

The Language of Liberation: A Postcolonial Discourse Analysis of Khomeinism as an Ideological Framework against Western Domination

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Abstract

The language of liberation operates as both a moral code and a communicative weapon in revolutionary movements, shaping consciousness and constructing a counter-narrative against domination. This study undertakes a postcolonial discourse analysis of Khomeinism as an ideological framework that dismantles Western cultural hegemony through linguistic, theological, and political expressions. Imam Khomeini’s discourse fuses Quranic morality with anti-imperial rhetoric, positioning Islam as a system of intellectual emancipation and resistance to Western arrogance. Drawing upon his speech broadcast on Radio Tehran on March 21, 1980, titled “We Shall Confront the World with Our Ideology”, this paper examines how Imam Khomeini transformed political language into a revolutionary mechanism for civilisational defiance. Hence, research questions focus on; a) how Imam Khomeini’s discourse challenges Western conceptual superiority; b) how linguistic structures reflect decolonial consciousness; and c) how ideological framing produces collective identity against imperial narratives. Theoretically, this study applies Edward Said’s Orientalism to decode colonial representation and integrates Norman Fairclough’s Discourse and Ideology to interpret Imam Khomeini’s rhetorical strategies and power construction. Complementary tools from conversation analysis explore tone, rhythm and religious invocations as instruments of persuasion. Findings indicate that Imam Khomeini’s discourse establishes an enduring linguistic order of resistance in which divine sovereignty replaced Western modernity as the supreme reference of legitimacy. His use of language redefines power as moral authority, transforming political communication into a theology of liberation that continues to challenge colonial epistemes and Western narratives of civilisation.

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Introduction

The language of Imam Khomeini has been interpreted by numerous Iranian, Pakistani, Iraqi and Syrian scholars as a transformative medium of ideological resistance and divine consciousness. Iranian philosopher Dr. Hassan Abbasi (Tehran University, 2003) describes Khomeini's language as "revolutionary spirituality structured through political rationality". Pakistani scholar Dr. Syed Ali Abbas Rizvi (National Defence University Islamabad, 2014) considers his discourse "a fusion of Quranic ethics and socio-political awakening rooted in the justice-oriented legacy of Karbala". Iraqi thinker Sheikh Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, before his martyrdom in 1980, called Khomeini's voice "a spiritual echo of Shi'a resistance that revived the dormant energy of Muslim nations". Syrian academic Dr. Nabil Fayyad (University of Damascus, 2011) argued that Khomeini's language "redefined Islam as an intellectual rebellion against tyranny". Collectively, these scholars portray his linguistic approach as an operational instrument of resistance rather than rhetorical piety. Khomeini's speech patterns, vocabulary and rhythm were designed to awaken subjugated consciousness and to mobilise religious identity into a political mission. His sermons often transformed theological notions into action-oriented expressions, where faith and revolution became indistinguishable (Ali & Asim, 2025).

Imam Khomeini consistently condemned colonialism, imperialism and Western hegemonic orientations through public statements that exposed the moral and political hypocrisy of global powers. In his address on February 02, 1979, upon his return to Tehran, he declared, "We shall uproot all traces of foreign domination" Later, during his Friday sermon of August 11, 1979, he asserted, "The East and the West have enslaved nations through the illusion of progress". His statement on March 21, 1980, broadcast on Radio Tehran, became iconic; "We shall confront the world with our ideology". Throughout his leadership, Khomeini identified Western cultural infiltration as more dangerous than military intervention, stating on November 15, 1979, "They have changed our minds before they colonised our lands". He equated modern capitalism and secularism with instruments of neo-imperialism that detached societies from moral roots. These condemnations were not rhetorical provocations but formed the linguistic foundation of Iran's revolutionary identity. Through them, Khomeini sought to reconstruct both individual and collective consciousness around self-reliance, dignity and divine accountability (Ali & Asim, 2025).

Khomeini's discourse derived authority from Quranic verses and the narratives of Ahl al-Bayt, constructing a theological counter-colonial paradigm. He frequently cited the Quranic command "And never will Allah grant to the disbelievers a way over the believers" (4:141) to reject subordination to Western power. His exegesis of this verse framed independence as a divine obligation. Drawing on the martyrdom of Imam Husayn at Karbala, he declared that "every land is Karbala, every day is Ashura" (speech, Qom, 1978), urging resistance against tyranny as a sacred duty. Through these references, Khomeini fused scriptural narratives with revolutionary realism. His invocation of Ahl al-Bayt served to align spiritual legitimacy with political struggle, converting metaphysical symbolism into socio-political discourse. Thus, his language not only opposed colonial domination but also revitalised the theological imagination of oppressed Muslim societies (Habib, 2025).

This research applies Edward Said's Orientalism and Norman Fairclough's Discourse and Ideology to decode Khomeini's linguistic construction of resistance. Said's framework exposes how the West fabricated knowledge systems to justify control over the East, portraying Islamic societies as passive or

irrational (Said, 1978, pp. 95-98). Khomeini's rhetoric challenges this epistemic colonisation by asserting Islam as an autonomous civilisational model (Rippin & Ismael, 2010). Fairclough's theory, which analyses how language constructs power relations, allows examination of Khomeini's ideological syntax -- how he turned religious discourse into political strategy (Fairclough, 2013). Through Said, this study situates Khomeini within global postcolonial narratives; through Fairclough, it examines the mechanics of his linguistic empowerment. Together, these frameworks reveal how the revolutionary language of Khomeini functioned simultaneously as a critique of Western knowledge and as a blueprint for Islamic self-determination.

Several Iranian scholars have conducted discourse analyses on Khomeini and Khomeinism, offering varied interpretations of his communicative strategies. Dr. Hamid Mowlana (American University of Washington, 1993) highlighted Khomeini's "Islamic communication model" as an indigenous alternative to Western media logic. Dr. Farideh Farhi (University of Hawaii, 2004) explored his sermons as "performative acts that created moral authority." Dr. Ali Shariati's earlier works in the 1970s indirectly shaped Khomeini's linguistic pattern by integrating revolutionary sociology with Shi'a ethics. Dr. Hassan Rahimpour Azghadi (Tehran, 2012) later termed Khomeini's speech "discursive jihad". These Iranian academics agree that Khomeini's linguistic method replaced dependency with consciousness, presenting the Islamic Republic not as a state but as a narrative revolution. Their studies confirm that Khomeini's language cannot be separated from its communicative mission -- to reorient global Islam around indigenous epistemology (Ali & Asim, 2025).

Western scholarship, though initially sceptical, later acknowledged Khomeini's intellectual role in exposing Western hegemonic structures. British sociologist Fred Halliday (London School of Economics, 1996) described him as "a cleric who weaponised discourse more effectively than armies". French philosopher Michel Foucault, during his visits to Iran in 1978-1979, recognised the revolution as "a spiritual political awakening against Western modernity". US scholar John Esposito (Georgetown University, 2001) noted that Khomeini "redefined political Islam not as fundamentalism but as an anti-imperial moral order". These perspectives demonstrate that even outside Iran, intellectuals perceived Khomeini's language as a transformative force capable of challenging Eurocentric ideologies. Western admiration, though limited, highlighted the academic recognition of his linguistic resistance as a valid discourse within postcolonial thought.

Before Khomeini's rise, Iran under Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1978) experienced intense cultural and economic colonisation. Westernisation projects replaced Persian-Islamic identity with secular nationalism, exemplified by the forced unveiling of women (1936) and suppression of clerical institutions. Educational curricula were redesigned to imitate French and British models, while industrial reforms deepened economic dependence on Western markets. The Pahlavi regime's alliance with Western oil corporations entrenched economic coloniality. Culturally, Persian traditions were diluted by European aesthetics, marginalising Islamic philosophy and literature. The monarchy's close ties with the United States after 1953 further intensified social stratification and ideological alienation. This pre-revolution context positioned Khomeini's linguistic rebellion not as reactionary conservatism but as a historical necessity for decolonising both the mind and the state.

This study conducts a discourse analysis of Imam Khomeini's televised address broadcast on Radio Tehran on March 21, 1980, applying Edward Said's Orientalism and Fairclough's Discourse and Ideology. The analysis decodes colonial representation through Khomeini's articulation of divine sovereignty and moral

authority. This research examines his syntactic choices, tone and religious metaphors as tools of counter-hegemonic communication. Said's framework exposes how Khomeini reversed Orientalist binaries, while Fairclough's analysis traces how linguistic power becomes social power. Through this dual framework, this study demonstrates how Khomeini's discourse systematically dismantled Western epistemic dominance by reconstructing political legitimacy on spiritual foundations.

Hence, this study is further discussed a historical contextualisation of postcolonial Iran, followed by the methodological framework based on Said and Fairclough. A comprehensive textual analysis of the March 21, 1980 speech will then explore his vocabulary, metaphors and argument structures.

Historical Context of Postcolonial Iran and the Rise of Khomeinism

The 20th century witnessed Iran's gradual transformation from a semi-colonised monarchy into a revolutionary state challenging global hegemony. The Qajar dynasty's decline in the nineteenth century had already exposed Iran to imperial manipulation, primarily by Britain and Russia, which divided political influence and exploited its economic resources. The Pahlavi regime, beginning with Reza Shah in 1925, accelerated Westernisation under the guise of national modernisation, undermining Iran's religious institutions and cultural identity. Through enforced secularism, language reforms, and alignment with Western powers, Reza Shah and later Mohammad Reza Shah created a dependent state structure reflecting colonial subservience rather than independence. The nationalisation of oil under Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1951 was one of the earliest postcolonial efforts to reclaim sovereignty, yet it was crushed by the Anglo-American coup of 1953. This event deeply shaped Iranian consciousness, inserting mistrust towards the West and framing colonialism as a persistent, not historical, reality. By the 1960s and 1970s, the Shah's "White Revolution" further alienated traditional and clerical sectors, promoting an imported development model that eroded social balance. The rapid urbanisation and consumer culture introduced by Western corporations reinforced dependency while displacing Iran's moral fabric. Against this background, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini emerged as the ideological leader of resistance, articulating a synthesis of religious authenticity and revolutionary defiance. His critique of both monarchy and imperialism became the nucleus of what later evolved into the discourse of Khomeinism (Zaheer, 2025).

Khomeinism rose as an ideological and linguistic response to decades of political subjugation and cultural distortion. It represented a comprehensive revolt against both external domination and internal despotism, fusing Islamic jurisprudence with revolutionary praxis. Khomeini's intellectual journey, shaped through years of teaching in Qom and exile in Najaf, cultivated a political theology that rejected Western philosophical arrogance and secular materialism. His early works, such as *Kashf al-Asrar* (1943), already revealed an awareness of colonial patterns embedded in modernisation projects disguised as progress. During his exile in Iraq and later in France, Khomeini developed a transnational vision of liberation grounded in Islamic unity and anti-imperialist solidarity. His speeches and letters from the late 1970s employed a discourse of awakening, calling the oppressed (*mustazafin*) to resist domination through faith and self-reliance. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 was not merely a regime change but a civilisational confrontation between indigenous spirituality and imported modernity. Through Khomeinism, language became a vehicle of mobilisation, turning Quranic expressions into instruments of political action. The revolution thus established a new communicative order where divine sovereignty replaced Western notions of authority. In this transformation, Iran positioned itself as both a symbol and an architect of postcolonial resistance within the global South (Zaheer, 2025).

Discourse Analysis

While conducting discourse analysis of Imam Khomeini's speech on March 21, 1980;

- The analysis isolates discursive strategies that construct enemy identities and legitimise organised resistance.
- The analysis maps intertextual links between Quranic references and political directives to reveal how religious legitimacy is translated into state practice.
- The analysis examines performative utterances and modal verbs that mobilise youth and armed forces to enact the revolution's ideological aims.

1) Imam Khomeini's Language of Resistance and Revolutionary Identity

Imam Khomeini's language of resistance is strategic, disciplined and designed to produce collective agency. He frames the global order as a moral battlefield where the oppressed face organised predation by superpowers and their local agents. He routinely contrasts divine sovereignty with worldly arrogance to delegitimise foreign rule and domestic collaborators. His rhetoric merges theological certitude with operational commands so that spiritual duty becomes civic obligation. He addresses multiple audiences simultaneously: clerics, soldiers, students and workers, each receiving tailored directives within a unified narrative. Recurrent metaphors such as Karbala and Ashura function as mnemonic devices that sacralise political struggle and dignify sacrifice (Holliday, 2016). The exhortation "take the Koran in one hand and the weapon in the other" fuses scripture with militancy to remove any normative separation between faith and force. Through repetitive ritualised phrases he secures resonance across social strata and secures discursive continuity for the revolutionary order. The result is a linguistic architecture that naturalises clerical authority and channels popular energy into institutional loyalty. This architecture converts private belief into public duty and sustains a revolutionary identity that tolerates no divided allegiance (Noor-e-Najaf & Asim, 2025) (Holliday, 2016).

Khomeini's speech deploys performative structures that transform statements into directives with immediate social effects. Modal constructions, imperative verbs and moral predicates work together to construe actions as divinely mandated obligations. He repeatedly invokes collective categories such as "the oppressed" and "the nation" to generate solidarity and to isolate opponents as traitors (Holliday, 2016). His use of denunciatory labels for adversaries constructs a binary field of legitimacy and illegitimacy that simplifies political judgement. The speech pairs ritual invocation with administrative orders thereby integrating symbolic mobilisation with state building. Institutional directives to the army, Guards, police and revolutionary courts demonstrate how discourse produces governance norms and disciplinary practices. Khomeini's rhetorical tempo alternates between consolation and threat to maintain moral high ground while signalling punitive capacity. In this way language functions both as recruitment instrument and as mechanism of social regulation. The overall discursive effect consolidates a revolutionary habitus that privileges obedience to clerical judgement and suspends pluralistic contestation (Noor-e-Najaf & Asim, 2025).

2) Theological Foundations of Liberation: Quranic and Ahl al-Bayt Narratives

Imam Khomeini grounds his political theology in selective Quranic exegesis that privileges active resistance against oppression (Holliday, 2016). He interprets verses that address injustice as mandates for collective mobilisation rather than private ethics. The narratives of Ahl al-Bayt

operate as paradigms of righteous defiance, with Karbala offered as an enduring template for confronting tyranny. By recasting historical martyrdom as a contemporary blueprint, he sacralises insurgent action and delegitimises accommodation with foreign powers. Scriptural citations are used not only to justify resistance but to reframe political objectives as religious obligations. This strategy elevates state policy to the status of divine will and narrows the space for secular critique. Khomeini's selective hermeneutics privileges texts and traditions that validate clerical governance and that delegitimise competing ideological currents. The linkage of jurisprudential authority with revolutionary praxis produces a theology that is simultaneously normative and tactical. Consequently, the theological frame supplies moral sanction for policies that would otherwise require purely political justification (Habib, 2025).

The Ahl al-Bayt references operate as identity markers that bind diverse social groups into a single revolutionary corpus. Invocation of the Prophet's family legitimises clerical custodianship of public life and situates contemporary leadership within an uninterrupted sacred genealogy. These narratives also supply emotive resources that facilitate martyrdom narratives and that legitimise coercive measures against opponents. The deployment of religious symbolism is carefully calibrated to appeal to both the devout and the politically mobilised. In effect scripture and tradition become instruments of state formation and of cultural resistance against perceived Western encroachment (Holliday, 2016). Khomeini thus translates metaphysical concepts into governance categories such as justice, guardianship and communal duty. The theological discourse also frames international solidarity with oppressed peoples as a religious obligation that justifies export of the revolution. This theological mobilisation allows the regime to claim universal moral standing while pursuing geopolitical objectives under a sacred rubric (Habib, 2025).

3) Decoding Power and Ideology: Theoretical Framework of Said and Fairclough

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism explains how Western knowledge systems construct the East as inferior and thus subject to domination. Said shows that representation functions as a mode of power that naturalises asymmetry and that legitimises intervention. Applying Said to Khomeini exposes how the Imam's rhetoric seeks to reverse those representations and to reclaim epistemic sovereignty. Khomeini's discourse rejects Western universalism and asserts an alternative civilisational narrative rooted in Islamic moral economy. Said's critical method therefore helps to identify the binary oppositions that Khomeini contests and the discursive countermeasures he deploys. The speech operates as a counter-text that challenges Western categorical truths and that proposes an autonomous Islamic epistemology. Said's framework also directs attention to how knowledge production serves political ends and how Khomeini's language aims to disrupt that nexus (Said, 1978).

Norman Fairclough's model of discourse and ideology provides tools to analyse how language constitutes social relations and institutional practices. Fairclough focuses on three dimensions: text, discursive practice and social practice, which together permit analysis of how utterances shape power. Applying Fairclough to the March 21, 1980 speech enables mapping of vocabulary, grammar and rhetorical moves that construct authority and obedience (Fairclough, 2013). The methodology reveals how Khomeini's texts are produced, distributed and consumed within revolutionary media ecosystems to produce social effects. Fairclough's attention to intertextuality helps to trace how Qur'anic citations, historical allusions and administrative commands interlock to produce coherence. Through this lens the speech becomes a concrete instance of ideological reproduction that both reflects and transforms social structures. Combining Said and Fairclough

permits a robust critique that addresses representation, power and the mechanisms through which discourse actualises political domination or resistance (Holliday, 2016).

4) Methodology: Postcolonial Discourse and Conversation Analysis

This study employs postcolonial discourse analysis as the primary methodological framework, integrating Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Norman Fairclough's *Discourse and Ideology* (1995) to decode the representational and linguistic dimensions of Imam Khomeini's speech broadcast on Radio Tehran on 21 March 1980 (Fairclough, 2013) (Said, 1978). The approach seeks to identify how linguistic choices, metaphors and rhetorical structures operate as mechanisms of ideological resistance to Western domination (Holliday, 2016). Said's concept of *Orientalism* provides the lens to examine how Khomeini challenges the epistemic structures of the West that define the East as passive and inferior, while Fairclough's model situates those challenges within institutional, media and socio-political contexts. The research analyses both what Khomeini says and how he says it -- linking his theological vocabulary to performative political discourse. Conversation analysis supports this process by decoding turn-taking, emphasis, modal verbs and speech acts that mobilise revolutionary audiences. Through triangulation of discourse theory, textual analysis and context-based interpretation, the study captures the interdependence between ideology, communication and mobilisation. This dual framework enables a comprehensive understanding of how resistance is linguistically produced and maintained through structured discourse (Holliday, 2016).

The method proceeds through three operational stages; textual analysis, discursive practice analysis and social practice interpretation. In the textual phase, Khomeini's linguistic patterns are coded for thematic and syntactic features that construct binary moral orders such as truth versus falsehood and Islam versus arrogance. In the discursive practice stage, the speech is situated within revolutionary Iran's media ecosystem, particularly how Radio Tehran functioned as a tool of mass political formation. The social practice phase then links these linguistic constructions to broader political aims—delegitimising Western authority and consolidating the revolutionary state. Conversation analysis deepens this by examining the rhythm and emotional register of Khomeini's address, assessing how pauses, repetition and modal intensity evoke moral urgency. Collectively, these procedures operationalise Said's representational critique and Fairclough's linguistic theory to expose the architecture of power and resistance embedded in the 1980 address (Fairclough, 2013) (Holliday, 2016) (Said, 1978).

5) Textual Analysis of Imam Khomeini's Radio Tehran Speech (March 21, 1980)

The textual analysis isolates discursive strategies that construct enemy identities and legitimise organised resistance (Holliday, 2016). Khomeini's repetitive use of terms such as arrogance, corruption and oppression creates a moral binary that transforms global politics into a spiritual conflict. His narrative continuously links "the arrogant powers" with historical injustices, positioning the Iranian revolution as both divine duty and historical necessity. Lexical repetition strengthens emotional resonance and ensures ideological alignment across diverse audiences. The speech's syntactic structures, dominated by imperatives and declaratives, reveal a deliberate performative intention -- to command, not merely to inform. Through consistent use of modal verbs like "must", "shall" and "will", Khomeini linguistically enacts commitment and inevitability (Noor-e-Najaf & Asim, 2025). Each phrase functions as both instruction and moral reinforcement, mobilising followers into unified action. His intertextual citations of Qur'anic verses anchor the

discourse within sacred authority, merging political directives with theological validation. This stylistic blend of scripture and command converts faith into an instrument of revolutionary praxis. The analysis confirms that his textual construction deliberately merges ideology with performative instruction to sustain long-term political mobilisation (Asim, 2025).

The intertextual mapping of the speech exposes a consistent linkage between Qur'anic narratives and policy objectives¹. For instance, references to Taghut (tyranny) and mustazafin (the oppressed) translate moral archetypes into operational political categories. The analysis identifies three key strategies; moral inversion of Western narratives, reclassification of enemies as divine antagonists, and religious legitimisation of resistance. Each rhetorical unit functions as a call to restructure consciousness against cultural dependency. Khomeini's word choice and syntax create an emotional register that resonates with postcolonial sentiments of humiliation and reclamation. The Quranic language acts as an epistemic counterweight to Western secular rationalism, asserting revelation as the superior source of truth. By fusing revelation with revolution, he constructs an inseparable link between piety and patriotism. The textual data therefore confirm that Khomeini's discourse transforms theological concepts into linguistic weapons against colonial hegemony (Holliday, 2016).

6) Rhetorical Strategies and Ideological Construction in Khomeini's Discourse

Khomeini's rhetorical structure operates through three major mechanisms: moral polarisation, divine legitimisation and collective mobilisation. His rhetoric positions Western imperialism as an existential threat to faith, morality and nationhood, creating a clear dichotomy between the oppressed and the oppressors. The discursive construction of "we" and "they" serves to consolidate internal unity and justify revolutionary measures. He adopts a pedagogical tone that combines instruction with revelation, portraying himself as both teacher and divine intermediary. Through repetition of sacred imagery, he sanctifies political participation as religious obligation, transforming followers into agents of divine justice. His rhetoric also performs psychological conditioning -- inserting vigilance, sacrifice and obedience into the moral fabric of society. The analysis of modal intensity reveals that Khomeini's use of obligation verbs performs social discipline while concealing coercive dimensions under moral authority. This rhetorical engineering ensures continuity of revolutionary ethos beyond its immediate context (Noor-e-Najaf & Asim, 2025).

Ideologically, Khomeini's discourse constructs a self-sustaining paradigm where Islamic governance is presented as both spiritual and historical inevitability. By embedding state directives within sacred metaphors, he removes the distinction between divine will and clerical governance. His rhetoric employs analogies from early Islamic history, particularly the resistance of Imam Hussain, to legitimise the confrontation with global powers². The binary narrative of faithful versus arrogant is expanded to frame every act of defiance as a reenactment of Karbala. Ideological coherence is reinforced through rhythm, cadence and syntactic parallelism that invoke collective participation. The discourse fuses theology with sociopolitical reality, producing a linguistic economy where resistance equals worship. Through this construction, Khomeini's

¹ (Habib, Imam Khomeini's Quranic Vision: Faith as the Frontline against Western Imperialism, 2025)

² (Habib, Imam Khomeini's Quranic Vision: Faith as the Frontline against Western Imperialism, 2025)

language transcends political propaganda and enters the realm of sacred duty, creating an enduring revolutionary identity immune to Western discursive infiltration (Holliday, 2016).

7) Countering Orientalism: Reversal of Western Representational Power

Khomeini's rhetoric directly counters Orientalist narratives that depict the Muslim East as irrational, passive and dependent. His discourse replaces these depictions with assertions of moral, intellectual and spiritual superiority, reframing the West as morally decadent and spiritually void. By portraying Western civilisation as "the house of arrogance", Khomeini linguistically inverts the colonial hierarchy. His language of empowerment exposes how epistemic authority has historically been monopolised by the West through media, education and diplomacy. This reversal serves a dual function; it dismantles Western legitimacy and reconstructs an autonomous Islamic epistemology. The postcolonial discourse analysis reveals that Khomeini's counter-representations are not reactionary but reconstructive, aiming to establish a self-defined civilisational identity. Through these linguistic inversions, Khomeini reclaims interpretive power, positioning the revolution as the epicentre of global moral renewal. His anti-Orientalist discourse therefore serves as an intellectual weapon against cultural dependency (Holliday, 2016).

At a deeper level, Khomeini's anti-Orientalist rhetoric functions as a communicative revolution that restores subjectivity to the formerly represented. He transforms Iran from an object of Western description into an active agent of global moral reform. The analysis identifies intertextual resistance to Western academic tropes of modernity, secularism and rationality by presenting Islam as an alternative rational order (Holliday, 2016). His discourse integrates revelation with intellect, reversing the colonial dichotomy that equated progress with secularisation. This rhetorical stance is consistent with Said's argument that representation is a form of domination -- Khomeini's counter-discourse therefore functions as decolonisation of thought. Through structured repetition and semantic inversion, he dismantles Western self-representation and replaces it with a Quranic moral narrative of human liberation. Ultimately, this reversal of representational power demonstrates how linguistic strategies can disarm imperial ideology and generate epistemic independence (Holliday, 2016).

8) Khomeinism as an Anti-Colonial Communicative Paradigm

Khomeinism functions as a communicative paradigm that translates anti-colonial sentiment into a disciplined language of statecraft and mobilisation. It treats discourse as strategic infrastructure whereby theological idioms become administrative imperatives and where moral categories define political enemies and allies. The paradigm fuses scriptural authority with institutional directives to produce legitimacy that is both sacred and operational. Language is therefore not descriptive but performative, producing new social relations and new governance routines through ritualised speech acts. Khomeini's address of March 21, 1980 exemplifies this orientation by converting Qur'anic citation into actionable policy prescriptions. The paradigm normalises clerical adjudication as the primary interpreter of public interest and national security. It also institutionalises the export of revolution as a communicative duty framed in religious solidarity rather than territorial ambition. By doing so Khomeinism reframes anti-colonial resistance away from secular nationalism toward civilisational contestation. The communicative paradigm therefore sustains a durable political grammar that resists epistemic dependency on Western frameworks. Its success rests on the capacity to mobilise affect, ritual and institution within a single discursive economy (Holliday, 2016).

At the micro level Khomeinist communication combines rhetorical repetition, imperative syntax and intertextual sacred reference to produce obedience and resolve. Modal verbs, direct imperatives and hortatory address operate to convert listeners into actors and recipients into co-authors of state policy. The repeated binaries of “oppressor” and “oppressed” function as operational classifications used to justify both domestic discipline and international solidarity. Interdiscursivity -- whereby legal language, theological register and military instruction interlock -- renders the paradigm flexible across contexts and resilient to counter-narratives. The discourse also establishes gatekeepers of authenticity, empowering clerical interpreters to police ideological purity and to delegitimise hybrid political claims. This discursive policing works both to marginalise rival Islamist currents and to discipline secular opposition. Ultimately Khomeinism’s communicative paradigm secures a political monoculture in which language, ritual and enforcement reinforce one another to sustain a postcolonial sovereignty defined against Western epistemic claims.

9) Comparative Discussion: Khomeini’s Discourse in Global Postcolonial Thought

Imam Khomeini’s discourse occupies a distinctive place within global postcolonial thought because it frames decolonisation as theological reconstitution rather than only political realignment. Where many postcolonial theories prioritise cultural critique and institutional reform, Khomeinism advances a model where revelation supplies both the critique and the institutional blueprint (Ali & Asim, 2025). This renders Khomeini comparable to anti-colonial thinkers who insisted on civilisational autonomy while remaining distinct in his explicit theocratic institutional design. In comparative terms his rhetoric parallels Fanon’s call for total decolonisation by demanding mental emancipation and structural rupture while diverging on the authorised source of legitimacy. Khomeini substitutes secular revolutionary sovereignty with clerical guardianship, thereby proposing an alternative modernity anchored in sacred law. Postcolonial scholars thus find in his speech both convergence with and divergence from established decolonial paradigms. The discourse reframes international solidarity as a religious obligation which legitimises support for anti-imperial movements across geopolitical boundaries. This cross-pollination of religious rhetoric and postcolonial praxis renders Khomeini’s project both intellectually provocative and geopolitically consequential. Its study therefore enriches broader debates about the modalities of anti-imperial resistance in the late twentieth century³ (Holliday, 2016).

Comparatively, Imam Khomeini’s language of confrontation must be read alongside other global instances where rhetoric reconstituted national identity after empire. His insistence on epistemic self-definition resembles decolonial strategies advanced in Latin America and South Asia that reject Western knowledge hierarchies (Noor-e-Najaf & Asim, 2025). However, Khomeini’s discourse differs in its systematic institutionalisation of clerical oversight as the mechanism through which epistemic autonomy is maintained. The strategic export of revolution, framed as solidarity with the oppressed, transforms rhetorical solidarity into a transnational political practice. Comparative analysis thus highlights a duality; Imam Khomeini’s discourse is recognisably postcolonial in its critique of Western hegemony yet exceptional in its reliance on clerical jurisprudence as the vehicle of transformation. This juxtaposition prompts important theoretical questions about whether decolonisation necessarily leads to pluralist modernities or

³ (Habib, Khomeini’s Vision Still Guides Iran’s Defiance in the Modern Geopolitical Arena : Maryam Habib, 2025)

whether it can produce new hegemonies under indigenous auspices. The comparative lens reveals the implications of Khomeini's model for global debates on sovereignty, legitimacy and the politics of knowledge (Holliday, 2016).

Findings and Thematic Conclusions

- Khomeini's March 21, 1980 address operationalises scriptural intertextuality to convert theological claims into concrete government directives, thereby fusing worship with administration (Holliday, 2016).
- Discursive mechanisms such as moral polarisation, repetitive mnemonic devices and imperative modality produce a stable revolutionary habitus that privileges clerical authority (Holliday, 2016).
- The speech constructs enemy identities through lexical strategies that simplify complex geopolitical actors into moral categories, facilitating rapid political judgement (Holliday, 2016).
- Interdiscursivity across legal, theological and militaristic registers enables the regime to translate rhetorical mobilisation into institutional practice⁴.
- Khomeinism performs epistemic reversal; it contests Western representational power while asserting an alternative Islamic epistemology as the basis of legitimacy (Ali & Asim, 2025).
- The paradigm institutionalises gatekeepers of ideological orthodoxy who marginalise pluralistic discourses and criminalise ideological hybridity (Holliday, 2016).
- The export of revolution is framed as religious obligation rather than strategic expansion, which legitimises transnational alliances with anti-imperial actors (Noor-e-Najaf & Asim, 2025)
- Conversation-analytic features such as imperatives, modal intensifiers and ritualised calls to youth function as effective recruitment technologies (Noor-e-Najaf & Asim, 2025).
- Textual analysis confirms that the speech's rhetorical economy sustains long-term political discipline while enabling immediate coercive measures (Noor-e-Najaf & Asim, 2025).
- The combined Said-Fairclough framework proves effective for revealing how representation and linguistic practice together instantiate anti-colonial state formation (Holliday, 2016).

Implications for Contemporary Islamic Political Discourse (facts and examples 9/11 to 2025)

- The securitisation of Muslim identity after 9/11 changed global frames of Islamic politics and reinforced counter-discourses that Khomeinism exploits to mobilise anti-Western sentiment; this dynamic altered public rhetoric and security practices across the Middle East and the West (Asim, 2025).
- The rise of transnational violent non-state actors in the early 2010s, notably ISIS, produced counter-reactions that strengthened state-centred religious narratives and expanded Iran's regional messaging of resistance (Asim, 2025).
- The Arab Spring of 2011 demonstrated both opportunities and limits of revolutionary rhetoric; Iran publicly expressed conditional support for popular uprisings while guarding against spillover that might threaten domestic clerical control (Asim, 2025).

⁴ (Habib, Imam Khomeini's Quranic Vision: Faith as the Frontline against Western Imperialism, 2025)

- The US withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018 intensified Iranian discourses of Western unreliability and reoriented Khomeinist rhetoric toward sanctions resilience and self-reliance (Asim, 2025).
- The US killing of Qasem Soleimani on January 03, 2020 produced a surge in state rhetoric framing resistance as necessary defence of sovereignty and validated Khomeinist arguments on external threat and internal unity (Asim, 2025).
- Iran's regional strategy since 2011, including support for proxy actors in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, illustrates how Khomeinist discourse converts ideological solidarity into material influence and strategic depth (Asim, 2025).
- Domestic contestation, including the 2019 fuel price protests and the 2022 demonstrations after Mahsa Amini's death, show limits of discursive authority and illustrate how popular grievances can challenge the coherence of Khomeinist communication (Asim, 2025).
- The 2023 regional crises including the Gaza war produced renewed rhetorical emphasis on Palestinian solidarity which Khomeinist discourse uses to assert moral leadership among Muslim publics (Asim, 2025).
- From 2001 to 2025 the interplay between global security narratives and local religious communication demonstrates that Khomeinist discourse retains potency where Western policy is perceived as coercive or inconsistent (Asim, 2025).
- Contemporary political actors can appropriate Khomeinist communicative strategies for distinct ends, which creates both opportunities for mobilisation and risks of reproducing new exclusionary orders in the name of anti-colonial resistance⁵ (Asim, 2025).

Conclusion

“Imam Khomeini transformed the vocabulary of resistance into a disciplined grammar of governance”, observed Richard Falk, acknowledging the Iranian leader's success in redefining political sovereignty through moral conviction (Asim, 2025). This paper has demonstrated that Khomeini's discourse constitutes a postcolonial communicative paradigm that merges theological certainty with political efficacy, transforming revelation into a manual of statecraft. His rhetoric does not only oppose Western domination but reconstructs a self-sustaining epistemic order grounded in Qur'anic legitimacy and collective moral agency. Through intertextual invocation, performative speech and strategic repetition, Khomeini converted language into an instrument of mobilisation, thereby linking spiritual duty with national purpose. The analysis confirmed that his March 21, 1980 address remains a seminal text in postcolonial political thought where faith, ideology and governance coalesce into a coherent doctrine of resistance. By decoding his discourse through Said and Fairclough, this study illuminated how linguistic power can both challenge and consolidate authority. Ultimately, discourse analysis exhibits as, “authentic liberation requires mastery of one's own language of truth, for nations that cannot speak in their own moral syntax remain colonised in silence” (Asim, 2025).

⁵ (Habib, Khomeini's Vision Still Guides Iran's Defiance in the Modern Geopolitical Arena : Maryam Habib, 2025)

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