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Volume 62

Discourse, Identity and Legitimacy

Self and Other in representations of Iran's nuclear programme

by Majid KhosraviNik

Discourse, Identity and Legitimacy

Self and Other in representations
of Iran's nuclear programme

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Introduction

1.1 Background

Iran has been at the centre of numerous international controversies since its 1979 Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Strong anti-colonial, anti-authoritarian and Islamic sentiments during the 1979 Revolution have fuelled and legitimised the Iranian revolutionary discourses when confronting the West. The Islamic revolutionary ideology of the Islamic Republic and its continuing tension with the West, especially the United States, is the result of a swing in Iran's official world view from a pro-Western, secular monarchic system to an anti-Western, post-colonial, theocratically-oriented system after 1979. This change has created a political entity which fiercely challenges the hegemony of the West, involving a range of religiously justified post-colonial aspirations. At the same time, the system funds its own legitimacy by reviving and reinforcing these very challenges.

Nevertheless, on its chosen path, the Islamic Republic has gone through major changes and developments since 1979. While some part of the overall revolutionary rhetoric has remained intact, influenced by the changes in society, several other social, political, economic and cultural discourses have been introduced and adopted by (some parts of) the establishment at the top. These changes have enhanced the fluidity and flexibility of the Islamic Republic, and consequently triggered different levels of alarm in the West with regard to the Iranian state.

Regardless of its historical background, Iran's nuclear programme has become a central issue for both the West and the Islamic Republic of Iran in the latter half of the Islamic Republic's life. Iran's nuclear programme is now one of the most publicised international controversies between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the West. Iran's nuclear programme is positioned and should be viewed within the wider frame of a political stand off. It is founded upon various historical and neighbouring inter-connected discursive and material events on both sides of the fence. The differences in selection and connection between meta-topics and frames in Iranian and Western news discourses have contributed to the creation of an extremely polarised context in which both sides project and maintain a legitimate position against the other, to the extent that they have been on the verge of war.

1.2 A sketch of Iran's nuclear programme

Iran's nuclear activities date back to the years well before the Revolution, to the 1950s when the first nuclear facilities were established in Iran with the support and encouragement of the United States and the West. Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968, a year after Tehran's nuclear research reactor, supplied by the U.S., became operational. An ambitious plan to construct numerous nuclear plants was consequently announced by the Shah of Iran, which aimed to fulfil Iran's electricity needs.

After the dramatic revolution of 1979, Iran's extensive and multi-layered cooperation with American and Western companies was almost entirely axed just before Saddam Hussein's army invaded Iran. Dictated by the requirements of wartime, there was a concentration of economic resources on the war, and so Iranian nuclear activities were reduced to a minimum, although never abandoned completely. After the war, in the early 1990s, Iran increased its nuclear activity with some support from the Russians, who agreed to help Iran finish its Bushehr nuclear plant, along with some smaller-scale aid from China.

The issue of Iran's nuclear programme became a matter of serious concern for the West by the turn of the millennium, at which point the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had already engaged in critical interaction with Iran in regard to its nuclear activities since the mid-1990s. In 2002, after the existence of two Iranian nuclear sites under construction was revealed, the IAEA reprimanded Iran and demanded full access to these sites for inspection. Iran argued that it was not violating the NPT as announcements of nuclear plants have to be made within six months of their construction. This clause of the NPT had been amended in 1992, demanding the official reporting of all nuclear-related activities, even at the planning stage; however, Iran was the last country to accept the decision and only agreed to implement that clause in 2003.

Later in 2003, France, Germany and the United Kingdom launched a diplomatic initiative to resolve the issues surrounding Iran's nuclear programme with the reformist government of Khatami. The negotiations led to an agreement, in October 2003, known as the *Tehran Declaration*, in which Iran agreed voluntarily to suspend its uranium enrichment activities. As a confidence-building measure, the country voluntarily signed the Additional Protocol of the NPT and fully cooperated with the IAEA. The EU3 (EU representative countries: France, Germany and Britain) in turn, agreed to recognise Iran's nuclear rights and help the country gain easier access to the technology required for its nuclear power programme after satisfactory assurances for its peaceful application were given. Later in 2003, the IAEA announced that Iran had, in fact, failed in a number of instances, over an extensive period of time, to meet its obligations with respect to the reporting of

nuclear material, its processes and uses, as well as the existence and construction of nuclear facilities.

In February 2005, a few months before the end of Khatami's presidency, while Iran pressed the EU3 to speed up talks, the negotiations were making little progress due to the divergent positions of the two sides. A few months after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad assumed the presidency, Iran made a move to remove the seals on the country's enrichment facilities, at which point the EU3 asked Iran to abandon its nuclear enrichment programme altogether and in return offered a package for Iran's permanent cessation of enrichment. The Islamic Republic of Iran dismissed the offer, characterising the package as a humiliating and insulting empty box. The country then moved towards the resumption of its enrichment activities along with the recently installed IAEA monitoring equipment. Soon, there were reports that traces of bomb-grade uranium had been found in Iran, which came from Pakistani equipment. The IAEA also reported that Iran was not complying with the Agency's requirements.

The tension between Iran and the West intensified by Ahmadinejad's controversial anti-Semitic stance on the Holocaust and Israel, as well as his politically belligerent confrontation with the West. By January 2006, Iran's nuclear programme and its new hard-line government had become primary international concerns. Topics relating to Iran and its nuclear programme dominated the media and newspapers in the West, as well as Iranian papers. In early February 2006, the IAEA's board of governors voted that Iran be referred to the United Nations for punitive actions. The U.K., Germany and France, backed by the U.S., supported the measure, and Russia and China reluctantly and conditionally agreed to it. In response, two days later, Iran suspended its voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol and all other voluntary cooperation with the IAEA beyond the original requirements of the NPT.

1.3 The research focus

By considering this specific background to the issue, the book endeavours to provide a wider contextualisation of how conflictual identities and legitimations are substantiated via this particular discourse. Hence, there is an attempt to mobilise and organise various levels of contextual information in explicating the ways in which the issue is perceived by both sides. The book discusses what discourses/topics and micro-linguistic mechanisms are employed – and with what qualities – to legitimise the Self identity and de-legitimise the Other identity. Britain is of particular interest here as it has long been 'present' in modern Iranian political history, in addition to being one of the major political actors in the Western camp,

i.e. the closest ally of the United States. The book focuses on texts on the topic of the Iranian nuclear programme which were written at a crucial moment when the radical conservative president of Iran (Ahmadinejad) had already announced Iran's new policy to resume its nuclear enrichment activities and the international dynamism regarding Iran was at its peak.

The analysis combines socio-political contextual explanations with extensive textual analyses on both sides of the fence with a view to finding answers to specific questions, such as how Iranian and British newspapers discursively construct and (de)legitimate the position of Self and Other and how different British and Iranian newspapers may be similar or different in their Self/Other legitimisation and identity constructions. Through critical discourse analysis, the study seeks to explain the nature of the conflict and illustrate systematic mechanisms of (de)legitimation by drawing on the general socio-political context and specific genres, as well as painting a representative picture of the textual patterns in the dynamics of the language used about this issue.

1.4 Socio-political context of Iran

The analysis of the book employs methods of critical textual analysis from within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as well as notions of recontextualisation and explanations of linguistic findings – a principle advocated by the CDA's interdisciplinary approach. As such, a narrative of the main socio-political discourses/events in contemporary Iran – with emphasis on the post-revolutionary era – will be provided to set the context for the following extensive linguistic analyses. Insights from this socio-political context will then provide the analysis with the required means to go beyond mere description of *what* discourses and discursive strategies are used, and thus account for *why* these discourses and discursive strategies are the way they are and *how* they resonate with the general public and relevant audiences (KhosraviNik, 2010a).

Writing about the contemporary socio-political context of Iran can be particularly sensitive and complicated. Iran is a 'country in passing', with significant contradictory forces impacting on the nation (Khiabany, 2010). Complexities exist both at the level of top-down official discourses and in the discourses of emergent bottom-up forces. Although official tendencies may be more visible due to the state's exclusive control over the channels of (mass) communication, bottom-up tendencies and public discourses should never be underestimated. While the official rhetoric of the state promotes traditional norms, perspectives and frames by drawing substantially on religion, the urban population in particular – the majority of Iranian population are concerned with issues of modernisation, welfare

and non-ideological readings of their life-worlds in various domains, e.g. family, entertainment, education and work.

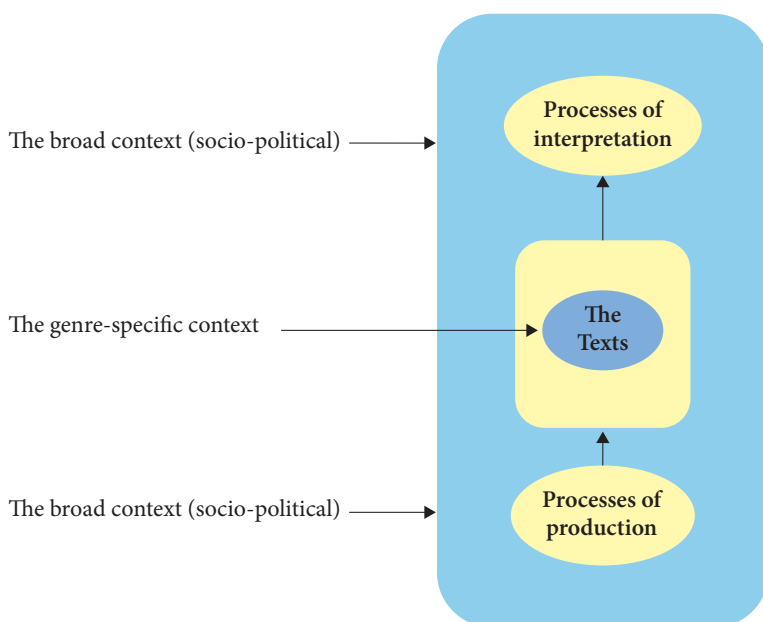
Ample research on Iran has been carried out regarding its Revolution. The roots of the Revolution have been analysed from various social, economic, cultural, political and religious perspectives. Research on the socio-political characteristics of and changes in Iran after the Revolution, however, have not received as much attention in Western scholarship.¹ The externally enforced, over-arching tendency to see post-revolutionary Iran as a known, static and homogeneous political tyranny, as well as the internally enforced, (self-)censorship and detrimental policies regarding the promotion and funding of independent studies, seem to have contributed to such a lack of deserving attention to the post-revolutionary Iranian context. Moreover, extreme political polarisation within the Iranian diaspora has led to a strict and ideologically-oriented dichotomy of pro vs anti-Islamic Republic side-taking, which continues to hinder serious academic dialogue on almost any aspect of Iranian politics.

1.5 The structure of the book

In line with a broad Faircloughian projection of CDA (Fairclough, 1995), the current study's overall research approach accounts for the immediate context of genre: the press, in addition to the broader socio-political context of production, distribution and interpretation (consumption) of discourses. In other words, the broad context of processes of production/ interpretation of texts is explained to be able to account for the messages communicated in society. A more localised contextualisation of press practices is also provided to be able to account for the genre-specific features of the analysed texts.

Specifically, the second chapter of the book attends to the socio-political context of the production/ interpretation of discourses in Iran. It sketches out contemporary Iranian political history with more weight given to the post-revolutionary period. Major discourses and historical events which pertain one way or another to the subject matter of this study are discussed in this chapter, followed by an illustrative representation of discourses in each historical/ political stage. The chapter views the

1. The author's initial search through the Lancaster University library catalogue using the keyword 'Iran' brought up 455 records. A vast majority of these publications are about Iran before the Revolution, in contrast to a small percentage of post-revolutionary accounts. It is also interesting to note that while the publications on pre-revolutionary Iran cover a wide variety of topics, e.g. history, language, literature, art, ethnography, religion, archaeology etc., titles published after the Revolution are restricted to politics, oil and Islam.



current socio-political context and synchronic discursive qualities and attitudes in Iran as being built on a diachronic series of discourses and histories which influence the processes of production and interpretation of the discourse around Iran's nuclear programme. The chapter briefly attends to the pre-revolutionary stages of the Constitutional Revolution, i.e. Reza Shah's reign, Mohammad Reza Shah's reign before the 1953 coup, Mohammad Mossadegh's rise, and the period from Mohammad Reza Shah's reinstatement until the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The post-revolutionary stages and developments are divided into five parts of the revolutionary period, the war period, the economic reforms period, the political reforms period and the radical conservative period of Ahmadinejad. The chapter also discusses the current political structure of the Islamic Republic and tries to sketch out the ruling power structure and its constitutive elements. The electoral mechanisms embedded in the larger conservative establishment as the embodiment of a merger of 'Islamic' and 'Republic' are also explained in this section.

Chapter Three is a theoretical account of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The main principles of and approaches in CDA, its defining characteristics and its general trends are discussed in this chapter. More specifically, the chapter dissects CDA's constitutive aspects, i.e. the notion of critique, a definition of discourse and the notion of analysis. The discussion on the notion of critique in the Discourse-Historical Approach to CDA is then linked to Habermas's ideas. Different approaches to the concept and analysis of 'meaning' in discourse and

communication are elaborated in the next section and distinctions are made between semantic meanings (language) and social meanings (language in use). The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), as one of the main approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis, and the approach adopted by the present study are elaborated in this theory chapter, followed by issues regarding the application of CDA to wider international contexts. It conducts a preliminary examination of CDA's main tenets in terms of assumptions of universality and whether (and how) they need to be approached differently by CDA studies in other non-Western contexts.

Chapter Four provides an account of the genre-specific context of the data in both the British and Iranian press and attends to these presses' historical background, current practices and power. On the British side, the relation between state and press, the economic model of news production and ownership trends are briefly evaluated along with the dominant approaches to journalism and media studies in the UK. On the Iranian side, the chapter deals with issues relating to the historical development of the Iranian press before and after the Islamic Revolution. It also discusses the glorified periods in which the press in Iran is viewed as enjoying relative freedom while discussing how it has been involved in major socio-political changes and stages. Within the post-revolutionary era, *Jameah* newspaper is specifically discussed as the flagship of a new trend in journalism in Iran in terms of quality and circulation numbers. And more recent socio-political developments in Iran, e.g. reformism, are also discussed. The last sub-section on the background of the press in Iran deals with major issues and problems of the Iranian press and this institution from various angles.

Chapter Five is on CDA methodology and the rationale for data selection. The chapter includes a short sketch on the main methods of Self and Other presentation and focuses on the methods suggested within the Discourse-Historical Approach, along the lines of referential, predication and argumentative strategies. Topoi analysis as the main approach to the analysis of the macro-argumentative structure of discourse is elaborated upon by drawing on the theoretical encapsulations of several scholars. In addition to Discourse-Historical Approach methods, some other discursive strategies, which have proved relevant to the data and socio-political context of the current research, are discussed. Notions surrounding presuppositions and the presence of (assumed) shared knowledge in the communication process are presented by drawing on different local or global approaches to presupposition in language. The last section of the chapter expands on the rationale behind the data selection and provides relevant graphs and tables pertaining to the numbers of articles in the British press. More specific background accounts of the selected British and Iranian newspapers are examined in the last section.

Four subsequent chapters explain the results of detailed textual analyses of the four selected newspapers. Each chapter serves to analyse the texts in one newspaper

and is structured in a similar way as much as possible. Discourse-topic analyses of the newspapers' content are discussed. As regards the Iranian newspapers, i.e. *Kayhan* and *Shargh*, the discourse-topic analyses include almost all the available discourses in the papers within the selected period. In the case of the British newspapers, i.e. *The Times* and *The Guardian*, the focus is on their discourses on Iran's nuclear programme along with their constitutive topics.

All four analytical chapters include samples of textual analysis before engaging extensively in categorising and summarising the findings of the whole body of texts according to referential, predication and argumentative strategies, in addition to discussing the papers' overall attitudes. Summary tables are provided for *Kayhan* chapter in the Appendix to illustrate and be an example of the details of the analysis. More space is allocated to the analysis of the Iranian daily *Kayhan*, partly because of the paper's exclusive ideological nature and partly because *Kayhan* incorporates and presents the main tenets of the over-arching conservative rhetoric of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In addition to the main discursive strategies, each chapter includes an analysis of specific discursive features. The *Kayhan* chapter includes sections on the recontextualisation processes systematically employed, along presuppositions, while the *Shargh* chapter sets out to divide the analysis into official and non-official content and discusses the paper's vague distancing and inclusion strategies. The chapter on the analysis of *The Times* includes a discussion of the paper's strategic use of presuppositions and shared knowledge and the *Guardian* chapter looks at the paper's hedging and distancing strategies.

The last chapter attempts to bring together the analyses of the Iranian and British newspapers and present some overall conclusions based on general trends found in the papers. It attempts to position the findings within the wider socio-political and genre-specific contexts sketched out in Chapters Two and Four.

Iran's socio-political history

To begin, to provide a basis for the socio-political context of Iran as discussed in Chapter 1, this chapter aims to recap on the political stages within contemporary Iranian history by providing encapsulations of the central dominant discourses of each phase. This will afford the research the diachronic architecture of influential discourses in Iran.

2.1 Introduction

The diachronic axis of the social context constitutes an important aspect of the socio-political explication for the dynamics of discourse in society. Historical discourses and events contribute crucially to structuring the immediate to overall levels of context (see KhosraviNik, 2010a for details) which characterise the qualities of the *sense-making apparatus* of a society, i.e. the social cognition of a given epistemic community. Such attention to the socio-political aspect helps to explain the various interpretations which may be construed from available discourses and the processes of discourse production and interpretation. It provides a platform to engage with questions such as why and to what end certain discourses are produced and reiterated and what kinds of messages are communicated through overt and covert textual clues – all of which depend on the qualities of (assumed) shared knowledge in the target society/ readership.

Iran is a country with an extremely rich historical background, and hence its political communication context almost always involves allusions and/or explicit references to certain historical discourses, events or phases. More particularly, Iran's contemporary history lays the ground for many real or constructed analogies for both ruling officials and the general public to draw on in political debates. In a similar way, the grand discourses adopted and substantiated by officials to legitimise the Iranian nuclear programme have their roots in the discourses which shaped the Islamic Revolution of 1979. An analysis of the texts and discourses pertaining to the row over Iran's nuclear programme and its (official) animosity to the West, particularly the US and the UK, would not be complete without consideration of the diachronic (as well as synchronic) aspect of discourses. This helps to contextualise the complex relationship between (official) discourses and society

in Iran's domestic political sphere and, more importantly, the Islamic Republic's confrontational foreign policy regarding its nuclear programme.

Of particular significance here is the political history of Iran during the last century, not only because of its contemporariness, but also because it proved to be a century of struggles against (quasi-) colonialism/ imperialism and the anti-despotic aspirations for political development, democracy and the rule of law. The twentieth century was one in which various internal socio-political deficiencies/ ideologies, e.g. structural corruption and external (colonial) interventions, repeatedly foiled Iranian popular uprisings to achieve independence and freedom.

All historical stages (and the discourses within them) are certainly not equally influential, nor are they all equally present in the collective memory of the Iranian public today. Yet it would be naive to assume that discourses and important political stages simply 'die out' in the collective memory of a society. In part, this historical account can explain why the so-called anti-imperialist discourses converged in the social politics of Iran and later fuelled the Islamic Revolution of 1979. It also casts some light on the reasons why the Iranian anti-colonial rhetoric draws deeply on religious proclivities and is repeatedly emphasised in the official grand discourses of the Islamic Republic.

While more recent history, after the 1979 revolutionary stages of Iranian politics, has admittedly left a more prominent mark on the social psyche of today's Iranian public, the representation of Iran in and by the West has overwhelmingly been reducing a complex Iranian political sense to certain snapshots, e.g. the American hostage-taking crisis and Iran's nuclear programme. One cannot, however, make reasonable sense of the reactions and aspirations of the Iranian public and officials vis-à-vis an issue of international importance, such as the nuclear programme, without considering the background to the current situation.

2.2 Iran before the 1979 Revolution

2.2.1 Ghajars, Constitutional Revolution and Reza Shah (Pahlavi I)

The Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1906–11) was the first major attempt – and the first of its kind in the Middle East² – to counter a historically established, despotic norm of governance and widespread colonial influence in Iran (Abrahamian,

2. 'Iran is one of the few countries in the world to have had two major, popular twentieth-century revolutions that succeeded in changing the form of government – the revolution of 1905–11 and that of 1978–9 ... The Constitutionalists 'wanted a Western-type liberal democratic government, with an elected parliament and executive, and guarantees for freedom of speech, assembly, and press' (Keddie, 1986: 5–6).

1982). The Constitutionals advocated a major shift from traditional, corrupt despots towards a modern system of law – with division of power and measures of accountability – similar to developments in various Western countries, specifically France. The Ghajars (1779–1925) were traditional, despotic monarchs who ‘considered themselves to be God’s representatives on earth’ (Abrahamian, 1982: 41); hence, similar to previous dynasties, they reigned with ‘functional despotism’ (Katouzian, 1981: 21). The Constitutional Revolution led to the creation of the first elected parliament in Iran, a vibrant public sphere, and a free press (see Kasravi & Siegel, 2006 for details of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution) and marked the beginning of debates on secularisation and modern politics in Iran (Rahnema & Behdad, 1995). The period saw debates on various socio-political discourses and helped to lay the foundations for political development.

In 1925, the feeble, traditional and monarchical Ghajar dynasty was officially abolished by Reza Khan (later the Shah). The emergence of Reza Khan and his *coup d’état* accompanied Britain’s fears of Bolshevik ideas spreading to Iran and beyond to neighbouring, colonised India (Abrahamian, 1982).

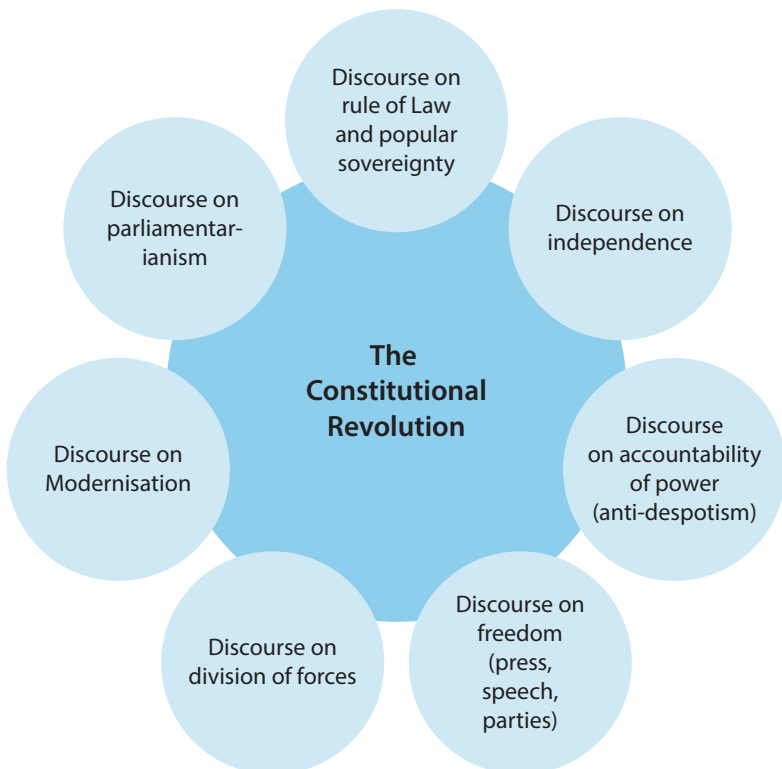


Figure 1. The encapsulation of widespread discourses during the Constitutional Revolution

Reza Shah's securing of power and his establishment as king³ coincided with the first discovery of oil in Iran under the supervision of the Anglo-Persian oil company (later, British Petroleum or BP). Reza Shah dedicated the Iranian share of the oil revenues to urban modernisation and the implementation of his modernisation policy. His strong focus on infrastructure, e.g. roads, railways, urban development, the first modern universities etc., was accompanied by a ruthless consolidation of political power.

On the social level, modernisation took a coercive turn. The top-down implementation of new dress codes for ordinary people and forceful removal of the hijab for women faced some resistance in the largely traditional society of Iran. Although Reza Shah's influence in social, cultural and infrastructural reforms for modern Iran is undeniable, the top-down, cultural engineering policies were not always productive (see Shaditalab, 2005 on women's participation) or at times comprehensive enough, e.g. family laws were not modernised or there was no clear impetus for the democratisation project.⁴ Similarly, Esposito (1990) maintains that many of Reza Shah's reforms suited and benefited the emerging, aristocratic and upper-middle classes, which helped to widen the sociocultural gap between those more Westernised citizens and the majority of Iranians.

The decree, which outlawed the traditionally worn *chador* in Iran, and Reza Shah's other modernisation/ Westernisation policies were partial reflections of Mustafa Kemal Pasha's influence on the Shah (Esposito, 1990: 20). Unlike Kemal Pasha, however, Reza Shah did not lead his reign towards a parliamentary republic, in stark contrast to the Constitutional Revolution's aspirations. He reduced the (constitutional) parliament to a ceremonial function, stripped the deputies of their parliamentary immunity, directly appointed prime ministers and the cabinet, closed down independent newspapers, banned all trade unions and destroyed the political parties (Abrahamian, 1982: 138).

Reza Shah envisaged a country free of clerical influence, nomadic uprisings and ethnic differences, following a strict, general *Persianisation* policy, which was introduced under the slogan of 'one country, one nation, one language'. Reza Shah's social reforms marked the beginning of what came to be known as the policy of

3. 'In December 1925, Reza Khan convened a Constituent Assembly to depose the Ghajar dynasty and offer himself the imperial throne. With Anglo-Russian support, in April of 1926, Reza Khan crowned himself "Shah-in-Shah of Iran", wearing military uniform and royal jewels in the style of his hero, Napoleon' (Abrahamian, 1982).

4. The law retained the Muslim male privilege of having as many as four wives at a time, and divorcing at will. Men were still recognised as the legal head of the family, and enjoyed more favourable inheritance and voting rights than women (Abrahamian, 1982: 144).

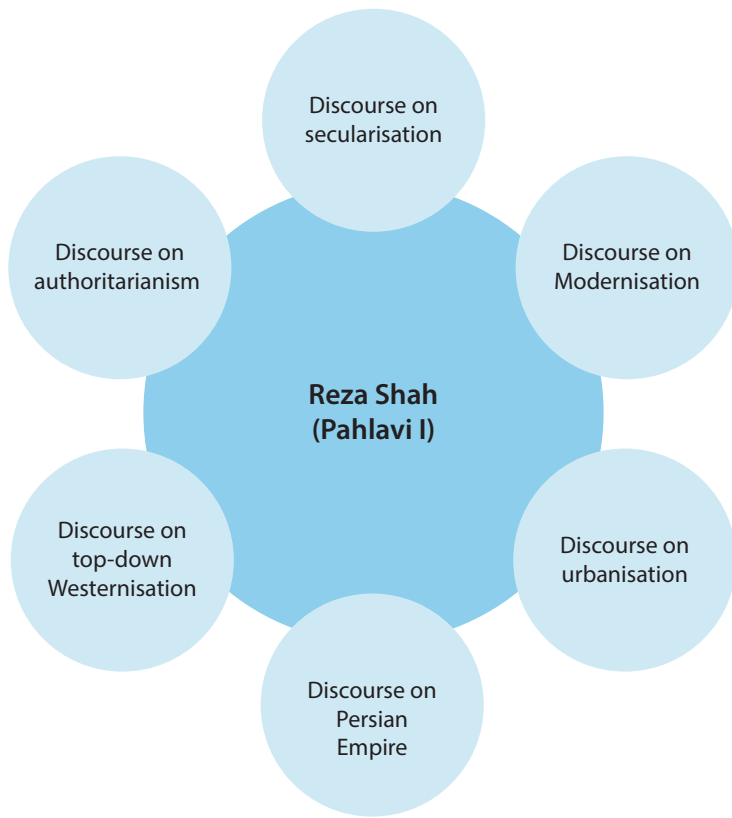


Figure 2. The encapsulation of widespread discourses during the reign of Reza Shah

‘pseudo-modernisation’ (Katouzian, 1981) and ‘uneven development’ (Marshall, 1988), where modernisation was interpreted as the Westernisation of cultural practices without adoption of the Western political philosophy of public sovereignty. In Siavoshi’s words (1995: 211), it was a system of both modernism and authoritarianism. While there was an obsession with “appearing Western”, the regime kept civil society out of politics and used coercive, economic and cultural means to discourage popular participation in politics, with the exception of government-sponsored rallies and meetings.

Reza Shah attempted to revive the image of the ‘glorious past of Persia’ and the grand discourse on the ‘Persian Empire’ with a strict nationalistic ideology. This theme would draw heavily on the 2,500-year history of the ‘great’ Persian monarchs of *Achaemenid*, the *Sassanid* dynasties and the ‘Grand Persian Empire’, which, at some point in history, controlled vast portions of land. Reza Shah, positioning

himself as the successor of this past glory, engaged in a fully-fledged, top-down, nation-building process.⁵

2.2.2 Mohammad Reza Shah (Pahlavi II)

In 1941, at the height of the Second World War, there were rumours of Reza Shah's tendency to adopt a more "independent"⁶ role in world events, while domestic resistance to his authoritarian policies grew and Russia and Britain continued to exert powerful influence on the country.⁷ Consequently, in August 1942, the Anglo-Russian armies invaded Iran, 'not only for obvious reasons of opening a new corridor to Russia, eliminating German agents, and safeguarding oil installations, but also for less obvious reasons of pre-empting possible pro-Axis officers who might have been tempted to oust the unpopular Shah and install a pro-German regime' (Abrahamian, 1982: 164). This time, Iran was (officially and practically) occupied⁸ by the superpowers of the time who divided Iran into a Russian-controlled margin in the north and northwest and a vast, British-controlled zone in the south and centre of Iran. Reza Shah's aggressively promoted, new, modern army was dismantled overnight as the Shah was forced to abdicate and sent into exile to a South African island. Within a fortnight, the British were able to strike a deal and the young Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (Reza Shah's son and announced heir to the

5. Mojab and Hassanpour (1995: 229–250) believe that 'the two Pahlavi monarchs combined extreme violence with extensive propaganda in order to build the nation-state of Iran. Ideologically, the Pahlavi state propagated national chauvinistic myths in the state-controlled media, in educational institutions, and in government organs ... the Pre-Islamic past associated with Persian culture and its Zoroastrian religion was glorified, while the post-Islamic culture, rooted in Arabic language and traditions, was vilified. Turkish and Arab domination over Iran in the remote past was declared the main historical obstacle to the continuity of the glorious Persian empire.'

6. The Shah himself complained that in the 1940s the Soviet and British ambassadors to Tehran presented him with lists of candidates whom both superpowers wanted to see elected to the Majles (Kamrava, 1990: 30).

7. At the onset of the Second World War, Germany was Iran's most significant commercial partner.

8. 'Iran was never openly directly colonized by any single colonial power, yet its history is a history of colonial interventions and external vying for influence. This foreign intervention left behind a legacy of 'psychological dependency' in Iran, a diffuse mythology of power of the colonial nations sometimes in excess of their actual or even potential role in Iran ... Pahlavi resorted to power through Western intervention and was highly dependent both economically and culturally on the West' (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994: 11).

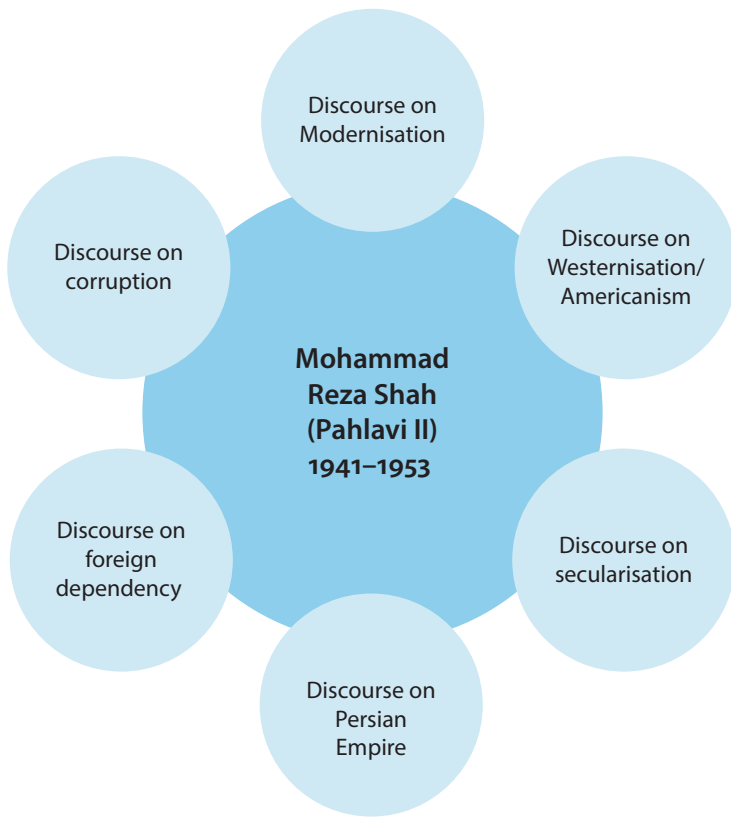


Figure 3. The encapsulation of widespread discourses during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah 1941–1953

throne) became the new Shah. There were promises of political development, an open political atmosphere and a return to the ideals of constitutional monarchism.

The period from 1941 to 1953 in Iran witnessed an atmosphere of relative political openness in which the parliament – though hardly representative – had fluctuating powers. Abrahamian (1982: 170) maintains that, during this period, power was distributed among the courtiers, the Majles (parliament), the cabinet, the foreign (colonial) embassies and the general public. There were political parties which were pro-British, pro-Soviet and proAmerican, as well as independent parliamentary groups. In such an atmosphere, the necessity for profound social, political reforms, a reshuffling of the semi-feudal, social class order in rural areas, the question of foreign allegiances, the source of sovereignty and the extent of the Shah's influence were open for debate, although not necessarily adamantly pursued.

Mossadegh's movement and the nationalisation of Iran's oil industry, for which he became famous (in a reductionist manner), developed at a moment in history when some degree of public debate within a functional, despotic system was plausible. Mossadegh's was an independence-seeking, nationalist,⁹ popular movement, which argued against the traditional, long-standing, 'taken-for-granted' concessions made to foreign powers¹⁰ (Abrahamian, 1982).

2.2.3 Mossadegh and the nationalisation of the oil industry

A crucial development in the contemporary history of Iran before the 1979 Revolution was the movement to nationalise the Iranian oil industry, led by Mohammad Mossadegh. Mossadegh was an author, lawyer and prominent parliamentarian from an aristocratic background who advocated a policy of 'negative equilibrium', denying any concessions to either of the traditional big foreign powers in Iran, i.e. Britain and Russia. Mossadegh ran his election campaign on three major issues; he argued that Iran would only preserve national independence if: (i) it gave up the misguided foreign policies of the past; (ii) it detached control of its military forces from the monarch and placed them under civilian/ parliamentary control; and (iii) it changed the electoral system, because he believed that social reforms were impossible as long as the landed families packed the parliament (Abrahamian, 1982: 189).

Mossadegh's anti-colonialism, anti-militarism, constitutionalism and political liberalism naturally appealed more to the middle classes than to the old landed families and the Shah. At the same time, his oil-nationalisation aspirations attracted support from the anti-colonial, nationalist parties, such as the National Front and the Iran Party, as well as renowned religious leaders, such as Ayatollah Kashani and his associates, who had strong links with the religious/ traditional middle classes. It also appealed to the newly formed and highly active, socialist *Tudeh (masses)* party, which was gaining a strong foothold in the oil industry. Mossadegh gained two clear lines of popular support, 'one which was conservative, religious, theocratic and mercantile and another which was modernistic,

9. It is important to note the positive and emancipatory connotation of the term nationalist in a quasicolonial context of a country like Iran at the time.

10. Mossadegh argued that 'Iran has been giving out concessions to Russia and England too much, and at times looked for a third party like Germany or France, which has turned Iran into a free-for-all country. He argued that the only way to end this dangerous situation is to cease granting major concessions, and to assure the main powers, especially Britain and Russia, that Iran would pursue a strictly non-aligned course' (Abrahamian, 1982: 189).

secular, technocratic and socialist' (Abrahamian, 1982:260; Ansari, 2000:33).¹¹ Mossadegh's charisma and popularity stemmed from his various personal and political features, as Abrahamian describes:

As a former finance minister and governor-general who refused to favour family friends ... Mossadegh was famous for his incorruptibility – a scarce quality in an environment notorious for government corruption. As an outspoken parliamentarian who opposed the coup d'état of 1921, the military dictatorship of Reza Shah, and the persisting influence of the royal court family, he embodied the high principles and the unfulfilled aspirations of the Constitutional Revolution. As a veteran statesman who consistently opposed foreign concessions, he enjoyed the reputation of a true patriot free of all outside connections. (1982:260)

The confrontation between Mohammad Reza Shah and the National Front escalated over new oil contracts as the *Tudeh* Party orchestrated major strikes in Khuzestan (an oil-rich Iranian province) and mobilised mass meetings against the government's plans. The Shah, overwhelmed by the scale of the protests, offered Mossadegh the premiership in July 1952, and Mossadegh accepted. After Mossadegh's nominated war minister was rejected by the Shah, Mossadegh resigned and appealed directly to the public, openly criticising the Shah. This was the first time that a prime minister had publicly criticised the Shah for violating the constitution and accused the court of standing in the way of a national struggle. It was also the first time a prime minister had dared to take a constitutional issue directly to the people. After five days of demonstrations, bloodshed and signs of dissent in the army, the Shah was compelled to reinstall Mossadegh to form a new government.

The popular victory of Mossadegh over the monarch is described as a revolution by some scholars (e.g. Zabih, 1979), marking a historical first and a shift from God-given monarchical sovereignty to publicly legitimised sovereignty.

Mossadegh named the day (*Siyeh tir*) a day of national uprising, the casualties were to be national martyrs. He transferred Reza Shah's lands back to the state, cut the palace budget and allocated the savings to the Health Ministry, placed the royal charities under government supervision ... forbade the Shah to communicate directly with foreign diplomats, forced Princess Ashraf, the politically active twin sister of the Shah, to leave the country, and refused to act against *Tudeh* papers that denounced the court as a "centre of corruption, treason and espionage ... [he also] reduced the budget of the army, called it 'defence ministry', only for defence, declared a land reform law, established village councils, increased the peasants' share of the annual product by 15 per cent, and started to reform judicial, electoral and educational structures." (Abrahamian, 1982:273)

11. Ansari maintains that without Kashani's religious support, the National Front would have been politically handicapped and that there was a strong religious flavour to the movement, despite the leadership being dominated by secular nationalists and socialists (Ansari, 2000).

By mid-1953 Mossadegh appeared to be in full control. He had nationalised the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, taken back the Soviet-administered Caspian fishery, routed aristocratic opponents and implemented a policy of ‘negative equilibrium’, in a way that ‘Iran, like many other Asian countries, appeared to be taking the road of republicanism, neutralism, and middle class radicalism’ (ibid.: 274).

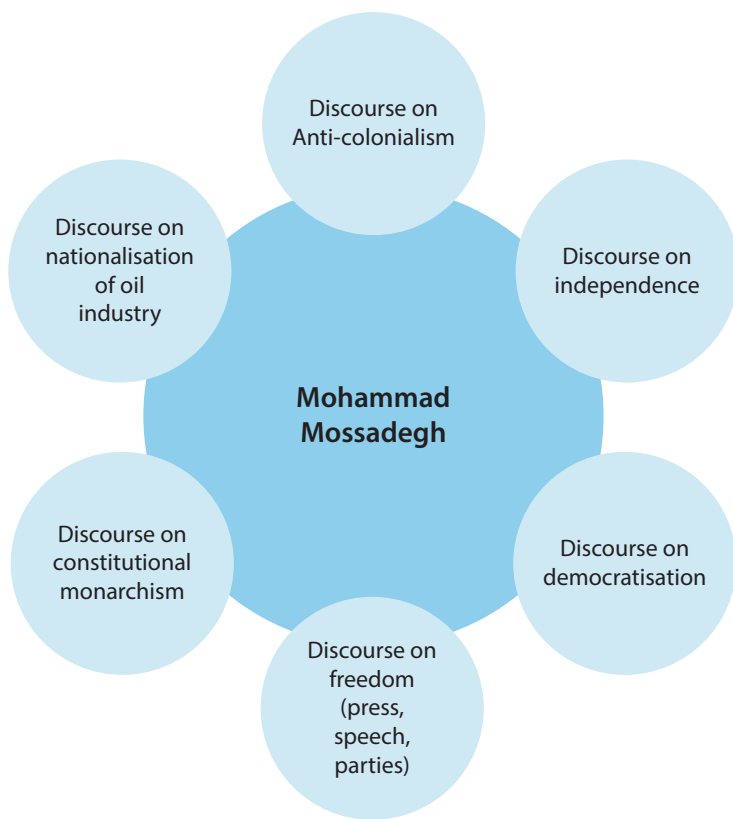


Figure 4. The encapsulation of widespread discourses during the Mohammad Mossadegh Movement

Under the aggrandised fear of the *Tudeh* party's atheist rhetoric, and what were perceived to be un-Islamic reforms, the religious leader, Ayatollah Kashani, fell out with Mossadegh. The debate about the role of Islam in Iran marked a gap between the secular and religious middle classes. Kashani and his associates advocated a full implementation of Islam, while the National Front argued that religion should be kept out of politics. Immediately after the Shah fled to Baghdad, the National Front set up a committee to decide the fate of the monarchy, while *Tudeh* crowds poured into the streets, destroying royalist statues and icons.

The Americans and the British, kept a close, worried eye on developments in the country. A CIA document records that, 'by the end of 1952,¹² it had become clear that Mossadegh's government in Iran was not going to settle with interested Western countries regarding oil revenues (CIA-released documents on the 1953 coup in Iran¹³). Within a few months, the US and Britain had already discussed and prepared a plan to save Iran's monarchy and topple Mossadegh. On 19 August 1953, Fazlollah Zahedi, a high-ranking Iranian general, initiated operation TAAJAX,¹⁴ commanding thirty-five Sherman tanks to surround the Premier's residence. After a nine-hour battle, Mossadegh was captured and the notorious Anglo-American *coup d'état*,¹⁵ 'to cause the fall of the Mossadegh government; to re-establish the prestige and power of the Shah' (George Washington University, 16 April 2000), was enacted. The 'TP Ajax Operation',¹⁶ as it came to be known, represents the most blatant case of foreign intervention at a highly sensitive stage of modern Iranian history.¹⁷

12. Katouzian (1981: 164) refers to the years 1951–3 as a period of 'dual sovereignty' in which power dynamism was switching back and forth between the monarch's godly legitimisation and the legitimacy brought about by popular support.

13. George Washington University, 16 April 2000, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB28/summary.pdf>.

14. 'General Fazlollah Zahedi, the former interior minister of Mossadegh, was chosen as the most suitable successor to the Premier ... He was to name a military secretariat with which the CIA would conclude a detailed staff plan of action ... the CIA had several articles planted in major newspapers and magazines which, when reproduced in Iran, had the desired psychological effect in Iran and contributed to the war of nerves against Mossadegh', CIA-released document available at: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB28/summary.pdf>.

15. 'The situation further urged both the British Foreign Office and the Department of State to make a maximum effort to persuade the Shah to make public statements encouraging the Army and populace to reject Mossadegh and to accept Zahedi as Prime Minister ... the CIA covertly made available \$ 5 m. within two days of Zahedi's assumption of power (ibid.).

16. For full details and documents on the coup d'état against Mossadegh's government in 1953, see the CIA documents released after 30 years at: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB28/>. The introduction to the document reads, 'this extremely important document is one of the last major pieces of the puzzle explaining American and British roles in the August 1953 coup against Iranian Premier Mohammad Mossadegh. Written in March 1954 by Donald Wilber, one of the operation's chief planners, the 200-page document is essentially an after-action report, apparently based in part on agency cable traffic and Wilber's interviews with agents who had been on the ground in Iran as the operation lurched to its conclusion.' See also Barlett & Steele, 19 May 2003.

17. In 2000, Madeline Albright, Secretary of State to Bill Clinton, acknowledged the role that the US played in that coup against the popularly supported government of Mossadegh, apologising to the reformist government of Khatami.

Within a couple of days, the Shah was brought back from exile and reinstated. He started quickly to reverse all of Mossadegh's policies. Using martial law and military tribunals he proceeded to crush the National Front as well as the *Tudeh* Party, arresting Mossadegh, along with many other leaders of the Iran Party and the socialist Third Force. Executions, murders and imprisonment followed, with the harshest treatment applied to *Tudeh* officials.¹⁸ Mossadegh was then prosecuted and imprisoned for three years, and later put under house arrest in the small village of Ahmad Abad, where he died in 1967 without ever returning to politics.

The 1953 coup ended the (c)overt intervention of the Soviet Union and Britain in Iranian affairs. Instead, the Iranian state and its leaders emerged as structurally and psychologically dependent on the American government (Kamrava, 1990: 31). In an interesting turn of events, Mohammad Reza Shah set out to consolidate his power, as his father had done. He placed the coup leaders in key positions, and with the help of the CIA and FBI and technical assistance from Israeli intelligence services he established a new, bureaucratically sophisticated secret police, which operated under the acronym of SAVAK,¹⁹ soon to become a notorious household acronym. He put aside Mossadegh's national system of oil-revenue control and signed a contract with a consortium made up of British Petroleum and eight other European and American oil companies. With the reinstated oil revenues and the vast amounts of aid sent by the United States, the Shah was able to expand the armed forces and his authority by way of bureaucratic allegiance (Abrahamian, 1982: 419).

The coup became a defining historical moment in the Iranian national psyche, forcing the public to face the fact of political dependence. On the one hand, the agency of old and new foreign powers in Iran were seen as a paramount, decisive reality; and on the other hand, the two anti-monarchical, mainly secularist, popular movements – (i) of the Constitutional Revolution, and (ii) of Mossadegh – had been crushed by foreign superpowers, one way or another. In Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi's words, the Khomeini phenomenon, which later came to shape the Islamic Revolution,

is a product of the alteration of natural change pattern in Iran by the interference of external powers ... had Mossadegh not been overturned by foreign-sponsored coup, the Khomeini regime would never have appeared. It was the erosion of the emergent public sphere of 1945–1953 that reduced Iran to a “dualistic culture” of

18. Dr. Hossein Fatemi, Mossadegh's Foreign Minister who had strongly criticised the Shah, was arrested, tortured and executed by the regime's martial court.

19. SAVAK gradually expanded its network and scrutinised anyone recruited by the universities, the civil service and large industrial plants, as well as the intelligentsia.

a dictatorial state and a religious opposition ... Thus, in some way, US intervention against the popular movement of 1953 received its popular reply, somewhat belatedly, in the anti-American flavour of the 1978 mobilisation. (1994: 58)

Mossadegh, however, left his mark on organic popular struggles in Iran. In Rahmani's (2007: 90) words, 'extremely popular in his era, the memory of the coup and the bitterness associated with Mossadegh's fall had a profound effect on the political consciousness of Iran'. Within a few years, the lower, more traditional middle classes were particularly unhappy about the 'rapid oligarchisation' of the market by the more privileged segments of the population, who clustered around a number of seemingly "non-profit" giant conglomerates (Ashraf, 1995: 113). Between 1953 (the coup) and 1979 (the Islamic Revolution), the US maintained a substantial presence in Iran, which expanded as resentment of authoritarian and coercive control grew, and the regime's policy of rapid, social Westernisation continued. Socially, there came to be 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' middle classes, the former maintaining their historical, economic positions, while the latter did not. For example, "traditionalists", such as small property-owners and Bazaar merchants, adhered to older (Islamic) values and cultural practices, while "non-traditionalists", who were the direct result of social change, through industrialisation, the expansion of bureaucracy and cultural diffusion, were oriented towards more modern social trends (Kamrava, 1990: 102, 113).

2.2.4 Towards the Islamic Revolution

Mohammad Reza Shah's emphasis on rudimentary Westernisation processes did not promote the use of genuine, modern civil society apparatuses, e.g. free media, free parliament and electoral systems (Katouzian, 1981), and the continued dictatorial control over politics, the centralisation of power in the hands of the Shah and the widespread corruption of the court entourage were among the sources of resentment of the Iranian public on both secular and religious levels. Uneven economic improvements also marked a severe urban-rural divide, with a top-heavy concentration of development in Tehran (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994: 193). A process of 'retraditionalisation around religion' provided the basis for a massive political mobilisation (ibid.: xvii).

Mohammad Reza Shah continued his father's modernisation policy, which favoured a small wealthy group – mostly seen as the court entourage, who were closely allied to the Shah – while 'the traditional Bazaar (merchants) classes were increasingly cut out of the pie' (Keddie, 1986: 3). The Pahlavis' educational policy took an uncritical, pro-Western (pro-American) slant and started to present a Manichean view of the global situation, 'the democratic, capitalist West, led by the

United States represented the good; and the dictatorship of the communist world, led by the Soviet Union, symbolised the evil' (Siavoshi, 1995: 208).

The newly urbanised middle class²⁰ did not idealise the lifestyle and politics which were officially promoted. Indeed, lacking any real means of political expression, they turned 'into themselves' (Dabashi, 1993), as mosques started to function as a strong political network all across the country. While SAVAK continued to suppress any attempts to channel dissent away from the public sphere, the Shah, like his father, increasingly based his power around the armed forces, the court patronage network and the country's vast state bureaucracy (Abrahamian, 1982: 453).

At the same time, a combination of factors, such as the regime's iron-fist policy against its critics and lack of venues to access the public sphere, combined with the memories of failed popular uprisings, created 'a movement of common negativism against the Shah's regime and the US neo-colonialism in a context where the politicisation of Islamic rhetoric provided further cultural glue across the layers of society' (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994: xvii). Similarly, Dabashi views the rise of Islamic ideology as the product of 'the absence of any meaningful (secular) political organisation to give active and legitimate expression to ideological aspirations of different classes' (1993: 498). Meanwhile the circle of suppression of dissidence grew and the giant state-controlled media denounced the Islamic clerics as 'medieval black reactionaries'.

Ayatollah Khomeini, a Mujtahed who had remained aloof from politics in the 1940s and '50s, began to speak out in 1962–3, after his patron, Ayatollah Boroujerdi, died in 1961. Kamrava divides Khomeini's political career into two phases. In the first he appeared as a conservative, reactionary, religious figure, similar to the bulk of clerics who attacked the regime for trying to alter certain traditional Islamic practices and beliefs, e.g. granting voting rights to women and to religious minorities in 1962. However, by 1978, as Kamrava (1990: 130) puts it,

what was once a reactionary Ayatollah [Khomeini] had become a progressive and idealist saint who perhaps was enunciating what he thought the people wanted to hear; the people must have freedom; men and women are equal, religious minorities can freely practise their religions, the clergy will not interfere in the political process, Iran's domination by the West and especially by the United States will be stopped, the toiling class will no longer be oppressed, and so on.

20. Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994) note that rapid urbanisation was the major demographic change in Iran, especially from the 1960s onwards. In the 1930s, only 21 per cent of the population lived in towns, in 1966 the figure was 38 per cent; and by 1977 nearly 48 per cent of the population lived in towns.

Abrahamian similarly argues that Ayatollah Khomeini, revealing a 'masterful grasp of mass politics, scrupulously avoided the former issues and instead hammered away at a host of other concerns that aroused greater indignation among the general population' (1982: 425). Most of these ideals had been demands since the Constitutional Revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini positioned himself within various historical, resistant, anti-dictatorship, prodemocracy and Islamic struggles.

He denounced the regime for living off corruption, rigging elections, violating Constitutional laws, stifling the press and the political parties, destroying the independence of the universities, neglecting the economical needs of merchants, workers and peasants, undermining the country's Islamic beliefs, encouraging *Gharbzadegi* [Westoxication] – indiscriminate borrowing from the West – granting "capitulations" to foreigners, selling oil to Israel, and constantly expanding the size of the central bureaucracy. (Abrahamian, 1982: 425)

Ayatollah Khomeini's charismatic leadership and radical, uprooting statements turned him into the undisputed leader of the Revolution, not only for the masses, but for all the various politically resistant groups and intellectuals.²¹ Ayatollah Khomeini propagated 'safeguarding independence and democracy' as the essence of the historical demands of Iranian society thus, not only did he 'dispel ... fears that the alternative he was proposed to Shah's monarchy was a theocracy, [but] he even appeared as a champion of democracy and freedom' (Kamrava, 1990: 130). Nevertheless, Islam obviously constituted a main principle of his ideas and added to his mass appeal, to the masses who had recently become acutely aware of their identity as Muslims.

In 1978, all the various elements of political and popular resistance – some inherently at odds with each other – came together in calling for social justice, independence, freedom and an Islamic Republic for Iran.²² Mohammad Reza Shah, under the impression that such upheaval was/could not be an organic revolt, left the unsettled country in December 1978, perhaps with the hope of returning – once again – with the support of a patron.

Abrahamian (1982) accords with (Keddie, 1986: 5–6) in observing that, in the early stages of the uprising, most of the opposition parties emphasised the

21. Many of these groups and individuals, especially advocates of the National Front, came under harsh criticism after the Revolution for giving in and supporting Khomeini.

22. 'Independence, Freedom and Islamic Republic' became the central demand of the Revolution. These three elements were respective responses to Iran's historical dependence on foreign super-powers (in this case the US), the historical demand for a real democratic system, the abolition of despotic norms of governance and the establishment of a system as Islamic Republic which was deemed to unite these ideals with Islam in the way it was proposed by Ayatollah Khomeini. As such, the Revolution was supported by almost all social and political forces and groups.

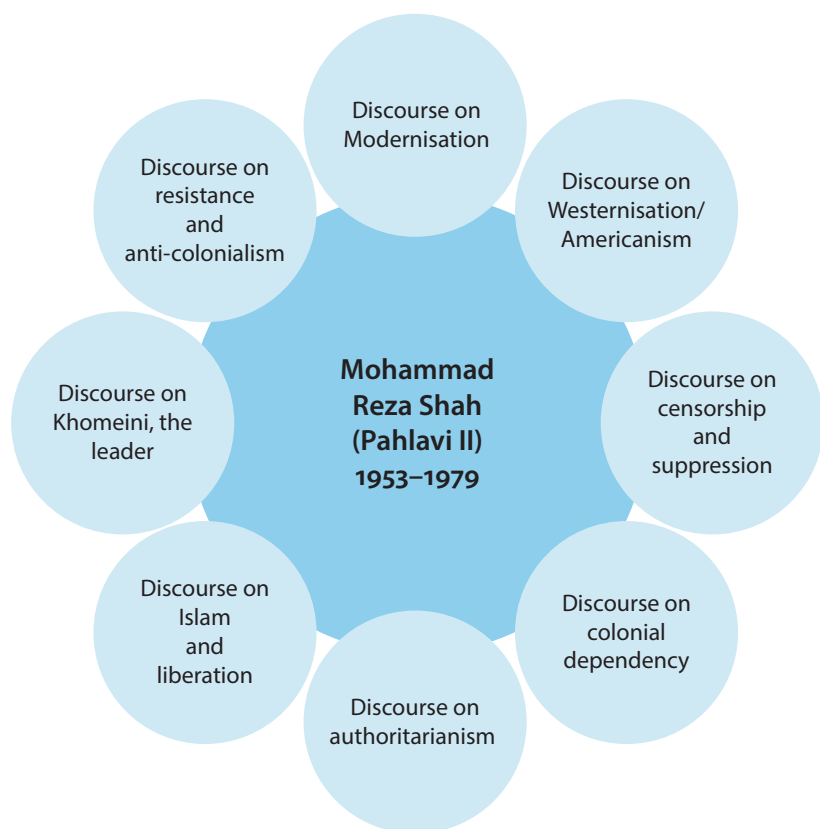


Figure 5. The encapsulation of widespread discourses during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, 1953–1979

re-establishment of the fundamental ideals of the Constitutional Revolution. However, the lack of political development and viable public sphere platforms had severely impaired meaningful political deliberation while Islam had turned into a common channel of communication for masses. On the other hand, the occasional massacre and bloody crackdown on demonstrators by the Shah, e.g. the *Jaleh* massacre, undermined the moderates who were calling for a Constitutionalist monarchy, foiled the attempts at gradual reform, and left the country with two simple choices: ‘a drastic revolution or a military counter-revolution’ (Abrahamian, 1982: 516). Ayatollah Khomeini rejected all forms of compromise with the Shah and called him ‘a bloody-handed devil’ who had sold Islam and Iran to foreigners.

The 1979 Iranian revolution was the result of the convergence and unanimous, popular consent of various social, economic, political and, at a later stage, ideological elements. Intellectual conceptualisations (see Dabashi, 1993, for