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Imagining a Revolutionary Iran:

National Narratives in the Revolutionary Discourse of the Mojahedin-e Khalq

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Abstract

Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions*, first published in 1979, was a hugely influential book encapsulating what has become known as the "Third Generation" of theories of revolution. In it, she argues that "revolutions are not made, they come" (Skocpol, 1979, 17), insisting that structural factors such as pre-revolutionary social structure and state breakdown were primarily responsible for the outbreak of revolutions. In that same year however, showing history's sense of irony, the shah of Iran fell to a revolutionary coalition unlike any discussed in Skocpol's work, forcing her to concede three years later that "if ever there has been a revolution deliberately 'made' by a mass-based social movement aiming to overthrow the old order, the Iranian Revolution against the shah surely is it" (Skocpol, 1982, 267).

One of the groups committed to "making" this revolution was the *Mojahedin-e Khalq*, an Iranian Marxist-inspired "revolutionary Islamic" guerrilla organisation formed in the 1960s, which committed itself to an armed insurrection against the ruling dictatorship of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi. Prior to carrying out any major attacks, however, the bulk of its leadership and members were rounded up by the shah's security forces, SAVAK, and put on trial. They used the opportunity of a court trial to denounce the regime, outline their ideology, and build the case for revolutionary action.

Through an analysis of seven of these speeches, I argue that Mojahedin contested the regime not only through arms, but through the elaboration of an alternative narrative of the nation. Specifically, drawing on the notions of the cultural toolkit and narrative genre wars, I argue that the Mojahedin reinterpreted the lessons of Islamic and Iranian culture and history to build a narrative making the case that revolution was not only just and legitimate, but inevitable. In this way they sought to build revolutionary solidarity with the Iranian people and encourage them to join in challenging the shah's regime. By centring narrative and culture in the study of revolution, I argue we can better appreciate agency and the role of revolutionary groups in the "making" of mass-based social revolutions.

Keywords: revolutionary Islam; narrative; culture; Mojahedin-e Khalq; Iran

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Introduction

Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions*, first published in 1979, was a hugely influential book encapsulating what has become known as the "Third Generation" of theories of revolution. In it, she argues that "revolutions are not made, they come" (Skocpol, 1979, 17), insisting that structural factors such as pre-revolutionary social structure and state breakdown were primarily responsible for the outbreak of revolutions. In that same year however, showing history's sense of irony, the shah of Iran fell to a revolutionary coalition unlike any discussed in Skocpol's work, forcing her to concede three years later that "if ever there has been a revolution deliberately 'made' by a mass-based social movement aiming to overthrow the old order, the Iranian Revolution against the shah surely is it" (Skocpol, 1982, 267). The Iranian Revolution, as the first modern case of successful social revolution leading to the establishment of a theocratic state, has been seen as a model for other Islamist movements in the wider Middle East (see for example: Hunter, 1988; Menasheri, 1990). Many historical accounts of the Iranian Revolution have focused on the discursive, ideological, and organizational capacity of Shi'a Islam, Ayatollah Khomeini, and the *ulema* in mobilizing opposition to the shah (see for example: Keddie, 2003; Burns, 1996; Skocpol, 1982; Moaddel, 1992). However, academic focus on Khomeini and the *ulema* has been at the expense of studying other important revolutionary groups. This "methodological reductionism" (Parsa, 2000, 9) has led to the assumption that participants in the revolution adhered to the ideologies of Khomeini, who emerged during the revolution as the key focal point of opposition to the shah. Others, such as Foran (1994) and Moghadam (1989), have argued that the revolution arose from multiple overlapping political cultures of opposition and resistance, members of which experienced and interpreted the realities of their everyday lives under the shah in terms of a variety of different sets of values, beliefs, and cultural frameworks.

The Iranian Revolution, along with the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the 1990s, encouraged a new wave of scholarship to engage with factors beyond the structural which lead to revolutionary crises. In particular the question of individual and group agency, and the issues of ideology, culture, and identity have come to the fore as possible explanations for why people become mobilised in revolutionary movements (See for example Sewell 1985; Burns 1996; Lawson 2016). Importantly, revolutionary movements are recognised as heterogeneous and containing groups with different ideological motivations, usually only united in opposition to the existing regime. At the same time, there is a shift away from viewing

revolutions as the result of a core set of attributes to be discovered and generalised theoretically, to viewing them as historically specific processes of "particular assemblages that combine in historically discrete ways" (Lawson, 2016, 111).

To have a more comprehensive understanding of the Iranian Revolution, it is important to look beyond the role of Khomeini and the *ulema* and their ideology and discourses, and to engage with other revolutionary groups in Iran in the 1970s. Several years before the 1977 protests, which are widely considered to be the beginning of Iran's revolutionary crisis (Abrahamian 2008), armed groups inspired by a variety of Marxist-Leninist and Islamist ideologies had sprouted up and begun to advocate violent revolution, waging a guerrilla war against the shah's regime which included bombing campaigns, assassinations, bank robberies, and other armed insurrections across Iran (Abrahamian, 1980). These groups, while not successful in overthrowing the regime militarily, showed that the regime was not as invincible as it claimed and meant that it could never claim total control over the country (Behrooz, 2004). One such group, the *Mojahedin-e-Khalq* (MEK)[1], was an Iranian Marxist-inspired "revolutionary Islamic" guerrilla organisation. It was formed in the 1960s and waged an armed insurrection against the ruling dictatorship of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-79). The MEK was one of the largest guerrilla organizations active during this period, and the first Iranian group to develop a modern revolutionary interpretation of Islam, synthesizing Marxist social thought with Shi'a Islamic teachings (Abrahamian, 1989). This ideology was similar to that of Ali Shariati, who is considered by many to be the main "ideologue of the Iranian Revolution", and whose own lectures and writings contributed to the success of the Mojahedin (Abrahamian 1993; 1989). They participated at the forefront of the revolution, fighting pitched battles with the shah's security forces, and by 1981 were able to bring over 500,000 people into the streets of Tehran, defying Khomeini's regime and risking the development of a civil war (Abrahamian 1989). Despite this significance, their pre-revolutionary history has remained relatively understudied by scholars of Iran and social movements. In seeking to correct this oversight, in this thesis I look into the revolutionary discourses of the group and investigate the ways the group framed its opposition to the shah's regime.

In "Fourth Generation" of theories of revolution, collective action arises from the intersection of myriad factors which disturb state legitimacy and undermine the claims to leadership of the

[1] *Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran*, People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI). Known interchangeably as PMOI, MEK, Mojahedin.

pre-revolutionary regime. These factors are not only economic and political, but also symbolic and cultural. Contestation of the "ideological-discursive framework" (Fairclough, 1985) of pre-revolutionary regimes contributes to their losing support and allows citizens to imagine a possible alternative to the regime. In the Iranian case, the regime of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi was underpinned by an ideology of modernism and Westernisation, while being grounded in a discourse of Iranian nationalism and a romantic national narrative of 2,500 years of monarchy. The overarching research questions which underpin this thesis are: How did the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* contest the shah's regime? Utilizing the notion of counter-publics and the cultural toolkit, I also engage with the question: how did they challenge dominant, regime-led constructions of Iranian national identity and what alternative narratives and discourses did they put forward? Consequently, my conclusions address a more general question: How do narratives influence our understanding of the Iranian revolution and, by extension revolutionary moments in general?

Through an analysis of seven defence speeches given in court following the arrest of leading members of the group, I argue that *Mojahedin- e Khalq* were invested in contesting this ideology discursively, through providing an alternative narrative of the nation. Specifically, I argue that national narratives provide the cultural framework within which political actors generate and legitimise patterns of actions, and as such form the overarching ideological-discursive framework of the MEK's oppositional discourses.

Disposition

In this thesis I explore the political discourses of the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* through analysing speeches of seven of the organisation's members, given in court trials after their arrests for plotting armed attacks on the shah's regime, and show how they construct an Iranian national narratives in support of their ideological worldview in their struggle against the shah's regime. In chapter one I provide a historical context for the case in question, exploring the shah's national identity narratives, existing debates on the components of Iranian national culture, the intellectual climate of 1960s and 1970s Iran, and background information on the activities and ideology of the MEK. Chapter two reviews existing literature on the causes of the Iranian revolution, and broadens into a wider discussion on theories of the causes of revolution. I then discuss how national narratives have been constructed and contested in political and revolutionary discourses. Building on this, chapter three establishes my theoretical framework for understanding how culture and national narratives are used and

constructed by political actors. It draws on Ann Swidler's (1986) concept of the cultural toolkit, and Philip Smith's (2005) concept of "genre wars" to suggest that narratives are an important means of connecting cultural codes, such as those found in national identity constructions, to concrete patterns of action. I further explore the concept of *subaltern counterpublics* as an arena for contesting dominant discourses and narratives. Chapter four explains my source selection and the Critical Discourse Analysis approach to analysing the sources. The main themes of the source materials are outlined in the findings chapter, while in my analysis chapter I analyse these findings with reference to my theoretical framework and argue that the *Mojahedin* contested the shah's regime through an alternative narration of Iran's history and present situation, combining Marxist, Islamist, and nationalist discourses, which they argued would inevitably lead to revolution. In the conclusion I summarise my arguments and propose some paths for future research.

1. Historical Context

This chapter provides the historical background for the case study of the MEK's construction and contestation of national narratives in 1970s Iran. I begin by outlining the ideological basis of the shah's regime, and the promotion of a specific national narrative constructed by the state during the Pahlavi era (1926 – 1979). I then outline the main alternative conceptions of Iranian national identity which have been discussed in academic literature. In the third section discuss the intellectual context of mid-20th century Iran and the emergence of cultural criticisms of the shah's regime which would go on to play an important role during the '78-9 revolution, before concluding with a more specific discussion of the MEK and the circumstances which led to their arrest.

1.1 The Pahlavi Construction of Iranian National Identity

Between the 12th and the 16th of October 1971, Iran celebrated 2,500 years of continuous monarchy with lavish festivities at Persepolis, the capital of the Achaemenid Empire. Intended as a display of Iranian civilization and progress, foreign dignitaries were treated to a sumptuous feast, luxurious surroundings, and grandiose ceremony. On the first day, during a ceremony at the tomb of Cyrus the Great, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, the Shahanshah[2] of the Imperial State of Iran, rose to give a speech:

> O Cyrus, great King, King of Kings, Emperor of the Achaemenians, monarch of the land of Iran. I, the Shahanshah of Iran, offer thee salutations from myself and from our nation.
>
> We are here to acclaim Cyrus, the Great, the immortal of Iran, the founder of the most ancient empire of the World; to praise Cyrus, the extraordinary emancipator of History; and to declare that he was one of the most noble sons of Humanity. Cyrus, we gather today around the tomb in which you eternally rest to tell you: Rest in Peace, for we are well awake and we will always be alert in order to preserve your proud legacy.
>
> We promise to preserve forever the traditions of humanism and goodwill, with which you founded the Persian Empire: traditions which made our people be the carrier of message transmitted everywhere, professing fraternity and truth.

[2] Literally "King of Kings", equivalent to "Emperor", the honorific title used to refer to the Persian/Iranian monarchs

Mohammed Reza Shah 12th October 1971 (quoted in Ansari 2012, 110)

These excerpts show clearly the ideology of nationalism which underpinned the regime of the last Iranian shah. Pahlavi state-sponsored nationalism focused on an understanding of Iranian history that went back to the 6th century BC, over a millennium before the conquests of Islam and two millennia before the rise of European imperialism. The shah's regime's conception of Iranian national identity glorified the history of the Persian monarchy, advocating the 'benevolent' rule of the shah (Ashraf, 1993). It was a unitary national identity, side-lining, ignoring, or rejecting the multi-ethnic character of Iran in favour of promoting a strong Persian identity. Reza Shah's rule (1925-41) saw the convergence of the ideas of monarchy, state, and nation in official discourse, and Reza Shah himself was portrayed as "the main repository of authority and fount of national will for change and progress" (Bayat, 2009, 113). "God, Shah, Motherland" (*Khoda, Shah, Mehan*) became the state motto under Reza Shah, and a blind pride in Iranian exceptionalism was encouraged by the state propaganda machine (Amanat, 2012, 21). A myth of historical continuity, from Cyrus to Pahlavi, was forged which glorified Iran's ancient past and its imperial supremacy, mirroring the populist European ideologies of Mussolini, Franco, and Ataturk (*ibid*). This state nationalism, continued under Mohammed Reza Shah, aspired to the systematic homogenization of the populace (ignoring or suppressing regional, tribal, and ethnic differences), and was used as an instrument of modernization and legitimization of continued Pahlavi rule (Litvak, 2017, 14). It emphasized the stability and unity of Iran under the centralised rule of the shah.

According to Atabaki, while up to the twentieth century the historiography of Iran was dominated by political, dynastical, and genealogical elements, the new political culture which followed the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11)[3] led to the establishment of a new school of Iranian historiography (Atabaki, 2009). This was an integrative endeavour by native and non-native historians to craft an Iranian identity by observing selected memories and recollections, driven in part by the ideological motivations of the Pahlavi era (*Ibid*, 3). Indeed, the Constitutional Revolution itself became a key reference point for nationalists and democrats in the twentieth century as an event which demonstrated the will and ability of the Iranian

[3] The Constitutional Revolution was a movement by merchants, *ulema*, and radical reformers who sought to end monarchial despotism and remove the dominance of foreign powers in Iran. It led to the establishment of the *Majlis* (Parliament), a constitutional monarchy, and the proclamation of the Iranian Constitution in 1906. Subsequent power struggles between the *Majlis* and the shahs, who were backed by Russian and British power, led to a long period of instability until the rise of Reza Shah in 1921 and the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925.

people to establish popular sovereignty, based on the rule of law and the removal of foreign interference (Shahibzadeh, 2015). This new history, prompted by a desire to overcome the narrative of decline associated with the Islamic and Qajar period, glorified the pre-Islamic past and stressed Iran's sufferings at the hands of alien conquerors as the root cause of material decline (Amanat, 2012, 21). This view underpinned a 'Pahlavist' ideology which sought to achieve ideological hegemony through the imagery of a past golden age and the promise of a future golden age (Shabiki, 2013). The shah published three books during his reign, outlining his vision for Iran which he termed "The Great Civilization". He aimed to build a unique and historic Persian Civilization, strongly identifying with Iran's ancient cultural heritage, through technological development and partnership with the global community, particularly with the West (Heisey and Trebing, 1983). The centrepiece of this project was the 1963 'Shah-People Revolution', also known as the White Revolution, a reform and development initiative which sought to forestall a 'Red Revolution' by Communists, or 'Black Revolution' by Shi'a clerics. Encouraged by successive US administrations as a means to promote stability, economic development, and counter communist influence, its dominant ideology was 'modernism', and it included promotion of women's rights and land redistribution. However, as a political programme it sought to retain the status quo which saw the institution of the monarchy as the lynchpin of Iranian state and society (Ansari, 2001, 2).

1.2 The Contestation of the Iranian Nation

While focused on political discourses in the Islamic Republic, Holliday's (2007) work highlights two key cultures in competition over Iran's national identity throughout the twentieth century: "*Iraniyyat* being Iranian in terms of Iran's pre-Islamic heritage and *Islamiyyat* being Islamic in terms of Iran's Islamic heritage" (28). Grinberg (2017) argues that *Iraniyyat* and *Islamiyyat* are best understood as two "ingredients" of Iranian national identity, which are used to different extents by various groups . The shah's regime, for example, relied more heavily on *Iraniyyat* discourses, while the radical *ulema* drew more from *Islamiyyat* ideas. Each brings a considerable corpus of history, myth, language, symbols and culture which can be interpreted to serve a variety of different purposes. In focusing on Iran's ancient past, *Iraniyyat* depicts Iranian national identity more in ethno-linguistic terms, stressing continuity with a glorious civilization stretching back to the Achaemenids in the 6th century BC or perhaps even further (with many historians in the 19th century believing Iranian history to stretch back for 6,000 or 7,000 years). Equally important is Iran's literary heritage,

particularly the *Shahnamah* or the "Persian Book of Kings" which Ansari termed "the only history many Iranians were willing to believe" (2012, 25). *Islamiyyat,* on the other hand, stresses Iran's Islamic and particularly its Shi'a heritage, emphasizing the role of the Safavid dynasty's declaration of Shi'ism as the state religion in the 16th century and the protection of Iranian Shi'is from its surrounding hostile Sunni neighbours (Litvak, 2017, 11). At specific historical junctures these identities have prefigured into a line-up of political forces, such as between Constitutionalists and Shari'atists during the Constitutional Revolution (Tavakoli-Targhi, 2001, p.96).

Aghaei (2000) cautions against viewing the two cultures as dichotomous during the Pahlavi era, however, stressing that most exponents of an Iranian national identity combined elements of both. While scholars of nationalism have debated between primordialist and modernist origins of nations, few ideologues of *Islamiyyat* deny the existence of a 2,500-year-old Iranian nation (Grinberg, 2017; Gat, 2017). Similarly, even the more secular groups during the Constitutional Revolution were unable to deny the Islamic nature of the country, and the shah maintained his belief in Iran's Shi'a character (although this would be a Shi'ism controlled and approved by his state) (Amanat 2012). This suggests that despite the Islamist and universalist claims of the Islamic forces during the Iranian Revolution, national narratives have remained important as unifying discourses in Iranian politics. Indeed, according to Litvak, the success of the Islamic Republic was to synthesise these two cultures, with universal Islam as the dominant ideology but *Iraniyyat* working at the operative level of this ideology (Litvak, 2017, 16, see also Maleševic, 2006). Ram (2000), who analysed school textbooks in the Islamic Republic, claims that the new Islamist regime has clung to the Pahlavi master narrative of Iranian history, articulating its Islamic terminology in the framework of symbols of Iranian nationalism such as the mythical "Persian Book of Kings", the Shahnameh.

As such, Ashraf (1993) argues that these identities (*Islamiyyat* and *Iraniyyat*) have not necessarily been in conflict with each other, but rather there have been four different intellectual trends and groups within Iran with differing views on Iranian national identity and how these two elements interact with each other: Conservative-traditionalists, Liberal nationalists, Shi'ite-Iranian (Islamists) and the radical left. Ansari identifies the same four groups, suggesting that each provides its own narrative of history emphasizing their own role over the others in an unfolding narrative of progress (Ansari, 2012, 2). It is important to note that these four groups are not mutually exclusive; many intellectuals and political figures

shifted between them over time and according to their political needs. Tensions have also existed with minority groups within Iran, such as in Iranian Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and Khuzestan, with periodic violence, separatism, and a rejection of the Persian-centric national elites (Saleh, 2013; Elling, 2013).

Compared to the other conceptions of national identity, the views of the radical left have been relatively under-studied. This is likely due to the fact that unlike the other three groups, the left has never held power in Iran and has as such never been able to impose its views, however briefly, through the machinery of the state (Behrooz, 1999). Source material from the Iranian left is also difficult to access due to decades of repression, first under the shahs and then under the Islamic Republic. For Ashraf (1993), the national identity of the contemporary left in Iran is one which emphasizes the multi-ethnic nature of Iran, rejecting the concept of the "nation of Iran" (*mellat-e Iran*) in favour of "peoples of Iran" (*khalqha-ye Iran*) (160). While Ansari directly states the existence of a radical leftist conception of national identity, he does not go into detail about how it is constructed instead discussing how leftist ideas such as universal education and welfare cohered well with other nationalist aims (2012, 129), and how Marxist motifs were married with Islamism by Khomeini (197). This calls for further research on the Iranian left and their construction of Iranian national identity, which this thesis contributes.

1.3 Cultural Opposition and the Mojahedin-e-Khalq

Following the crackdown on protest against the shah's 1963 White Revolution, which brought together Islamic and leftist elements opposed to the reforms, many student groups and intellectuals were forced underground where they studied and read Third Worldist thinkers, Maoism, and other international anti-imperialist thought (Moghadam, 1987). Drawing on Fanon's call for using culture to raise national consciousness and awaken the people against imperialism, Iranian intellectuals on both the left and the right adopted ideas of "cultural authenticity" and sought a sense of Iranian dignity and identity to stand against the West (Nabavi, 2003). Two writers in particular were important in this development; Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati. Jalal Al-e Ahmad's work *Gharbzadegi* or "Westoxification", originally written in the early 1960s, emphasized resistance to the Westernisation advocated by the shah and critiqued the West's modernity as spiritually unfulfilling (Moghadam, 1987). He insisted that Shi'ism had become an indispensable component of Iranian identity which was incompatible with Western cultural penetration (Holliday, 2007, 35). By imposing

Western concepts and practices, Al-e Ahmad claimed the shah had offended "the culture of the people" (Moghadam, 1989). Shariati went further and looked to what he perceived as the true spirit of Shi'a Islam, arguing that Shi'ism was essentially a revolutionary doctrine, marrying Shi'ism with Marxist methodology (Ansari, 2012). Denouncing conservative interpretations of Islam, Shariati argued that Shi'ism was a revolution against all forms of oppression, especially feudalism, capitalism, and imperialism (Abrahamian, 2008).

Against this intellectual backdrop and inspired by the experiences of China, Vietnam, Cuba, and other Third World countries, opposition Marxist and Islamist groups began to advocate guerrilla warfare as a result of the failure of previous attempts to overthrow or change the regime through street protests, labour strikes, and underground political parties (Abrahamian, 1980). They sought to act as the vanguards of revolution and promote a more general uprising against the shah (Abrahamian, 1982). Beginning with the 1971 Siahkal incident, an attack on a military outpost in northern Iran by the Marxist-Leninist Organization of the Iranian People's Fedai Guerrillas (the *Fedaiyan-e Khalq*), the guerrilla warfare spread and included bombing campaigns, assassinations, bank robberies, and other armed insurrections across Iran (Abrahamian, 1980).

The *Mojahedin-e-Khalq* (MEK) was one of the largest guerrilla organizations active during this period. Despite this, little scholarly attention has been paid to their activities before the revolution aside from Abrahamian (1989), who has provided the only comprehensive history of the MEK available in the English language. The MEK developed out of the Liberation Movement of Iran, a Mossadeq-aligned religious political party (with which Ali Shariati was also associated) formed in 1961 by Mehdi Bazargan and Ayatollah Taleqani both of whom combined their devotion to Islam with advocating socialist political policies (Abrahamian 1980, 1989). It was largely a middle-class organization of students and children of religiously-inclined merchants. The Mojahedin advocated armed struggle to overthrow the shah based on an ideology of "revolutionary Islam", a Marxism-inspired reading of Shi'a Islamic thought which emphasises the call for social justice within Islam. Importantly, while they accepted Marxist methodology and methods of analysis, they rejected it as an overarching ideology due to its atheism. They were nevertheless attacked by both the shah's regime and the more conservative religious opposition as "Islamic Marxists", with Marxism used as a slur due to its atheist connotations.

The Mojahedin interpreted early Shi'ism as "a protest movement against class exploitation and state oppression", arguing that God not only created the world but "had set in motion the law of historical evolution" (Abrahamian, 1989, 92-93), which created private property, class inequality, and class conflict. This conflict generated historical dynamism and would ensure the destruction of outdated social systems like slavery and feudalism, and would eventually lead to an egalitarian society. They viewed revolutionary Islam as being free of clerical leadership, which brought them into conflict with Khomeini, whose followers were in turn suspicious of the MEK's Marxist leanings (Behrooz, 2004). Indeed, in meetings with Khomeini between 1972 and 1974, leading members of the Mojahedin became disillusioned with him after he refused to endorse their activities, believing them to be too closely aligned with international communism (Abrahamian, 1989, 149-151). While they developed their ideology independently of Ali Shariati, their similarities led to the Mojahedin freely borrowing from his arguments and theories (Moghadam, 1987).

Their decision to turn to armed struggle followed the strategy of "propaganda by the deed", which aimed to provoke a general popular uprising against the regime through weakening it and showing it was not invulnerable. The MEK had intended to carry out guerrilla activities when enough of their members had returned from Palestinian training camps in Lebanon and Jordan, however the Siahkal incident encouraged them to act sooner. Plans to disrupt the shah's Persepolis celebrations by blowing up an electrical plant in Tehran fell apart, as their contact for procuring dynamite turned out to be a police informer (Abrahamian 1989). In late 1971 SAVAK successfully rounded up 105 members of the MEK, 69 of whom went to trial in 1972 accused of various crimes such as weapons smuggling, planning to overthrow the monarchy, and plots to bomb public buildings. Eleven of the MEK's sixteen-strong central cadre were put on trial, which were initially held openly but were later closed to the public as the foreign press began to report that prisoners had been tortured.

The defendants were tried for a series of crimes relating to their planned guerrilla activities against the shah's regime, including conspiracy to overthrow the regime, treason, and attempting to stockpile weapons. While ordinarily a courtroom would be a place for legal discussion, for the MEK the trials were political rather than legal. The defendants were assigned counsels with no legal training, and families were not permitted to attend. They had no hope of receiving a fair trial, nor did they necessarily wish to have one, instead taking the opportunity to challenge the shah's regime within one of the key institutions of the state – the courtroom. For the defendants this was their first opportunity to directly confront the state, as

they had been arrested before carrying out any guerrilla activities (Abrahamian, 1989). They used the opportunity of a court trial to denounce the regime, outline their ideology, and publicly articulate their perspectives on the character of Iran and the Iranian people. Transcripts of the speeches were smuggled out of the courtroom and printed by the MEK. These were quickly circulated throughout universities in Iran and abroad, through reprinting by the Liberation Movement, National Front, and student groups like the Confederation of Iranian Students. This allowed the MEK to have their views spread to hundreds of thousands of Iranians.

All of the accused were found guilty, with eleven sentenced to death and 16 to life imprisonment. The arrests and trials significantly weakened the organisation, but did not destroy it. Now publicly known, although still operating underground, the MEK restructured and grew, carrying out attacks and engaging in armed warfare with the regime. In order to understand how they justified these actions to the wider public, it is important to look at how they articulated their opposition to the shah within their public discourses. The analysis of the MEK trial speeches sheds light on their vision of Iranian national identity and narrative and the basis for their opposition to the shah. While it is impossible to assess the popularity of the movement or the extent of readership of the circulated transcripts, the narratives presented in these trials still constitute an element of pre-revolutionary Iranian public discourse that has so far been left unexplored.

2. Literature Review

In this chapter I ground my case study in the existing literature on the Iranian Revolution, theoretical approaches to the study of revolutions, and the construction and contestation of national narratives. In the first section I critique existing accounts of the Iranian Revolution for an overly narrow focus on Khomeini and the radical *ulema*, which have led to what Parsa (2000) terms "methodological reductionism", and an assumption that participants in the revolution adhered to Khomeini's ideology. In the second section I situate work on the Iranian Revolution more broadly within scholarship on revolutions, and highlight the "fourth generation" theories of revolution which call for an increased focus on the roles of ideology, culture, and identity in bringing about revolutions. In light of this, in the third and fourth sections I argue that the nation is the key discursive arena in which culture and identity are contested and formulated in revolutions. I highlight work on the construction and contestation of the nation by political actors, and centre my understanding of the nation as a narrative which is used by political actors to justify their ideological ends.

2.1 Perspectives on the Iranian Revolution

The Iranian Revolution 1978-9 posed a problem to Skocpol's (1979) state-centred structural explanations of social revolutions. Prior to the revolution there was no state collapse or state instability, indeed Iran was considered "an island of stability in one of the most troubled areas of the world" by US President Jimmy Carter in December 1977 (Abrahamian, 2008). There was no military defeat from outside, and no pressure or provocation of conflicts within the regime. Furthermore, rather than comprised of peasant uprisings or a single-class based opposition movement, the Iranian revolution was a broad, multi-class revolution which involved millions of people taking to the streets in a single day (Foran and Goodwin, 1993).

Skocpol herself accepted that the Iranian Revolution was clearly a revolution "made" by a mass-based social movement aiming to overthrow the old order (Skocpol, 1982, 267). The question of how this revolution was "made" has been at the heart of historians', sociologists', political scientists', and other's accounts of the Iranian Revolution. Kurzman critiques attempts to explain the Iranian Revolution by reference to broader structural theories, dismissing them as attempts at "retroactive prediction" which insufficiently engage with free will and the unpredictable elements of human action (Kurzman, 2005, 4-5). His study advocates an "anti-explanation" of the Iranian Revolution, attempting to reconstruct the

events as they occurred and taking into account the contingent and unpredictable elements which had outsized effects on the overall outcome of the revolution. This, he suggests, allows scholars to account for the anomalies which weaken structural arguments. He argues that "So long as revolution remained 'unthinkable,' it remained undoable. It could come to pass only when large numbers of people began to 'think the unthinkable'" (Kurzman, 2005, 172). He suggests that in the confusion of a revolutionary crisis, the perceived "viability" of the revolutionary movement (whether the people believed it would be a success) was the core factor in leading so many to take to the streets. The central weakness in his argument for an "anti-explanation" is that, by his own account, the perceived "viability" of a revolutionary movement provides something of an explanation for how the revolution emerged. It suggests that the best possible explanations should focus on how this sense of a thinkable, viable, or imaginable revolution was spread.

In this vein, accounts from other scholars have centred on the discursive construction of opposition to the regime by the radical *ulema*. Many attempts to explain the causes of the Iranian Revolution have focused on the ideology and organizational capacity of Shi'a Islam as a cross-class unifying force in Iranian society. Keddie (2003) for example highlights the independent authority and organisational capacity of the *ulema* as crucial in their ability to provide a revolutionary alternative to the shah's regime, while Skocpol (1982) and Halliday (1982) emphasise, alongside structural factors, the appeal of an Islamist ideology to those who took part in the revolution. Farhi (1990) claims that the radical *ulema* mobilised other middle-class groups through mosque and bazaar networks, tapping into religious beliefs to orchestrate the collapse of the shah's legitimacy and pin him as the cause of all of Iran's problems. Arjomand (1986) suggests that the Islamic revolution was a response to a politicized quest for authenticity, in which the *ulema* provided an authentic, indigenous ideology with the power to unify disparate social groups in opposition to the shah and the West. These accounts have focused on the ability of the *ulema* to contest the shah's legitimacy and his claim of the right to rule Iran by proposing an alternative model of legitimacy based on Islam. Burns (1996) suggests that the Islamist ideology of the radical *ulema* should be viewed, rather than a specific set of programs, as a set of images and concepts which enable diverse groups to unite against the old regime. Anti-imperialism and vilification of the shah's regime were the central points of agreement in his view, as well as the belief that Islam provided "an indigenous alternative" (350) to the regime. This idea of an "indigenous alternative" to the regime and its US backers played an important role in the

revolution, as questions of cultural authenticity and opposition to Western cultural dominance rose to the fore through the works of Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati (Moghadam, 1989).

Moaddel (1992) provides a more detailed account of the role of Islamic imagery and symbolism during the Revolution, suggesting that the "revolutionary crisis erupted when revolutionary ideology began to take over the protest movements because the monarchy's ideology and that of the Islamic opposition were mutually exclusive" (366). Grounding opposition in Islamic discourse allowed the opposition to undermine the shah's nationalism, providing an alternative model of governance which did not rely on continuity with 2,500 years of national history. He argues for viewing ideology as 'episodic discourse', which consists of general principles, concepts, and rituals that shape human action during particular historical periods. Islam, he suggests, was ascendant during the Iranian Revolution as it was flexible enough in its content to mean different things to different contending revolutionary actors, while allowing them to focus their opposition to the shah through it. However, Moaddel's account is centred on understandings of the clerical opposition's Islamic ideology and discourses. While the Islamic discourses of Khomeini and the *ulema* may have been dominant during (and after) the Iranian Revolution, they were far from the only group drawing on an Islamic ideology.

The limitation of most of these perspectives, in my view, comes from two main methodological problems. Firstly, there is a focus on the revolution as a broad-based coalition built by Khomeini and the radical *ulema*, and their discourse and ideology of Islam. This "methodological reductionism" (Parsa, 2000, 9) leads to the assumption that participants in the revolution adhere to the ideologies of those who are successful during and after the revolutionary contestation. Furthermore, this approach assumes that Khomeini and the radical *ulema* held a monopoly over the definitions and content of Islam as a revolutionary ideology, and leads to a lack of engagement with how Islam was used by other revolutionary groups as a mobilising discourse. Significant protests and mobilization by other groups in society such as students and workers which occurred in 1977 were motivated largely by leftist and liberal-nationalist, rather than Islamist, principles, and were not led by Khomeini, who had only a small following at this point (Parsa, 2000). The process of dissent was initiated and led by the middle classes emphasizing liberal freedoms, with few considering the implementation of theocracy a serious possibility (Burns, 1996, 359-360). Moghadam (1989) contends that the revolution was a populist social revolution, with Islamization only setting in after the fall of the shah, and Bayat similarly suggests that "Islamization unfolded largely after the victory of

the Islamic revolution and was enforced largely from above by the Islamic state" (Bayat, 1992, 145). The revolution, as Foran (1994) argues, arose from multiple overlapping political cultures of opposition and resistance, including middle class liberals, students of varying political persuasions, oil workers, and a recently migrated urban working class, who experienced and interpreted the realities of their everyday lives under the shah in terms of a variety of different sets of values, beliefs, and cultural frameworks. While unified in their opposition to the shah and their desire to bring down his regime, the contestation between these varying sets of values and beliefs has remained understudied.

The first problem in many ways leads to the second, which is the tendency to focus on the period of 1978-9 and the revolutionary discourses contained within it rather than taking a more long-term view of the revolution. This is a weakness in Kurzman's (2005) account, as by only focusing on the last two years of the shah's reign, his "anti-explanation" of how the Iranian revolution developed is still reliant on other, structuralist, explanations for the emergence of a revolutionary scenario. By 1978, the revolution was crystallising and Khomeini had become an important focal point of opposition to the shah. The January 1978 *Ettela'at* article condemning Khomeini is in many accounts of the Revolution seen as the starting point for major mobilisation (see for example: Abrahamian, 2008), but ignores earlier mobilization such as the protests mentioned above, and indeed the long-running radical opposition and mobilisation by guerrilla groups (Abrahamian, 1982). Pro-Khomeini protests in Qom in 1975, which failed to lead to widespread and mass-based mobilisation (Kurzman, 2003), suggest that the emergence of Khomeini and his radical, clerical Islamist ideology should be seen as much as a result of the processes of revolution as one of its causes. The existing literature on the causes of the Iranian revolution thus requires complementing with the exploration of other revolutionary groups and discourses not centred on the clerical opposition, and identity constructions that are not focused only on Islam.

2.2 Discursive and Ideological Contestation in Revolutions

Explanations of how and why revolutions occur have developed along several "generations" of theory. The first-generation approach centred on descriptive and comparative analysis of the "great" revolutions, like the French and Russian revolutions, seeking similarities in patterns of mass mobilisations and elite breakdowns (Goldstone, 1982). The second-generation approach attempted to build more generalisable theoretical models to understand the causes of revolutions, suggesting that unrealised expectations, as a result of rapid

modernization and economic growth followed by economic downturn, led people to revolt and resulted in revolutionary uprisings. The "relative deprivation" thesis (Gurr, 1970) and the J-Curve theory of revolutions (Davies, 1971) are prototypical examples of this school of thought. The third-generation structuralist approach, exemplified by Skocpol (1979) and Goldstone (1991) highlights the macro conditions under which revolutions emerge. Skocpol (1979) defines a social revolution as "a combination of thoroughgoing structural transformation and massive class upheavals" (Skocpol, 1979, 173). Her work takes the case studies of the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions to centre the state and social institutions in our understandings of social revolutions. Revolutionary situations occur as a result of state destabilization (as a result of war or crisis), and their processes are determined by the pre-revolutionary regime structures. Social structure and patterns of class dominance determine which groups participate in revolutionary activity through class upheavals, with peasant uprisings in predominantly agrarian societies seen as a key feature of class conflict during social revolutions. The structuralist approach is summarised by the declaration "Revolutions are not made; they come" (*Ibid*, 17).

This viewpoint has been criticised however for its deemphasis on ideology, culture and the role of individual and group agency in bringing about revolutions. Sewell (1985), for example, argues through reference to the French Revolution that ideological and cultural factors were crucial in shaping the outcomes of state breakdown and revolutionary struggle during debates over the creation of the First Republic. In particular, he criticises Skocpol's conflation of ideology and class struggle, and stresses the importance of ideological formations and their interrelation with social forces and cultural systems as drivers of revolutionary mobilisation, state breakdown, and ultimately revolutionary outcomes. Centring ideology in the study of revolutions means that "the replacement of one socio-ideological order by another also becomes a crucial dimension of the change that needs to be explained, one no less important than the replacement of one class system by another or one state apparatus by another" (Sewell, 1985, 62). These criticisms were strengthened by the emergence of revolutions which did not neatly fit into the pattern of state crisis and breakdown such as the Iranian Revolution of 1978-9, in which broad multi-class coalitions, and the relative absence of peasant uprisings, were able to bring about social revolutions against an otherwise stable regime (Moaddel 1992; Foran and Goodwin 1993). Scholars have attempted to use cultural frameworks to explain how multi-class coalitions remain unified prior to the revolution, suggesting that common cultural reference points and narratives help

to mask ideological differences between heterogeneous revolutionary groups (Goldstone 1991; Burns 1996). In this view, only after the downfall of the regime does ideology become more important as contestations over the direction of the revolutionary state lead to the revolutionary coalition collapsing, and often sees the emergence of violence, repression, or civil war (Goldstone 1991). As such, during the pre-revolutionary period of contestation with the regime, explicit positive ideological claims and perspectives have less importance than the deconstruction and undermining of the ideological framework of the regime.

Fourth-generation theories of revolution have emphasised the disparate causes of state instability, including international factors, elite conflict, and how ideology and culture contribute to and shape revolutionary mobilization (Foran 1993; Parsa 2000). Nevertheless, these frameworks largely still rest on the notion of state-crisis as providing the political opportunity for revolutionary groups to contest state power, and are unable to explain why revolutions occur in places or situations without these structural conditions (McAdam et. al. 2001; Lawson 2016; Wasserstrom 1995). State instability remains "the necessary precondition for the generation of revolutionary crisis" (Lawson, 2016, 110). Lawson's key and convincing critique of this scholarship is that it contains a continued and reinforced distinction between structure and agency, political openings and revolutionary opportunities are still viewed in terms of state crisis and structural factors exogeneous to the efforts of revolutionary groups and movements themselves. The emphasis has been on how revolutionary crises create revolutionary movements, rather than looking at how revolutionary groups, through contestation over meanings, practices, and institutions, create revolutionary movements that can play a role in the emergence of revolutionary crises (Lawson, 2016, 122).

Goldstone (2001) suggests the importance of the formation of protest identities for the emergence of social movements which embark on revolutionary challenges to the state. For Goldstone, these protest identities are not inherent, but rather must be created and maintained over time in order for people's existing identities to become more politically salient. Protest identities are able to "bring people together for large-scale, risky, and effective challenges to state authority" (Goldstone, 2001, 153). Protest groups inculcate these identities to help justify individual grievances against the status quo, situating them in a wider context, and through taking action in pursuing change these groups can give their members a sense of empowerment and earn their allegiance (*Ibid*, 154). In addition the state, through labelling the protest group as its enemy and by taking actions against it, may reinforce the sense of oppositional identity within the group and for its followers. It is through identification with

these protest identities, Goldstone argues, that cultural frameworks and ideologies generate meaning and purposeful action. This idea has been explored in relation to the Iranian Revolution with regards to the use of religious identity and ideology by Khomeini and the radical *ulema* and the ideological reinterpretation of Shi'a Islam as an inherently revolutionary doctrine by Khomeini, Shariati, and indeed the MEK (see for example Moghadam, 1989; Abrahamian, 1989; Abrahamian, 1993). By situating protest and revolution within wider narratives, revolutionaries are able to build broader support for their revolutionary aims.

2.3 Nationalism and the Construction of National Identities

In the modern era it is nationalism which provides the major source of state legitimacy and authority, and the nation "that provides the major societal context and thus the arena" for power struggles (Simon and Klandermans, 2001, 327). Nations provide common culture reference points for political actors to situate their claims and ideologies, and the main social identity within which other collective identities, such as class or religion, are nested (*Ibid*). In revolutions, where state legitimacy and authority breaks down, revolutionary actors have to build the case for their own legitimacy in replacing the pre-revolutionary regime. I claim that revolutionaries, often despite their reference to universal ideological goals, are deeply embedded within understandings of their own national and cultural context, and justify their revolutionary actions with reference to this context. As such it is important to look at how nationalism and the nation is conceived of and used in political discourse.

Nationalism as a theory holds that a group of people, by virtue of their sharing a common language or common geographical space, have a collective past, a collective present, and a collective future (Wodak et. al, 2009, 4). Two visions of the nation combine to form national identity, *Staatsnation* which emphasizes the achievements of the state, and *Kulturnation*, which includes "high-cultural" achievements and shared everyday culture and language (Wodak et. al., 2009). Nations are "systems of cultural representations", and national cultures a way of constructing meanings which influence and organise both actions and conceptions of the self (Hall, 1996, 612-613). Anderson (1983) termed the nation an "imagined community" due to the fact that most members of this group would never meet each other face to face, a point which applies to most collective groups larger than the smallest of villages (*Ibid,* 6). Anderson, along with Gellner (1983) and Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983) are the prominent examples of the 'modernist' school of nationalism, which stress the invention and

construction of nationality towards the end of the eighteenth century. For them, nationalism invents nations as collective forms of identity where previously they did not exist, through the modern advent of unified and homogenizing educational systems, territorialisation and the fixing of borders and labour markets, and the standardization of language. Smith (1991) takes a slightly modified view, termed ethno-symbolism, which argues that while nations are primarily modern phenomena, they are historically bounded by ethnic and cultural symbols. This restrict the ability of nations to be 'invented', and provides for a degree of determinism in the way in which nations are 'imagined'. In both frameworks however, nationalism constituted a new ideology about primary identities, competing with (and sometimes absorbing) local, family, and religious identities (Calhoun 2005).

In rejecting primordialist notions of the nation as an existing cultural identity since time immemorial, modernist and ethno-symbolist accounts of the emergence of nationalism focus on its construction by elites, intellectuals, and political actors. Gellner's (1983) definition of nationalism as "a political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" means that any attempt to forge a national culture is therefore a political action with political consequences (Smith, 1991, 99). Calhoun argues that nationalism and national identity is better understood as a "discursive formation", as nations do not exist "objectively" before they exist discursively (Calhoun, 2007, 27). Nationalism has largely been studied as the ideology for independence movements and revolutions, driving rebellions against multi-ethnic absolutist monarchies in 19th century Europe; uprisings against colonial regimes in the Americas, Africa, and Asia; and separatist movements throughout the world of groups seeking to create their own nation-states. Nevertheless, even in independent nations, contestation over the meaning of the nation and the cultural values that it expresses is a core part of political contestation.

Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's philosophical theory of identity (1992), Wodak et. al. argue that national identity is predominantly a narrative-based identity which allows the actors to synthesize heterogeneous and conflicting elements in national cultures into one overarching story (Wodak et. al., 2009, 14-15). This provides a dynamic concept of identity which includes the possibility of transformation, whereby the identity of a nation is drawn from heterogeneous elements throughout time but brought together in a cohesive narrative structure. Whether mythological or historical, national narratives revolve around the three temporal axes of the past, the present, and the future, in an attempt to provide continuity and a constant reference point (the nation) throughout time (*Ibid*, 26).

For Hall, the narration of national culture contains five main elements. First, the narrative of the nation as told in national histories, literature, the media, and popular culture which provide a set of stories, images, historical events, national symbols, and rituals which represent shared experiences and give meaning to the nation. Second, an emphasis on origins, continuity, tradition, and timelessness where national identity is represented as primordial and essentialist, unchanged throughout history. Thirdly, the invention of traditions which inculcate certain values and norms by repetition, implying continuity with historical past. Fourthly, the use of a foundational myth which locates the origin of the nation and its people long ago, lost in the mists of time. Finally, national identity is often grounded on the idea of a pure, original people or "folk" (*Ibid*, 1996, 613-615). Furthermore, Smith (1991, 66-68) highlights the "cult of golden ages" as a key way in which nationalist-intellectuals have constructed national identities, using them to create vivid memories of the past successes of the national community and mythologise legendary heroes as exemplars of the nation. Through imagining an era at some point in the past in which the nation was at its most successful, nationalists create an ideal to return to at some point in the future.

While all nationalisms can be said to contain these common elements, their contents are specific to the nation in question. Attempts to define nationalism as an ideology have run in to difficulty, Finlayson (1998) contends, because no two nationalisms can be the same. There is no generalizable truth about nationalism in terms of its content, because by their nature nationalisms in France and England, for example, must be different. One being concerned with some notion of Frenchness and the other with some notion of Englishness (*Ibid*, 100). As such, he advocates a theoretical approach to studying the specificity of nationalism which relates it to their concrete contents, and links these with political ideologies which define themselves through association with the 'natural' nation (*Ibid*, 100). Nationalism in political discourse, he argues, should be understood as part of an "ideological legitimation strategy revolving around the tension of the universal and particular" (*Ibid*, 103). Ideologies provide definition to contested concepts such as fairness, justice, and freedom, through stipulation of their correct meanings, and competition over the legitimacy of these conceptual definitions has been "a driving force of the struggle among ideologies to control political systems" (Freeden, 2006, 12). Nationalisms "are always directed to the construction of a specific chain of discourse, the production of a specific notion of the specific nation and the national subject" (*Ibid*, 105) and thus different political actors within a given nation will articulate the nation differently, according to their ideological imperatives. As a result, the construction of

national identity is part of a continual process of ideological contestation, as the nation is interpreted and re-interpreted by actors seeking to build legitimacy for their universalist ideological claims. Political actors adapt ideologies to local national settings, and use discourses of nationalism to define the nation in such a way that their ideological political claims derive naturally from the nation (*Ibid*, 113).

I view the nation, therefore, as a narrative which defines and describes the culture and history (whether factual or mythological), present, and future, of a group of people. Its significance in the political sphere derives from its construction of a meaningful narrative with which individuals can identify, contained "in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and imaginaries which are constructed out of it" (Hall, 1996, 613). Political actors, driven by their own ideological claims and beliefs, contest national identity through providing alternative narratives of the nation's past, present, and future, in keeping with their ideological worldviews.

2.4 The Contestation of National Identity

Maleševic (2006), in line with Finlayson (1998) contends that nationalism is the dominant ideology of modernity due to its role at the operative level of the ideological, rather than the normative. By this he means that while different political actors may be driven by different modern normative ideologies like socialism, liberalism, and conservatism, the way they express these ideologies is through nationalism. To show this he takes the cases of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Socialist Yugoslavia, and the United Kingdom and demonstrates that while each clings to a distinct normative ideological worldview (Islamism, socialism, and liberalism respectively), in practice in constitutions and political speeches the leaders of these countries all express their ideologies in nationalist terms. He argues that modern political orders legitimize their rule in nationalist terms, a process made possible by associating the normative ideology (e.g. socialism or Islamism) with the historical narrative of the nation. Salecl (1993) has shown that in former Yugoslavia, opponents of abortion used discourses of nationalism, intersecting with religion, morality, and gender, in opposition to state socialism and capitalism. Similarly debates in the United Kingdom over Section 28, the law introduced in 1987 to ban local government's "promotion of homosexuality", were suffused with nationalist discourse in the service of a homophobic agenda as politicians argued homosexuality went against the sanctity of the family as crucial to the survival of the nation (Finlayson, 1998, 109). By associating normative ideological claims and worldviews with the narrative of the

nation, showing that these claims are in keeping with the nation's experiences, political actors attempt to show that their vision is the truest representation of the will of the nation.

Cruz (2000) focuses on the contestation of national identity by competing political actors in the early phase of nation-building. He argues that national identity is a 'declarative identity', constructed by the rhetorical frames of political actors in an attempt to organize action. These frames can be contested by other political actors with different motivations and ideologies, and as such national identities are never fixed but are always under construction through political contestation and rhetorical framing. He takes as his case study the early histories of Nicaragua and Costa Rica as a comparative example of nation and state-building in which "political entrepreneurs" competed for power following independence from Spain by drawing on different memories of their colonial experience. He understands national identity as a collective identity which provides a "field of imaginable possibilities" within which political elites act rhetorically and discursively, according to their own interests (277). As such, political conflict occurs through contesting the meanings of this field.

Given the importance of nationalism for the legitimacy of political orders, revolutionary groups who offer alternative visions of the state commonly base these visions on nationalist principles (Goldstone 1991 pp 416-417). Goldstone gives the examples of the English Revolution, French Revolution, and Russian Revolutions as cases where the successful ideologies (puritanism, Jacobinism, and Bolshevism, respectively) were advocated by a small group or elite who succeeded in mobilizing popular support 'by identifying themselves as custodians of a tradition more "authentic" and truly "national" than those of their opponents' (1991 413). In the cases of the English and French Revolutions, Finlayson (1998) argues that rights claims are situated in the contexts of national history and institutional traditions. The English Revolution drew on a mythic past to show a certain population (the English people) were able to legitimately claim political freedoms, while French revolutionary discourses in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen justified rights in terms of Frenchness and belonging to a French national community (p101-102).

As a universalist ideology explicitly calling for workers of the world to unite, classical Marxism condemns nationalism as a bourgeois construction to be discarded in favour of internationalism (Nimni, 1991). In practice however, in Communist revolutions class is only one category of collective identity mobilised by revolutionary communist groups. For example, while the Russian Bolsheviks were committed to world revolution and international

solidarity, the 1917 revolution contained elements of Russian nationalism as the Bolsheviks asserted the "true" people's Russia against the privileges of the Tsarist regime and the domination of foreign capital (Kumar, 2015, 600 – 601). Kumar compares the Bolshevik revolution to third world revolutions in China and Cuba, and considers them all as revolutions of national liberation. Stuart (2006) has shown in the case of the nineteenth century Parti Ouvrier Français (POF) that despite its early internationalist and cosmopolitan ideology, it was forced to respond to the "national question" and construct a "Jacobin socialism" (75). Rather than resisting the ideas of nationhood, the POF appropriated its language and rhetoric. They situated their own beliefs in the revolutionary tradition of France, arguing that the triumphs of the First Republic foreshadowed their own inevitable victories (176). Stuart suggests that the move towards socialist nationalism was largely due to the POF's enemies discovering the usefulness of nationalism to discredit their convictions.

2.5 Summary

In this chapter I have made the case that the Iranian Revolution has been studied in a relatively one-sided manner, through emphasis on the organisational capacity and Islamic discourses of the Shi'a *ulema* led by Ayatollah Khomeini. As a result, other ideological and discursive mobilisations and contestations by different revolutionary groups have remained relatively understudied. The fourth-generation theories of revolution suggest that the ideological contestation of cultural frameworks and the formation of protest identities is a key means by which revolutionary movements attempt to mobilize the population, through their ability to unify disparate groups across a society. Importantly this contestation occurs prior to the creation of revolutionary crises and can be understood as one of the causes of the breakdown of state legitimacy and authority. Before we delve into the nature of contestations during revolutionary moments, it is important to see them as struggles for legitimacy and the ability to advocate for a specific narrative of national identity. In the modern era it is nationalism which provides the major source of state legitimacy and authority, and the nation "that provides the major societal context and thus the arena" for power struggles (Simon and Klandermans, 2001, 327). As such political actors, such as revolutionary groups, are invested in contesting notions of national identity to show that their aims and ideology are in keeping with the nation's identity and interests. Expressing their opposition in this way allows them to show their ideological beliefs are in keeping with the narrative of the nation.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I set out my theoretical framework for understanding the means by which the MEK contested the shah's regime through their defence speeches. Drawing on cultural sociology, I argue for viewing culture as a "toolkit" which actors draw upon to construct and legitimize patterns of action (Swidler, 1986). I then suggest the centrality of culture in establishing binary codes for the moral evaluation of events and actors through drawing on Alexander and Smith (1993), and the function of narratives in political discourse through Smith's (2005) concept of genre wars, to help understand how national narratives are linked to social action. Finally, I introduce the notion of the public sphere, and particularly Fraser's (1990) "subaltern counterpublics" to understand how social groups are able to contest dominant narratives in situations of exclusion from mainstream political discourse.

3.1 Culture as a Tool Kit

Culture, as a body of beliefs, practices, language, stories, and rituals, is significant in that it is a vehicle through which modes of behaviour and outlooks are shared within a community (Swidler, 1986). Ann Swidler proposes a model for analysing culture which views it as a "tool kit" which people use to make sense of the world, and solve various real-world problems. It provides the components that are used to construct "strategies of action", which are persistent ways of ordering action through time (*Ibid*, 273). The tool kit is a system of publicly available meanings which "facilitate certain patterns of action, making them readily available, while discouraging others" (*Ibid,* 283). As cultures contain diverse and conflicting symbols, rituals, and guides to action, actors draw upon the tool kit strategically, choosing pieces of it to construct lines of action in accordance with their interests (*Ibid*, 277). Cultural meanings develop over time along a continuum depending on their level of explicit articulation. Ideologies are highly articulated, self-conscious belief and ritual systems, and a phase at the beginning of the development of a system of cultural meaning. Over time these may become traditions, which are still largely articulated, but taken for granted. Once fully integrated into a cultural system, meanings and beliefs become a part of common sense assumptions which seem a natural, transparent, and undeniable part of the structure of the world (*Ibid*, 279). Culture provides the discursive repertoire within which values are elaborated, allowing political actors to direct human action to some ends rather than others.

Swidler builds two models of cultural influence, in "settled" and "unsettled" periods. In settled periods, culture (through traditions and "common sense" ideas) provides materials from which diverse groups call on selectively to bring to bear different styles and habits in different situations (*Ibid*, 280). In unsettled periods however (such as in war or times of social upheaval), cultural values and symbols can be abandoned while new elements are created through ideological competition. Different cultural practices may become highly politically charged as they become imbued with stronger ideological meaning, and established cultural meanings which are part of common-sense assumptions about the world can become challenged by new ideologies which reinterpret existing cultural frameworks (*Ibid*, 280). This distinction is important as it emphasises that cultural meanings are not static, but can be adapted as different situations and imperatives emerge.

3.2 Cultural Codes and the Concept of *Genre Wars*

Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith propose that culture should be thought of as "a structure composed of symbolic sets" which "provide categories for understanding the elements of social, individual and organic life" (Alexander and Smith, 1993, 156). These symbolic sets are cultural codes which structure reality through binary evaluations, specifying what is good and what is evil, and as such generate an "us" and "them", an in-group and an out-group. Those who exhibit favourable traits according to "our culture", are considered morally good, and vice versa. In analysing American civil society discourses, they argue that civil society consists of actors and the relationships between actors and institutions, and that cultural binary codes provide a coherent way of understanding how they interrelate (Alexander, 2003, 122). While societies develop in historically specific ways, at the heart of all of them rests similar core symbolic sets which structure the relations between actors and institutions through binary patterns (Alexander and Smith, 1993, 161). These codes inform action through becoming internalized by individuals, providing the foundation for moral imperatives in the promotion of good and removal of evil, and provide public value judgements for holding actors morally accountable (*Ibid*, 196).

These cultural codes have great significance in public and political discourse. Public debate and discourse are directed towards the "moral regulation of social life", facilitated by cultural resources (Smith, 2005, 11-12). Public discourse is a collective interpretative system through which the complexities of current affairs and events are simplified and converted into useable information with a normative value (*Ibid*, 12). While cultural codes enable classification of

people and events into moral criteria, however, Smith argues they are insufficient for explaining the link between culture and action. Instead, he provides the concept of *genre wars* which emphasises the importance of narratives for building action. While Smith's work is concerned with Western narratives which lead to war, the theoretical model he proposes can also shed insights into how narratives can be constructed in ways which lead to other social mobilisations such as revolution. Smith argues that it is narrative structures which provide the link between culture and action, through placing actors and events into plots, and allocating moral responsibility, causality, and agency. Narratives "indicate the trajectory of past episodes and predict consequences of future choices, suggest courses of action, confer and withdraw legitimacy, and provide social approval by aligning events with normative cultural codes" (*Ibid*, 18). Through these two axes, cultural codes and narrative structures, cultural systems "engage with the more concrete realm of events and things, in effect making them into nonmaterial social facts" (*Ibid*, 14).

Drawing on literary theorist Northrop Frye's codification of narrative genres, Smith outlines four genres of storytelling with different outcomes of social action. Low mimesis stories, which are the least plot driven and the predominant narrative for everyday life, concern mundane themes and do not lead to substantial engagement or action on behalf of social actors, who are largely driven by routines rather than moral imperatives (Smith, 2005, 23 – 24). Tragedies have a strong sense of character movement and plot development, but at their essence is the futility of human striving and themes of fatalism which leads to paralysis in political life as they provide little hope for the future (*Ibid*, 25). Romance narratives involve the triumph of heroes over adversity and are fundamentally optimistic, with actors motivated by high ideals and a strong sense that human actions can make a difference in the world. While Smith argues that romantic narratives can inspire social movements, they cannot sustain large scale violence or upheaval such as war. For this, apocalyptic narratives are necessary, which facilitate the most extreme forms of social mobilisation through narrating intense character polarization along moral lines with no room for compromise. The evils are so absolute that they must be destroyed, and events contained within the narratives are seen as world-historical (*Ibid*, 26-27). Apocalyptic narratives enable cultural constraints on violence to be overcome, and are most effective, he argues, at generating and legitimating society-wide sacrifice (*Ibid*, 27).

Smith's concept of *genre wars* explains how in political contestation, actors struggle to align narratives with their own interests or beliefs. Genre wars involve the framing of events along

different narrative structures by opposing political actors, and in doing so "attempting to institutionalize and disseminate a broader, more diffuse, and therefore more powerful genre of interpretation through the public sphere" (Smith, 2005, 28). While binary cultural codes classify the world according to moral criteria, Smith argues that narratives explain what should happen next, they connect moral judgements to definitive action, and as such genre wars are conflicts over patterns of future action. Narratives provide stories of moral polarisation, change over time, and the chance of redemption should the correct course of action be taken. I maintain that this is a useful concept beyond Smith's case of building support for foreign wars, and that it can be used to understand how revolutionary actors build the case for revolutionary action. Through framing the nation's story in apocalyptic narratives, political actors can build support for extreme or out of the ordinary actions such as revolution.

3.3 Public Spheres and Counterpublics

Underpinning the above ideas of contention over culture and narratives is the idea of a public sphere of open political discourse in which narratives are constructed, questioned, and challenged. The public sphere as theorized by Habermas (1989) is a site of rational-logical discussion and debate in which the public come together to discuss societal problems and the solutions to them. Framed largely in a Western and bourgeois context, it is seen as an important element of democracy and a means by which public opinion can be formed, which can then influence public policy and the political direction of the state. It is the institutionalised arena of discursive interaction, in which public matters are discussed and a "public opinion" or consensus emerges. For Habermas, the public sphere as an ideal emerged in 18th and 19th century European coffee houses and salons as a place of unrestricted rational discussion, where members of the public were able to participate equally (insofar as their ability to discuss things rationally allowed).

Importantly, the view of the public sphere as a site of rational-logical discussion needs to be qualified as public political discourse involves other forms of contention and solidarity building. Drawing on Arendt (1977), Calhoun (2002) defines the public sphere as not only a setting for rational debate and decision making, but as the location of social solidarity development through public discourse. The public sphere is where a common culture and identity is constructed and defined, through debates over values and meanings. He argues that the public sphere should be seen as a dimension of democratic society which can orient itself

toward and potentially steer the state through not only debates on policy but through "world-making", and the formation of culture frameworks for understanding particular social realities (pp 158-159). In the public sphere, the collective subject (the public or the people) is defined discursively, and as such politically salient identities are produced and transformed (163).

Habermas' definition of the public sphere has been critiqued, as a historic or even theoretical reality, particularly on its claims of equality and for its under-appreciation of the problems of imbalances in power. Fraser (1990) highlights that public spheres have historically been built on significant exclusions (for example by excluding women or the working classes). They succeed, she argues, by constructing an ideal of the public which absorbs the less powerful and reflects only those powerful enough to fully participate in it. Public spheres operate through the cultural hegemony of dominant social groups, who assert their identities and ideologies as constitutive of the wider "public" (Jacobs, 2000). Faced with exclusion from the public sphere, members of subordinated groups create alternative discursive arenas, termed *subaltern counterpublics*, in which these groups circulate counter-discourses, and formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities and interests (Fraser, 1990, 67). Further, they may base themselves on a different system of cultural codes than the hegemonic public sphere, and define themselves through these codes in direct opposition to it. These counterpublics expand discursive space and widen discursive contestation by challenging the participatory requirements of the mainstream (or hegemonic) public sphere. Fraser thus expands the notion of the public sphere, arguing that in stratified societies (typified by inequality between social groups) the public sphere is "the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest or negotiation among a variety of publics takes place" (*Ibid*, 68). In this way, subaltern counterpublics serve a counter-hegemonic function through challenging the cultural dominance of the hegemonic groups within the public sphere (Jacobs, 2000, 28).

The notion of subaltern counterpublics is particularly useful in the study of revolutionary discourses. Theories of the public sphere are not usually concerned with revolutionary times, given that revolutionary situations usually occur in repressive social and political circumstances in which public political discourse is heavily restricted, although recent work concerned with the 2011 Arab Revolutions has begun to engage with the concept of the public sphere in these situations (see Kraidy and Krikorian, 2017). Nevertheless, in these circumstances there still exists underground meetings and clandestine publications in which opponents of the regime attempt to make their voices heard. Public political discourse, however limited, is an important means of building the case for revolutionary action.

3.4 Summary

I view culture not as strictly determinative of social action, but rather as a body of discourse which is used selectively and strategically by actors to build legitimacy and justifications for their choice of social action (Swidler, 1986). Revolutionary actors, driven by their ideological aims, interpret elements of the national culture in order to build and support their chosen patterns of action. Furthermore, they do this by drawing on binary codes established by their interpretations of the "cultural tool kit" to assign moral value to actors and events, and through constructing overarching narratives of the nation they are able to connect these actors and events in a broader story which supports their end goals of revolution. These discourses are circulated in counterpublics, in which counter-discourses and alternative narratives are able to challenge the dominant public spheres ideological and discursive constructions.

4. Methodology

This chapter outlines my methodological considerations in undertaking this study. I begin by outlining the case and sources selection, and then Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which informs my research approach to the analysis of my sources. I then discuss the ethical considerations and limitations in the research.

4.1 Case Selection and Source Collection

The aim of this thesis is to broaden the study of discourses in the Iranian Revolution away from emphasis on the role of Khomeini and the radical *ulema*, in line with my arguments in the literature review (see section 2.1), drawing on one particular case study, that of the MEK before the Iranian Revolution. A case study is generally a descriptive or illustrative method, which in some cases can form the basis for more general theories (Babbie, 2013, 338). The choice of a historical case study necessitated the use of archival research in order to find materials from the time. The availability of sources from opposition groups in Pahlavi Iran is limited, due to the lack of political freedoms or freedom of the press. Opposition groups were illegal and prisons were filled with political prisoners. As publishing opposition material within Iran at the time was almost impossible, due to restrictions on press and speech freedoms, the main sources we are able to use for studying opposition groups comes from those who were active in exile. Even sources which do exist in Iran are difficult to access for international scholars due to the political sensitivity and lack of academic freedom in the Islamic Republic. Students, communists, and the Islamist opposition in particular had active organizations based in the West, where they were able to publish freely and organise against the shah's regime. The data I have collected for this thesis are from one key archive of opposition materials based in Tübingen in Germany. This archive, accumulated by Wolfgang Behn in the 1980s, contains pamphlets, speeches, transcripts, and other written publications from opposition groups active outside of Iran in the 1960s and 70s.

Within the archives I chose to focus on the last defence statements of members of the MEK, who were on trial for various crimes (see section 1.3 for the details of their arrest and trial). While other Mojahedin documents, such as internal policy papers and leaflets, were available, none gave as comprehensive an exposition of the oppositional discourses of the members of the MEK as these defence speeches. While detailed analysis of their contents has not been conducted before, the speeches have been referred to by Abrahamian (1989) and some of their

historical significance elaborated. The statements were all made in 1972, and were the first time the existence of the MEK was admitted openly, the regime having previously thought that those arrested were merely the armed wing of the Liberation Movement. Of further historical significance, they were referred to during meetings between the MEK and Ayatollah Khomeini in Najaf in 1972-1974. The MEK had approached Khomeini to try to gain his support for their activities, but became disillusioned with him after he suggested that the transcripts of the defence statements must have been doctored by Marxists due to their solidarity with international communism (*Ibid,* 149-151). The archive contained seven defence statements from members of the MEK, three of which were translated and published in English, two in French, and two in Farsi. I translated the non-English texts myself, and as such I am wholly responsible for any errors as a result.

4.2 Coding and Themes

In order to identify the key aspects of the MEK's oppositional political discourse, I conducted a thematic analysis of the source texts based on open coding. As Bryman (2012, 578-579) notes, thematic analysis is not necessarily an identifiable approach to data analysis as it is usually an activity found in most approaches to qualitative data analysis. I view thematic analysis as a form of content analysis which seeks to highlight broader concepts and ideas in a given text rather than simply highlighting the specific words used. As such, it is the latent content of the text, rather than the manifest, which is of greater interest in this study (Babbie, 2013, 300-301). In practice, through a close reading of the source texts, I highlighted the core themes relating to the Mojahedin's analysis of the Iranian political situation and their key reasons for opposing the shah's regime, and built these into broader aspects of the overall narrative that they construct. This analysis of the content of the speeches forms the basis of my findings chapter. It is important to note that thematic analysis is always somewhat subjective, in that another researcher may end up with different themes based on their interpretation of the source material. However, the themes themselves are not the end point of the research – rather it is the interpretation of these themes within a broader theoretical and empirical literature that is central.

4.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Berger and Lackmann's seminal *Social Construction of Reality* (1966) argues that people's knowledge, beliefs, and understandings of reality are the product of social processes which

have become institutionalised and internalised through habit and custom. Beliefs which are taken-for-granted or considered common sense within society form "symbolic universes", which legitimise the structures and institutions within that society by making them seem natural and unquestionable (Berger and Lackmann, 1996, 110-115). Universe-maintenance procedures, to alter aspects of the symbolic universe when it is challenged, can be undertaken to ensure the continuity of the society's structures and institutions (*Ibid*, 122-124). These symbolic universes are constructed predominantly through language, which as well as other symbols like visual images is known as *discourse* (Fairclough, 1992). Discourses are "different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice" which do not "just reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct or 'constitute' them" (*Ibid*, 3). Through discourse, social actors "constitute objects of knowledge, situations and social roles" and as such can contribute to "the restoration, legitimation, or relativisation of a social status quo", or may be "effective in transforming, dismantling or even destroying the status quo" (Wodak et. al., 2009, 8). Social institutions contain diverse 'ideological-discursive formations', usually one of which is dominant and has the capacity to 'naturalize' ideologies as non-ideological 'common sense' (Fairclough, 1985). Ideologies, in Fairclough's view, are "a particular representation of some aspect of the world… which might be (and may be) alternatively represented" (*Ibid,* 742). They are "non-negotiable principles" which seek "the status of universal truths" (Freeden, 2006, 8). In this way, discourse can serve to hide relations of power and dominance within society.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) seeks to question these common-sense and natural assumptions which underpin modern society, showing how "social structures determine properties of discourse, and how discourse in turn determines social structures" (Fairclough, 1992*,* 739). A central feature of the theory of CDA is the view that social structures and discourses have a dialectical relationship. Discourse and discursive events, such as texts, are seen as sites of social practice, where social structures and institutions are articulated through ongoing or uncritical reproduction of socially accepted norms or behaviours (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999 p35-36). Nevertheless, it is also in discursive events where these social structures can become problematised and contested (*Ibid* 36). Meanings are made as part of this social process, and thus CDA focuses on the relationship between the meanings of language (or semiosis in Fairclough's terminology) and other social institutions and organizations (Fairclough, 2009). CDA involves analysing texts and the discourses contained within them in relation to wider social structures and understandings of reality. In doing so, it

links the content and formulation of texts, for example in the choice of words, metaphors, and concepts, to broader discourses in society (Fairclough, 1992). CDA "de-naturalises" the ideologies or assumptions hidden within discourse, making the latent explicit (Ibid, 739). In this way, CDA is concerned with uncovering power in discourse through identifying the transmission of normative ideological claims.

As argued in chapter 3, actors use widely held cultural understandings, through narratives and binary cultural codes, to legitimize and support their end goals. Through the CDA approach, in this thesis I analyse the discursive constructions of culture and narrative within the Mojahedin's speeches, and look to uncover the ways in which the Mojahedin's ideological claims are transmitted. Further, I also analyse how they question or challenge the dominant constructions which supported the regime's hold on power.

4.4 Ethics and Limitations

There are fewer ethical considerations when working with archives than, for example, when working with interview or survey respondents. Archives are publicly available (at least to academics), and as such questions of privacy and confidentiality have already been answered. Lee (2015, 2017) highlights three main methodological issues with archival research which researchers need to be overcome. The first is confirmation bias, that when working with large archives the scholar may choose to focus on documents which support their initial hypothesis. While historians also may face these problems, the historical method does not usually involve a strong hypothesis to prove (Lee, 2015, 6). Historical approaches are more exploratory and less definitive, and as such the conclusions drawn are not intended to be broadly generalizable, limiting the impact of this confirmation bias. The second issue is of missing data. "Survival bias" results from the archives being stored for long periods of time, where there are many opportunities for some material to be lost or destroyed, or indeed many documents either not being stored in the first place. While I did identify other archives which potentially held other printed reproductions of court speeches, within the constraints of this thesis I was only able to visit one archive and use the materials available there. Should other relevant sources be available in these archives, future research would incorporate them in order to validate or challenge the findings of this thesis.

The third issue is what Lee terms the "source bias" (*Ibid*, 8), in which archived materials only contain what was recorded and by their very nature omit internal deliberations and things

which were not written down. It is important to note that the sources I analyse are not the speeches themselves, but rather printed reproductions of the speeches, published on various dates in the years afterwards by opposition groups active outside of Iran, such as student groups and the Liberation Movement of Iran, as a means of highlighting the repressive nature of the shah's regime to the international community as well as to the Iranian diaspora (Abrahamian, 1989, 138). As such it is possible that, through the process of translation and publication, certain elements of the speeches may have been edited or mistranslated. I am aware of this methodological problem, as it may limit the extent to which we can say these sources are representative of the MEK's discourses and thought. Given that these texts were produced and reproduced by a myriad of different oppositional groups, however, we can note their significance as outputs of the Iranian opposition as a whole, attributed to the MEK.

The main limitation of my analysis is the fact that I am working with these sources in translation, and therefore I am unable to conduct a more detailed linguistic or semantic analysis of the original Farsi language texts. As such, as outlined above, my analysis is based on the identification of broader themes within the Mojahedin's discourses, and situating this within the concepts of the cultural tool kit (Swidler, 1986) and genre wars (Smith, 2005).

5. Findings

In this chapter I discuss the content of the seven texts as political discourse. While the speeches made in court by the Mojahedin were ostensibly "last defence" statements as part of a legal trial, the defendants roundly rejected the trials as illegitimate and chose instead to use the platform predominantly as a means of explaining their political beliefs. They highlight their ideology of revolutionary Islam, explain their commitment to armed revolutionary struggle, and attack the regime for its perceived failings. In doing so, they build up an apocalyptic narrative of Iran's past and present, using it to show that Iran is entering into a new revolutionary moment in which the Iranian people, along with the Mojahedin, should rise up and overthrow the shah once and for all.

The seven speeches were made in military courts during mass trials of captured Mojahedin members in 1972. Five of the defendants (Said Mohsen, Nasser Sadeq, Massoud Rajavi, Ali Mihandust, and Mohammed Bazargani) were members of the central cadre of the Mojahedin which was elected in 1968 (Abrahamian, 1989, 129), and had been captured during roundups of Mojahedin members in 1971. Mohammad Mofidi and Mehdi Rezai were captured during street battles with the police in 1972.

5.1 Rejection of the Legitimacy of the Regime's Court

Contestation of legitimacy form an integral part of challenging a certain narrative of national identity, and these contestations are evident throughout the speeches. Mohsen, the first defendant to be tried, begins by rejecting the legitimacy and competence of the court, arguing that it lacks a popular mandate and that the procedures it follows are unconstitutional according to the Iranian Constitution. The constitution, Mohsen claims, is a law "which is the manifestation of the people's determination, not the one that is the product of the hollow-brains of the puppets of your own inspired Majlis".[4] He questions why the court is held in secret without allowing any members of the public to attend, suggesting this is because the regime is "afraid of the people in the streets", whose protests and objections to the regime have led to increasing numbers of uprisings and the growth of the armed struggle. The justice system, he claims "has no aim other than to perpetuate oppression and exploitation of the

[4] Parliament, originally established by the 1905-6 Constitutional Revolution. By the 1970s it was firmly under the control of the Shah with two loyal, official political parties. Elections were largely a farce and by 1975 the Shah dispelled with the trappings of competitive electoral democracy, consolidating both parties into a "one party state" under his *Rastakhiz* (Resurgence) party (Abrahamian 2008)

masses", while the aim of the defendants is to "abolish any exploitation of human beings by other human beings". He insists that the laws under which the Mojahedin are being tried are void, as "the nation of Iran is not obliged to follow a reactionary idea" and the laws are but "a product of the dictatorial regimes and hence are not accepted by the people." Similarly, Sadeq states that "we are judged before a military court whose jurisdiction we dispute and in the name of a law which we question the legitimacy of". The courts, for Mohsen, are nothing "but a scene of wickedness of the regime" and cannot be regarded as justice courts, as the only legitimate judges and prosecutors are the masses. Members of the regime "are not competent to be members of a holy justice court" (*Mohsen*) and thus the court does not have any legitimacy.

The defendants largely do not contest the charges of conspiracy to overthrow the regime, with Sadeq claiming "our condemnation by this court under such accusations honours us to the people of Iran, in front of the revolutionaries of the whole world, and acquits us before divine justice." Similarly, Mohsen states "indeed, all your charges against us are merely credits to us." Rajavi and Mohsen both accept they will be executed or sentenced to life imprisonment following the trial, stating that the verdict was predetermined. Rather than receiving justice from the shah's judicial system, Mohsen asserts that "the best arbitrator between us and you is Qital[5]", insisting to the prosecutors that "by our blood, our most incisive weapon, will take you to the justice bench and will have you convicted." The views of the Mojahedin are "for the people to judge" and it is the people who "must determine who the real rebels, plunderers and misleaders of the people are" (*Rezai*). The defendants highlight their own identities as well-educated, Iranian Muslims, emphasising their own youth and the role of Iran's youth as a progressive vanguard joining the revolution. Rezai, Bazargani, and Sadegh each ask the prosecutor rhetorically why "the finest young people of our nation who are known for their excellence, integrity, humanity and sense of responsibility in study and work, have devoted themselves to struggle" (*Rezai*). Rezai states that the defendants could have lived an easy life, coming from middle class backgrounds, but have "chosen to leave house and home in the flower of our youth… because millions of our fellow countrymen live in these very basic conditions". In this, show that the Mojahedin are the ones willing to make sacrifices for the Iranian people. Expressing solidarity with the suffering of the Iranian people, he declares that the "discomfort and pain of our oppressed people is for us an intolerable thing". Along with this, they emphasize the support of Iran's intellectuals for the Mojahedin's cause, claiming

[5] Quranic term meaning war.

that the people alone will judge them "with hundreds of other young revolutionary Iranian intellectuals" (*Sadeq*).

Mohsen rejects the "charges of wickedness" they are being brought to court for, claiming that "the reality is that you, rather than we, are wicked, and it is we who have risen to liberate the nation from you". They construct a binary between a violent regime and a peaceful and innocent population, with Mohsen highlighting cases of the regime's repression such as the 15th Khordad.[6] He asks why the regime shells "innocent workers" who "toil endlessly for days on end without any support, just barely to sustain their lives". The Mojahedin point to the regime's use of force and torture against its opponents as evidence of its lack of a popular foundation and support. SAVAK[7] is frequently raised as barbarous and repressive organization which tortures innocent people, including the defendants. They highlight the failure of the regime to follow the constitution, and give numerous examples of its disproportionate violence, using this to justify their own turn to violence. For example, after highlighting the harsh crackdown of the regime against workers strikes, Rajavi asks "when the regime reacts in such a way to the constitutional demands of people, can we honestly stay unperturbed and not take up arms?" Bazargani attacks the military prosecutor, declaring that "the stars of your epaulets are coloured with the blood of our youth". The excessive use of violence by the regime to quash any form of dissent or protest show for the Mojahedin that the regime was the enemy of the people. The Mojahedin claim to represent all of the Iranian people, and stand against the regime which has attacked and suppressed them. The regime's injustices against its opponents were not just aimed at political enemies, but against ordinary workers or youths, the very groups who constitute ordinary Iranian people.

5.2 The Ideological Claims of Revolutionary Islam

In their speeches, the Mojahedin explicitly outline their ideology as centred on the notion of anti-exploitation, rooted in their understandings of Islam, which they claim to be "the basis of anti-exploitation" (*Mihandust*). Islam provides binary moral codes through which the Mojahedin pit themselves against the regime. As such, their speeches are peppered with quotes from the Quran and the *Nahj-al-Balagheh*[8], and they insist on their own identity as

[6] 5th June 1963, when protests against the Shah's White Revolution (led by, amongst others, Ayatollah Khomeini) were brutally suppressed. Not long after this, Khomeini was sent into exile in Iraq.
[7] *Sazman-e Ettela'at va Amniyat-e Keshvar*, Organisation of National Intelligence and National Security. This was the shah's secret police which was widely hated and feared throughout Iran
[8] A collection of sermons and letters attributed to Ali.

Shi'a Muslims claiming "we follow the great Mohammad and belong to the school of Ali, and whatever Ali has said, we live" (*Rezai*). They found their ideology on the thoughts of Ali[9], whose historical model represents "rising against oppression, its abolition, and the establishment of unity and equality" which is "the high hope and ideal" of mankind (*Mohsen*). Islam "is the ideology of the masses" whose "revolutionary patience and resistance" will lead them to victory in their struggle (*Mihandust*). The revolutionary struggle, for the Mojahedin, is part of God's will and the inevitable end result of historical evolution, the laws of which God put in place. This universalist ideal, while based in their elaboration on Islamic teachings, has parallels with the historical materialism of Marxist thought which claims that patterns of class relations determine the historical evolution of societies. Their aim is to "abolish any exploitation of human beings by other human beings", an aim which "is out of the boundaries of time and place" (*Mohsen*), and thus universal. From this they elaborate a worldview of class and anti-imperial conflict, drawn from their analysis of world and Iranian history and society, which compelled them to enter the armed struggle.

For the Mojahedin, "the Quran has named the contradiction between the exploited and the looters" (*Mihandust*). The theme of class conflict, highlighted at the beginning of Mohsen's speech when he declares that "On one side are enemies of the people, fully equipped with arms and techniques: and on the other side there is the staunch determination of the painstaking masses and the callous hands of peasants and workers". The conflict comes as a result of "exploitation of a class by another class" being the "the background for all disorders" (*Mohsen*). Mohsen, whose speech contains the most detailed explicit statements of the Mojahedin's ideological beliefs, further aligns this class conflict within the war between "*Haq*" and "*Batil*", truth and falsehood in Quranic terms. He criticizes the capitalist system, claiming that an economic system which "allocates the product of one's labour to himself" (*Mohsen*) is the only just one. Mohsen argues that, in contrast to capitalists, the Mojahedin view work as the source of the value of goods, which contain "human's life crystalized in any produced substance", and therefore nobody but the producer has any right to them (and their value). For Mihandust, capitalism, along with feudalism and slavery, are based on exploitation "of the slave, the peasant, and the labourer". The exploitative nature of capitalism, therefore, leads to the Mojahedin to view the world as a conflict between the capitalist exploiters and the exploited workers and peasants.

[9] The fourth Muslim Caliph, cousin of the Prophet Muhammed, and considered to be the rightful successor to Muhammad by Shia Muslims.

This theme of class conflict is supplemented by the theme of anti-imperialism, as Mohsen highlights by pitting the "gleaners of a system dependant on world imperialism" against "the youths, who owe their very existence to the people and are trying to discharge this (system) as soon as possible". Imperialism operates on both the political level, through colonialism, and "economic supremacy by which the strings of a nation's economy are drawn by foreigners" (*Rajavi*). Mihandust further details the economic aspects of "predatory imperialism" and its use of cheap labour in order to extract profits from the Third World. Grounding this in the Mojahedin's ideology of anti-exploitation, Mihandust asks rhetorically "is not the purpose of imperialism the continuation of exploitation?" From their anti-imperialist ideology therefore, they also see the world in a binary conflict between the imperialists and imperialist countries, and the exploited nations of the Third World, with Rajavi insisting that there are "two distinct categories in the world: on the one hand there are the poor, the millions starving, for example the Palestinian refugees, and on the other hand we have the rich, the opulent, the parades of great haves and masters of big business". The Mojahedin place Iran's struggle within that of the global anti-imperialist struggle of the Third World, comparing Iran to newly independent countries in Africa, as well as the revolutionary states in Cuba, China, and Vietnam and state that "Today, not only our nation but the whole Third World is in the fever of armed anti-imperialist revolution" (*Mohsen*).

5.3 Iran's History as part of a Narrative of Ongoing Struggle

The two themes of class conflict and imperialist conflict are read into a historical narrative of "struggle against despotism" which is "part of the existence of the people of Iran" (*Mohsen*). The defendants, particularly Mohsen and Sadeq, spend a large amount of their speeches dedicated to narrating Iranian history to show that Iranians have an established past of rising up against exploitation, and that the Mojahedin are a continuation of this. This allows them to build up motivation for a revolution, strengthening the Iranian people's sense of historical agency, and showing that "when a nation has the will to acquire freedom and independence, the historic necessity is that it will get it" (*Mohsen*).

Various episodes in twentieth century Iranian history in which popular or mass movements fought against monarchical regimes are referenced to show the resistant spirit of the Iranian people against the oppressive nature of the regime, which has succeeded in its oppression thanks to the support of outside imperialist powers. For example, they point to the Constitutional Revolution, in which the people rose up "to free themselves from the yoke of a

regime that had subjected them totally to English colonialism, to free themselves from material misery and political asphyxiation" (*Sadeq*) and to "[defeat] despotism and [approve] the Constitution, which was a very progressive one at that time" (*Mohsen*). Mohsen highlights the efforts of the guerrilla resistance during the First World War against the British, Russian, and Ottoman empires, and along with Sadeq mentions the popular uprisings in Tabriz and Khorasan, and the revolutionary *Jangali* movement in the northern Gilan forests led by Merza Kuchek-Khan, who rose up to defend the constitutional movement. The Jangali movement is emphasized as a revolutionary government, the Gilan Republic, which was "regarded as a threat to the foreigners and the internal reactionary" (*Mohsen*).

The immediate years following the Second World War are discussed in reference to the rise of Mohammed Mosaddeq, whose years as Prime Minister are praised at length for succeeding "in the most valuable services the nation has ever had in the last 50 years", achieved "just from the support of the masses" (*Mohsen*). Mosaddeq is referred to as "the National Leader of Iran", and "the pioneer defendant" of the nation's rights (*Mohsen*) who acted against both imperialism and the shah's Court in defence of the law and the constitution. Primarily this period is noted for the nationalization of oil, which meant that "the people trusted the Government of Mosaddeq; this was the only government that they considered national and legitimate" (*Sadeq*). Mohsen also notes the "removal of the political influence of the biggest ruling colonialists in Iran" and the withdrawal of the recognition of Israel as successes from Mosaddeq's rule. This period is depicted as a time of popular sovereignty, when Mosaddeq was able to defeat the plots of British imperialism through the unified support of the masses. The mistake of Mosaddeq's government, however, was that "they could not determine the true characteristic of Yankee imperialism" (*Rajavi*). While able to defeat one colonial power (Britain) and survive numerous colonial plots, even with the unqualified support of the masses Mosaddeq was unable to defeat the combined might of both British and American imperialism. The 1953 coup (known as the 28th Mordad) restored the shah and imperialist interests in influence and oil, beginning the phase of US domination in Iran. Nevertheless, Mohsen takes a lesson from Mosaddeq's rule, declaring "he showed that when a nation has the will to acquire freedom and independence, the historic necessity is in that it will get it".

The shah's White Revolution in 1963, and the ensuing protests, are depicted as the pinnacle of his reign and a key turning point in the Iranian people's understanding of the nature of the regime and how to oppose it. Mass protests in which "everyone took part in the general campaign" (*Rajavi*) led to the massacres of the 15th Khordad, when "the regime unleashed a

barbaric massacre of unarmed populations in Tehran and some other large cities in Iran, followed by mass arrests" (*Sadeq*). This violence and repression made people realise "the impossibility of asking for these [constitutional] rights through logic and reason" (*Rajavi*).

The Mojahedin's narrative of Iranian history highlights the efforts of the Iranian people to bring about the Constitutional Revolution and the rule of Mohammed Mosaddeq, two "Golden Ages" of sovereignty and independence for Iran. Nevertheless, they also show the determining role of imperialism, initially British but later American, in crushing the revolutionary and progressive actions of the Iranian people. The sense that Iran has been submissive to the Western imperial powers (namely Britain and the United States), results in the need for armed struggle to "liberate the nation, which has long been a woman for a long time under the yoke" (*Mihandust*). Their reading of Iran's 20th century shows it as a century of struggle and setbacks, but one which was formative for the Iranian people's revolutionary consciousness. In particular, "the coup d'état of 28 Mordad and the brutal massacre of 15 Khordad show that our nation must pursue armed struggle and seek to win it" (*Mihandust*). For Mohsen, "history showed that our nation had been captured by a rotten dictatorial Shah-in-shahi system; and this system, lacking the support of the masses, has resorted to arms to protect itself and has put the nation in chains by threatening it with the fire of its arms."

5.4 The Present Situation of Increasing Inequality and Exploitation

Building on this historical background, the Mojahedin continue to weave the two themes into their narrative of Iran's present social and political situation, and highlight what they see as the grotesque inequalities and exploitations that are increasing under the shah's regime. They build a binary division along class lines, arguing that the concentration of wealth and capital leads to the exploitation of workers and the Iranian people as a whole. For example, Rajavi asks "who really sold our homeland, you or me? Who owns the casinos, hotels or night clubs?", suggesting that Iranians are not only exploited by foreign imperialists, but by regime-aligned Iranian capitalists and aristocratic elites. Enduring inequality and chronic poverty, in spite of oil wealth which led to "promises reiterated for years that Iran would become the paradise of the earth" (*Sadegh*), are framed as the result of an uncaring and corrupt regime. Instances of corruption are highlighted, such as in the Dez Dam project which Rajavi and Rezai argue will only benefit the major landowners who "sell the final product of the dam, that is to say the electricity, and pocket the amount" (*Rajavi*). Episodes of corruption are

raised regularly, particularly in the banking, oil, and infrastructure sectors. These go to show for the Mojahedin that the regime stands against, rather than for, the Iranian people.

The White Revolution is highlighted as a key episode in the narrative of widening class divisions and increasing exploitation, and the Mojahedin claim that far from bringing modernity to Iran it has left it just as backwards as before. Indeed, the notion that Iran's present political situation is out of step with modernity can be found throughout the speeches, for example when Mohsen says (referring to the failure of the Development Organization to solve drought issues in the south of the country) "it is shameful to say that at a time when man is conquering the universe, our system has not been able to solve such seemingly minute problems as irrigation." They highlight the regime's limited responses to natural disasters, and accuse those "who weep at day-time at the site of earthquake-affected areas of Qir and Kazin, and in the same evening they are drunk and haughty of power, enjoying the company of the fabulously dressed film stars in the film festivals" (*Mohsen*). The Persepolis celebrations of 2,500 years of Iranian monarchy are criticised as a wasteful expense, with the costs decried as a "celebration to defend an outdated system, rather than to execute an operation for reconstruction and productive projects" (*Mohsen*).

The Mojahedin insist that the land (and importantly, its resources) belong to the "people" of Iran. They highlight the exploitation of the resources of the country by foreigners, with the issue of oil featuring heavily in their arguments, forming a narrative of continued and worsening imperialist exploitation. Favourable terms of trade in oil to the West results in "the Iranian people [being] cheated of the small sum of $1.825 million" annually (*Rajavi*). They insist that Iran and its resources have been willingly sold by the regime to outside powers. In this way they accuse the shah and his regime of being traitors, reflecting the accusations of treason that were levied against them. The shah's regime "is providing for today's Zahaks[10] the desired food from youthful minds, and also for those, who, from across the oceans, have stuck their covetous teeth into our national livelihood and whose huge navigational fleets are relentlessly plundering thousands of tons of our raw materials (products of the people's toil) every moment." (*Mohsen*). Foreign investment in Iranian development projects is decried as "…nothing but a sale of national wealth." (*Sadegh*). Bazargani highlights development

[10] A monster in Iranian folklore, originally from Zoroastrian mythology, who was rewritten in the *Shahnamah* as a prince corrupted by the devil, Ahriman. Ahriman caused two snakes to grow from Zahak's shoulders, which had to be fed with human brains every day. After a long tyranny, throughout which two men were executed daily to feed the snakes, a rebellion led by Kavah the blacksmith overthrew Zahak and put Fereydun, a just and honourable king, in his place.

projects in Qazvin and Jiroft as a "swindle carried out by the Israelis in broad daylight" which do nothing to advance the interests of Iranians, but instead are used to siphon off Iran's wealth through salaries to foreign technicians.

Furthermore, the Mojahedin emphasize the threat of consumerism and a westernised culture which involves "the spread of debauchery and libertinism" (*Sadegh*) and the spread of pornography, drugs, and the capitalist pursuit of consumer and luxury goods which are depicted as anathema to Iran's true culture. This fear of "Westoxification" or *gharbzadegi* plays a prominent role for the Mojahedin. The shah's regime is criticized as an active agent in encouraging this spread, with Mihandust criticizing his educational revolution for accelerating "our society towards the culture of the bourgeoisie and the blind imitation of Western and American culture." They decry the spread of the "corrupt culture of Western capitalism" (*Mofidi*) and consumerism as undermining national and religious traditions. For Rezai, the "traitors are those whose lifestyle is French, whose cooks are foreign, whose hairdressers are foreign, whose daily expenses are the equivalent of what a peasant lays out in two years."

The MEK stand in opposition to the use of the Iranian military within the Middle East to suppress other, Islamic, revolutionary movements. They see the Middle East as part of an overall narrative of the Third World rising up against imperialism, with the shah's regime standing on the side of the imperialists. This can be seen for example when Mofidi questions why Iran supported Israel in the 1967 Six Day War by "[pouring] out bombs on Arab Muslim people". Mohsen questions the shah's extensive arms purchases, charging that "you submit our wealth to the arms-producing companies of Pentagon; and then put the price of the arms free to the Zionist State of Israel in order that its pilots after being trained in the Dezful base massacre our Palestinian brothers". Constructing Iran's identity as Muslim, they argue that Iran should stand by other Muslim nations oppressed by the imperialists, for example when Rajavi insists that "countries like Iran and Palestine that share a common culture and a common background must assert the same revolution together". Sadeq and Rajavi both criticise the high military budget of Iran, and the desire of the regime to "become a reactionary stronghold and to play the role of regional policeman at the expense of the unfortunate people of Iran" (*Sadeq*).

5.5 A Revolutionary Moment and the Culmination of the Apocalyptic Narrative

Building on their professed ideology of Revolutionary Islam and its core concept of anti-

exploitation, in their defence speeches the Mojahedin diagnose Iran's current social and economic problems, mainly poverty and inequality, to be as a result of class exploitation and international imperialism, and an uncaring and hostile regime. Combined with their understanding of Iranian contemporary history, the Mojahedin weave an apocalyptic narrative suggesting that the time is right for a final confrontation and armed revolutionary struggle. The pressure and repression of the Iranian people, the Mojahedin claim, drives them towards revolution. The suppression of the constitution, the use of torture and repression in putting down the legitimate demands of the people, and the opening of Iran to imperial exploitation, suggest that the shah himself is a traitor who is guilty of betraying the nation.

Following their historical narrative and their analysis of the present situation, the Mojahedin emphasize that Iranian history has reached a turning point in which armed conflict and revolution is inevitable. They suggest that by all natural and national historical forces, the shah's regime would be long gone, given that its "historic age and glory has been gone for many years now" (*Mohsen*). Only the repressive power of the regime and its international backers have maintained it in place. Mohsen sees the development of the armed struggle as the culmination of "50 years' campaign and sacrifices", which have led to the realization by the Iranian people that as long as the regime supports capitalism and imperialism, they will be unable to benefit from the fruits of their own labour. They highlight the year 1971 (the year prior to the trials taking place), and the Siahkal incident, as "the beginning of a radical change in the history of the struggle of the Iranian people" (*Sadeq*). Sadeq mentions a range of other revolutionary groups, as well as the Mojahedin, as "the sign of the development of the armed revolution in our country". As a result of the martyrdom of the Mojahedin members, Mohsen claims, "the revolution will become more profound in our society and strengthen the pillars of its national democratic government". These martyrdoms make it clear for Mofidi "that the great resurrection of the Iranian nation has begun and will continue to triumph". The nation, Mohsen claims, has "under the light of the bright experience of its seventy-year campaigns, realized that it should reclaim its rights from the usurpers by armed struggle" as evidenced by peasant uprisings, protests, and the martyrs of Siahkal. Further, he claims the international supporters of the regime are "losing their strength day by day", as waves of global revolution weakens British and American imperialism. For Mohsen "the rotten monarchial system and its historic age is over, and it is heading towards its own destruction" and it is the duty of the Mojahedin "to speed it up by our determination and by offering our blood."

6. Analysis

In this chapter, I analyse the defence speeches of the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* in light of my theoretical arguments in chapter 3, in order to shed further light on my research question: How did the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* contest the Shah's regime? As a result of its place as the "main legitimation for social order and solidarity" globally until the present day (Smith 1991 16), I have argued that nationalism and national identity provide the key cultural and identificational framework within which revolutionaries, as political actors, discursively and ideologically contest pre-revolutionary regimes. As constructed predominantly through narrative, national identities provide representations of the past, present, and future, and attempt to create a coherent thread through which ideological formations are "naturalised" into the common sense of the nation (Finlayson, 1998). Through providing alternative narrative structures for explaining the nation's past, present, and future, political actors encourage social mobilisation by stressing the moral polarisation of national actors and the need for struggle to overcome challenges to the nation.

As such, I argue that the Mojahedin contest the nationalist and Pahlavist ideology underpinning the regime's hold on the state through drawing on an Iranian "cultural toolkit" reading Islam as a revolutionary doctrine, and Iranian history as a narrative of struggle in which the Iranian people have repeatedly sought to free themselves from tyranny and oppression. They legitimize their armed struggle as a patriotic duty in line with Iran's history, and as the only means of expressing popular sovereignty to ensure the will of the masses is respected. Further, in narrating Iran's past and present through an apocalyptic genre (Smith, 2005), they attempt to build wider support for revolutionary action and a sense of imminent revolutionary crisis. They construct Iranian national identity as a "protest identity" (Goldstone, 1991), in an attempt to bring about widespread opposition to the regime.

Below I outline the key means by which the MEK challenge the shah's regime in the analysed texts. First, drawing on Fraser's notion of *subaltern counterpublics*, I argue that through the very act of speaking against the shah's regime in the courtroom they contested the regime's ability to define the public sphere and the limits on legitimate speech. Next, I argue that through re-interpreting Islam as a revolutionary, anti-exploitation ideology, and through an interpretation of Iranian history as one of struggle and conflict, they build a populist ideology against the shah's regime. I then go on to show how, with reference to Smith's (2005) concept of *genre wars*, they weave this ideology into a narration of Iran's past, present, and future,

contesting the shah's romantic vision of a progressive and modern Iran and instead constructing an Iran which is engaged in a life or death struggle against tyranny and oppression.

6.1 The Counterpublic in the Courtroom

Given the lack of freedom of speech and opportunities for open political organisation under the shah's regime, the Mojahedin had few avenues for reaching a wider public and making their views known. The trials were the first time in which the existence of the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* was made known publicly (Abrahamian, 1989) and as such they took the opportunity to espouse their views. The courtroom itself however was not their target audience. Indeed, they fully expected to be executed after the trials, knowing they had no power to resist the will of the regime through legal arguments or convince it of its errors through political arguments. Instead, in rejecting the legitimacy of the shah's courtroom, the Mojahedin carved out a counter-hegemonic space (Jacobs, 2000) within which they could elaborate a different vision of what constitutes legitimate governance, in keeping with what is in their view a true representation of the Iranian nation, and as such build solidarity with the wider Iranian public who they sought to agitate into revolutionary action.

Excluded from mainstream public discourse considered legitimate by the regime, the Mojahedin's speeches can be seen as part of an alternative discursive arena or subaltern counterpublic, in which they circulated counter-discourses and formulated oppositional identities and interests (Fraser, 1990). This allowed the Mojahedin to frame their own identity outside of the power dynamics imposed by the shah's restrictive public sphere, in which the Mojahedin were delegitimized as "Islamic Marxists" and terrorists (Abrahamian, 1989). Rather than attempting to steer the state through rational-critical discourse, the Mojahedin's counter-public sought to undermine it through propagating an alternative construction of Iran, in which the state stood against the interests of the people. By tying the shah's regime so closely with the interests of imperialism and capitalism, the Mojahedin reject the possibility that he can be working for the interests of the Iranian people, and show that it cannot possibly be considered legitimate. In their speeches, the Mojahedin promote their own legitimacy as representatives of the Iranian people by aligning their ideology and their identities as young, Muslim, Iranian patriots with the interests of the Iranian people at large, while the shah's regime is depicted as actively working against the interests of the people.

The counter-hegemonic discursive space they open up allowed the Mojahedin to contest the regime and contemplate and advocate forms of resistance, like armed struggle, which would be inconceivable in the wider pre-revolutionary Iranian public sphere. They justify this not only through historical precedent (as discussed below), but also by claiming that the repression of the regime leaves them no choice but to resort to arms. In understanding the Mojahedin's speeches as part of a counterpublic, we can recognise counterpublics as an important space in Pahlavi Iran in which solidarity could be built, and marginalised and oppositional groups could have the opportunity to frame their own identities outside of the discursive restrictions imposed by the Pahlavi state.

6.2 The Iranian "Cultural Toolkit"

Following Swidler's (1986) formulation, culture is the means by which individuals and groups make sense of the world, and construct responses to events as they occur. The "cultural toolkit" is a system of publicly available meanings which "facilitate certain patterns of action, making them readily available, while discouraging others" (*Ibid*, 283). Through drawing on elements of the Iranian cultural toolkit which align with their expressed ideology of revolutionary Islam, the Mojahedin attempt to show that their revolutionary actions against the shah's regime are legitimate and just. As I have argued above, national identity "provides the major social context and thus the arena" (Simon and Klandermans, 2001, 327) for power struggles as political actors seek to situate their vision as most in keeping with the common sense truths of the nation (Finlayson, 1998). Iranian national identity and culture, as argued above, can be understood as a combination of two elements, *Iraniyyat* and *Islamiyyat* (Grinberg, 2017; Litvak, 2017). In constructing their opposition to the shah, the Mojahedin draw on both Islamic cultural resources and more "secular" Iranian cultural resources.

Their reinterpretation of Islam as a revolutionary doctrine presents the clearest example of the Mojahedin imbuing existing cultural frameworks with new, ideological meanings. They interpret their struggle as a part of God's will, and their core ideological beliefs of anti-exploitation as the true meaning of Islam. They use unifying discourses which call for solidarity with other (Sunni, Arab) Muslim peoples against imperialism, and they emphasise the historical model of Ali, regarded as the first Imam by the Shi'a, as the template for their revolutionary program. Indeed, the historical model of Ali provides a historical "foundational myth" for the Mojahedin, as well as a golden age to return to. They align the conflict between the regime and the Mojahedin with the Quranic war between "*Haq*" (truth) and "*Batil*"

(falsehood), and draw on the notion of "*Qital*" to justify the use of violence against the regime.

National culture, following Stuart Hall's view, usually consists of five components: a shared historical narrative, an emphasis on continuity and timelessness, the invention of traditions which imply continuity with the past, a foundational myth locating the origin of the nation and its people long ago, and the idea of a pure original people or "folk" (Hall, 1996, 613-615). This provides a broad cultural toolkit within which the Mojahedin are able to situate themselves. They centre the Iranian people at the heart of the nation of Iran and posit the shah as the enemy of the people. In doing so, they challenged the dominant Pahlavist construction of Iranian national identity promoted by the shah's regime, which saw the shah as the core of the nation and responsible for its progress (Shabiki, 2013). Through building an idea of Iran in opposition to the shah they attempted to build a "protest identity" (Goldstone, 2001) which could form a broader social movement to bring about a wider revolutionary challenge to the Pahlavi state.

History forms an essential part of the cultural toolkit of national identity, given the importance of historical narratives in allowing political actors to show that their vision is the truest representation of the will of the nation, and that their actions most in keeping with the lessons of the nation's history (Finlayson, 1998). For the Mojahedin, who advocated armed struggle and revolution against the shah's regime, the Constitutional Revolution, the *Jangali* movement, the Khorasan and Tabriz uprisings, and the Mosaddeq period are all read as key moments of Iranian history in which heroic political actors and the Iranian people rose up to oppose exploitation and tyranny. Their actions could therefore be seen as continuous with this aspect of the Iranian nation, the continuous struggle against oppression. The Mojahedin's historical narrative centres the ideas of resistance to the rule of the shahs and imperialists in Iran, in contrast to official histories from the shah which centred on the monarchy and the Pahlavi state's ability to overcome decline associated with the Islamic and Qajar period (Amanat, 2012; Atabaki, 2009). Iran's history of struggle provided not only inspiration for the Mojahedin's armed insurgency, but justification for it, through inventing a national tradition of rising up against oppression (Hall, 1996). Further, by framing their conflict with the shah as an anti-imperialist struggle, they link it discursively with the global anti-imperialist struggle of the Third World. Drawing on the intellectual environment of the 1960s and 1970s which was heavily influenced by Third Worldist discourses (Abrahamian, 1980; Moghadam, 1987), the Mojahedin place Iran within the Third World, drawing parallels with China, Cuba,

and Vietnam, in contrast to the shah's attempts to posit Iran as part of the cultural and economic Western world.

Smith (1991, 66-68) highlights the "cult of golden ages" as a key way in which nationalists construct national identities, mythologizing national heroes and idealising a time in the past which can be returned to, should the proscriptions of the nationalists be followed. While not necessarily a "foundational myth" which locates the origins of the nation in the distant past, golden age narratives provide a moment in which the nation became the truest representation of itself. The shah's "Pahlavist" ideology was underpinned by references to ancient Iran's glories, the benevolent rule of the monarchy throughout Iran's history, and, under his vision, a "Great Civilisation" to come in the future, thanks to technological and economic progress (Ashraf 1993; Amanat 2012; Shabiki 2013). In the Mojahedin's construction, however, the monarchy has only a history of tyranny and repression of the people. Under their ideology of anti-exploitation, there was never a time under the rule of the shahs in which Iran truly experienced a golden age. Instead, the Constitutional Revolution and the Mosaddeq era are highlighted as golden ages to return to, times in which Iran enjoyed not just sovereignty as a nation, but popular sovereignty in which the will of the masses was reflected through the Majlis and the government of Mosaddeq (Shahibzadeh, 2015). The revolutionaries of the Constitutional Revolution and Mosaddeq himself are highlighted as heroes of Iranian history for standing up against monarchical tyranny and imperial exploitation.

While the shah's regime claimed to be acting within the limits of the Iranian constitution, which was never formally abrogated even after the end of the Constitutional Era (Abrahamian 2008), the MEK repeatedly appeal to the constitution to either state the legitimacy of their own actions or the actions of the people (as for example in their claim to the right to resist the "wicked" regime), or to reject the legitimacy of the court itself and the repressive actions of the regime. Through situating their claims within the institutional traditions of the Iranian constitution they attempted to demonstrate that they were the custodians of the Constitutional Revolution, and thus a tradition "more 'authentic' and truly 'national'" than that of the shah (Goldstone, 1991, 413).

6.3 The Building of a Revolutionary Narrative

Alexander and Smith (1993) emphasise the importance of culture in establishing what constitutes the binary categories of good and evil, which enable normative value judgements

to be made of people and events. As argued by Smith (2005), culture's link to social action goes beyond these binary codes through narrative structures, which place these actors and events into overarching plots, assigning moral responsibility, causality, and agency, and plot out potential outcomes for the future (*Ibid*, 14). Narratives provide a pathway to social action, in that they indicate the trajectory of past episodes, predict the consequences of future choices, and as such suggest actions to be undertaken by social actors (*Ibid*, 18). Genre wars take place as political actors attempt to frame events along different narrative lines to encourage action in accordance with their aims.

Through binary cultural codes derived from their understanding of Islam, the Mojahedin distinguish between the regime and imperialists as the "looters" and the people as the "exploited". The Mojahedin positing the shah and his regime as villains rather than heroes, highlighting continued suffering and tragedy throughout Iran and directly blaming the regime for it. Their opposition to imperialism and class exploitation clearly frame the shah's regime and his international and domestic capitalist backers as the enemy, while valorising the hardworking Iranian peasants and working classes as virtuous peoples. This allows them to read events in the history of Iran according to these moral criteria, highlighting figures like Mosaddeq as national heroes for standing up to the shah and imperialism, and siding with the people against exploitation.

In reading Iran's past and present through these cultural codes, the Mojahedin engage in a genre war with the shah. In their efforts to build revolutionary solidarity amongst the Iranian people, the Mojahedin construct an apocalyptic national narrative which suggests that only through armed revolutionary action can the evils of the regime be overcome. The shah's historical narratives centred on the narrative of decline associated with the Islamic conquests, and Russian and British imperialism during the Qajar period, from which the Pahlavi dynasty emerged to rescue the nation (Amanat, 2012). The shah's conception of Iranian national identity can be considered a romantic narrative, following Smith's (2005) outlining of narrative genres. Driven by imagery of a past golden age of imperial glory, the shah's narrative promised a future golden age, the "Great Civilization", as Iran continued to modernise and develop under his benevolent rule (Shabiki, 2013). This narrative did not call for social action but rather social passivity, a continuation and "business-as-usual" approach to life with the assurance that things would continue to progress and nothing needed to change.

Apocalyptic narratives, which involve extreme moral polarisation and enable cultural constraints on violence to be overcome, are those most suited to mobilising and legitimising society-wide sacrifice (Smith, 2005, 27). In their narrative, Iranian history has been a constant struggle between the shahs and his international, imperialist backers, and the Iranian people, a struggle which the Mojahedin, in their fight against the regime, are a part of. They link the contemporary struggles of the Mojahedin and the Iranian people to these struggles, and indeed even further back through references to Ali and the origins of Shi'a Islam. Importantly, however, the story has not ended for the Mojahedin. Their narrative talks also of the future, and emphasises the role of the Mojahedin and the Iranian people in bringing about the end of the regime. Rather than seeing the setbacks of the past sixty or seventy years as defeats, the Mojahedin view them as part of an ongoing narrative of struggle in which the Iranian people have learned that to challenge the injustices of imperialism and the shah's regime, they must turn to armed struggle and revolution.

6.4 Imagining a Revolutionary Iran

Rather than following Skocpol's argument that "revolutions are not made, they come" (Skocpol, 1979, 17), Lawson (2016) highlights that through contestation over meanings, practices, and institutions, revolutionary groups are able to build and sustain revolutionary movements to challenge the status quo. While structural factors may create individual grievances against the status quo, Goldstone (2001) highlights the necessity for revolutionary movements of situating individual grievances within a wider cultural and ideological context, generating protest identities which can spread and sustain revolutionary action. Cultural codes and narratives allow this very process, through providing a bridge between culture, ideology, and agency, situating events and people not only in a wider social context, but also a historical context as part of an ongoing story of moral conflict (Smith, 2005). They allow contestation over the meanings of history and the futures which can be made possible. Imagining a revolution is an important step in achieving a revolution, and narratives allow revolutions to become discursively imagined and "thinkable", before they occur (Kurzman, 2005). Through analysis of the discourses of revolutionary groups and viewing culture as a tool kit (Swidler, 1986) that can be drawn upon to construct new meanings and new strategies of action, we can centre the agency of revolutionary actors in building revolutions.

Goldstone (1991) argued that during pre-revolutionary periods of contestation with the regime, explicit positive ideological claims have less importance than the undermining of the

ideological framework of the regime. The notion of the cultural tool kit helps understand how nationalism and national narratives are discursively constructed and contested by revolutionary actors, as elements within it are interpreted and re-interpreted by political actors seeking to draw symbolic support for their actions through association with the idea of the nation. Drawing on the cultural tool kit strategically and selectively, revolutionary actors construct "a specific notion of the specific nation and the national subject" (Finlayson, 1998, 105), to show that their aims are legitimate and in keeping with the meanings and values of the nation's culture. The meanings of the nation are contested as elements of it are interpreted and re-interpreted by political actors seeking to build legitimacy for their actions.

There was no revolutionary crisis in 1971, indeed the Persepolis celebration of 1971 is often depicted as the pinnacle of the shah's reign (Ansari, 2012). Yet what the Mojahedin's speeches show is that in 1971 a small group of Iranians were actively imagining a revolution taking place, and discursively constructing a narrative which justified and legitimised the overthrow of the shah's regime. They based this narrative on an interpretation of Islam which was revolutionary, and which situated Iran within a Third World anti-imperialist struggle, showing that the *ulema* had no monopoly on Islamic discourses and imagery. They attempted to show that a revolution was "viable" and encouraged the Iranian people to "think the unthinkable" (Kurzman, 2005, 176) While we cannot know the full extent of their spread, we know that these speeches circulated in a counter public (Fraser, 1990) in which notions of what it meant to be an Iranian were being contested, counter-discourses were being circulated, and ideological opposition to the regime was being discursively framed. Foran (1994) argues that the revolution emerged from multiple, overlapping cultures of opposition, of which the *Mojahedin*'s was one. While only one part of the overall picture of the revolutionary mobilisations that took place in the Iranian revolution, the Mojahedin's narratives provided a call to arms to all Iranian people to join them in the revolutionary struggle, a call which were it heard may have contributed to the revolution several years later.

Conclusion – Imagining a Revolutionary Iran

Revolutions are attempts to fundamentally reshape a nation, politically, and often socially, economically, and culturally. But they are also a part of a nation's overall history or narrative. When historians write about revolutions they look backwards to see in the nation's past the reasons why such a dramatic event has taken place. It is my argument in this thesis that revolutionaries too attempt to situate their revolutions within the national narrative, and that by looking at these narratives we can understand how revolutionaries are able to draw on national "cultural tool kits" to build justifications for their revolutionary action. Narrative genres and cultural toolkits are important strategies for understanding how revolutionary movements are built, and thus in part can help explain how revolutions themselves can succeed.

In this thesis I have argued that studies of the Iranian revolution have focused too much on the discursive and organisational impact of Khomeini and the radical *ulema*, particularly with reference to the two years before the eventual overthrow of the shah, and to the neglect of studying other important revolutionary movements and discourses in existence long before the revolution itself occurred. Other studies of revolutions have highlighted the importance of ideological contestation and cultural frameworks, particularly those of national identity narratives, in building and sustaining successful opposition to pre-revolutionary regimes. Successful revolutionary movements are able to show that their vision is the most in keeping with the narrative of the nation. In my theory chapter I argued that culture functions as a "tool kit" which actors draw upon to build patterns of action, and drew on the concept of genre wars to elaborate the means by which political actors construct alternative narratives to support their end goals.

In exploring the revolutionary discourses of the *Mojahedin-e Khalq*, this thesis has added empirically to understandings of the Iranian revolution through looking at a previously understudied revolutionary group. I have shown that through contestation over the narrative and meaning of the Iranian culture "tool kit" they attempted to build a case for revolutionary action. Their ideology of "revolutionary Islam" created a world-view of two primary conflicts, class conflict and anti-imperialist conflict, within which they grounded their conflict with the regime of the shah. Drawing on this binary, they emphasised their solidarity with the Iranian people against the shah and his imperialist backers, whose exploitation and repression was impoverishing the Iranian people. They reread Iran's national narrative along these

conflicts, seeing Iran's history not as a romantic and progressive journey towards modernity but as a constant struggle between the Iranian people and repressive and exploitative shahs. This apocalyptic narrative built the case for the Iranian people to engage in what they saw as an inevitable coming revolution to finally rid Iran of the evils of exploitation and tyranny.

The theoretical approach centring narrative constructions and counter publics opens up the possibility of future research questions surrounding the Iranian revolution. Tracing the Mojahedin's narratives beyond my specific case of the 1971/72 defence speeches to the rest of the 1970s, how did these narratives change and incorporate new events which occurred in the build up to the revolution? What other counter-publics existed and how did other groups construct oppositional narratives in Iran in the 1970s? Of particular interest would be studying the non-Islamic opposition groups such as the *Fedaiyan-e Khalq* or other Marxist groups. How did they draw on Iranian culture to oppose the shah without relying on Islamic cultural discourses? And during the revolutionary crisis of 1977-79, how did the various counter-publics interact and how did understandings of Iran's national narrative change? Can narrative theories help explain why Khomeini and the radical *ulema* were ultimately successful in seizing control of the revolution? It is clear that forty years after the "unthinkable" revolution in Iran, there is a great deal more that can be learned.

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Primary Sources

All of the documents were part of the Wolfgang Behn microfiche collection, “Iranian Opposition to the Shah”, in Tübingen University Library, Tübingen, Germany.

Defendant Name	Document Title	Archive Section	Publication Number	Microfiche Number
Mohammed **Bazargani**	Les plaidoires de Said Mohsen, Massoud Radjavi, Nasser Sadegh, Mehdi Rezai, Mohammad Bazargani, membres de l'O.M.P.I. devant les tribunaux militaires du regime dechu et la lettre de Reza Rezai, tombe au champ d'honneur en juin 1973. (2e ed.). [Paris?]: (Association des Etudiants Musulmans en France), [ca.. 1979]...57 p.; First ed. by Editions Abu-Dhar..	21	18	11-12
Ali **Mihandust**	مجاهدین شهید علی میهندوست و مهدی رضائی در دفاع مجاهدین خلق ایران. (پیام مجاهد: Memphis, Tennessee) (انتشارات سازمان مجاهدین خلق ایران) Defence pleas as well as brief biographies of 'Ali Mihandust and Mahdi Riza'i'. Mojahed Letters – Organization of the People’s Mojahedin of Iran	21	13	8
Mohammed **Mofidi**	زندگی نامه و مدافعات مجاهد شهید محمد مفیدی. (Springfield Missouri : نهضت آزادی ایران) Letters and testimony of martyred mojahed Mohammed Mofidi Freedom Movement of Iran	21	12	8
Said **Mohsen**	Muhsin, Sa'id. Biography of Sa'id Mohsin, co-founder of Organization of combatants of the people of Iran; text of defense in military court, 1972. (Springfield, Mo.:) Liberation	2	14	9-10

	Movement of Iran, abroad, 1976. 42 p			
Massoud **Rajavi**	Les plaidoires de Said Mohsen, Massoud Radjavi, Nasser Sadegh, Mehdi Rezai, Mohammad Bazargani, membres de l'O.M.P.I. devant les tribunaux militaires du regime dechu et la lettre de Reza Rezai, tombe au champ d'honneur en juin 1973. (2e ed.). [Paris?]: (Association des Etudiants Musulmans en France), [ca.. 1979]...57 p.; First ed. by Editions Abu-Dhar..	21	18	11-12
Mehdi **Rezai**	Riza'i, Mahdi. The defenses of martyred mojahed Mehdi Reza'i. [n.]: People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, (1980). 38 p	21	20	12
Nasser **Sadeq**	Organisation des moudjahidines du peuple iraniens. Vol. 1. [n.]: Editions Abu-Dhar, (1977). 109 (Documents du mouvement revolutionnaire iranien; 2).	19	32	25-26