



Reflections on different aspects of Reza Shah's absolute/modern state; a Durkheimian structural perspective

Taghi Jafari¹, Ghaffar Zarei^{2*}

¹Department of Political Science, Lamerd Branch, Islamic Azad University, Lamerd, Iran

²Department of Political Science, Lamerd Branch, Islamic Azad University, Lamerd, Iran

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Abstract:

Modern state as a critical institution and, of course, a social phenomenon didn't emerge accidentally in Iran, but rather originated from a complex set of intellectual and concrete conditions. With execution and operationalization of various action plans under the process of modernization in political and societal area, Reza Shah's new state sought to initiate structural transformations and establishment of a new division of labor in the society that was required for state-building. Following these action plans, the military power of government seriously enforced and local governors, who enjoyed considerable authority in Qajar period, eliminated completely so as to develop a centralized governance of modern state as a united authority structure. As a result of such incorporation of previously fragmented social institutions, a kind of modern state in an authoritative and absolute sense existed in Iran and consequently redefined the Iranian identity in a distinctive form that was predominantly based on *nation-state* ideology. Accordingly, by using a descriptive-analytic method, this article tries to find a convincing answer for the question that: how could we explain the raise of modern state in Iran by application of Durkheim's theory *Division of labor*. Therefore, the hypothesis implies that given the increasing qualitative/quantitative extension of social arena and development of professional-occupational fields, as well as transformation of social structures toward a partial integration in global system politically and economically, new institutions with differentiated functions appeared that facilitated the very modern state-building in Iran at the time of Reza Shah's rule.

Keywords: Absolute State, Reza Shah Pahlavi, Durkheim, Structuralism, Nation-state building

Introduction

The concept of *state* in society is one of the most significant socio-political facts considered as a highly disputed area since early

history of politics. Through ancient history, from middle Ages till the modern era, the state had been regarding, by and large, on behalf of "ruling man or group", while

*Corresponding Author's Email: ghafarzarei@yahoo.com

encountering emerging social changes the conception of state shifted gradually to a relational institution which isn't by no means independent from the society as a whole. Put it differently, state is the fundamental subject matter of political sociology and primarily embedded in social life (Duverger, 1959: 10-11). Historically, origins of state in its primitive forms returned to City-States in Ancient Greece included cities such as Rome, Athens, Carthage, and the Italian city-states during the Renaissance. But, there are several factors distinguish this archaic form of political organization from the modern state. Large majority of political scientists who have worked particularly on modern state and its rise believe that the modern state is a recent phenomenon born nearly in 16th century. According to Vincent (1987: 17): "new conception of state couldn't be inferred from Greek or medieval city-states since, the modern state differs substantially from the governing body of tribes or empires". Throughout the nineteenth century, Iran's monarchs were "Oriental despots" who, despite awesome trappings of personal authority, reined only by manipulating divisions among armed tribes, regional landlord potentates, and self-governing urban corporate groups. A modern Iranian state, with a nationally centralized army and administration, emerged only in the 1920s, after Reza Kahn, the colonel of a tiny professional military force, seized power in a *coup d'etat* and expanded his army to pacify and unify the country. Shah Reza Pahlavi (as he crowned himself in 1925) constructed a kind of agrarian bureaucracy, a centralized state coexisting with landed aristocrats. During his reign Iran gained greater national unity and autonomy than ever before in modern times, yet still did not escape its destiny at

the geopolitical interstices of great power rivalries. During World War II, Iran was occupied by Britain and the Soviet Union; Reza Shah, who had made the mistake of flirting with the Germans, was packed off into exile. After the war, Iran struggled for renewed national autonomy, first against the Soviets and then against the British and their oil interests. History of modern state-building in Iran had coincided with the onset of integration in global system occurred during Qajar period led heavily structural pressures in line with modernization process and given birth to Iranian Constitutional Revolution at last. Yet, lack of military and bureaucratic development and as a result, failure to establish concentrated governance via absolute state destroyed the legacy of constitutional state at once. Consequently, conflict and disarray dominated the society and these events mainly prepared conditions for Reza Shah Sovereignty provided with special supports of Britain authorities. However, the first Pahlavi state adopted policies aimed at basic transformations in social structure and setting up new division of labor in order to modern state-building accomplishment. Chiefly, the first and foremost step was to get rid of local governors and principalities called "Moluk al-Tawaif" and constitution of a united authority throughout the country. In fact, the paper attempts to explore the rise of modern state in Iran concerning the explanation of emerging institutions provoked radical changes in division of labor and influenced individual's beliefs and intentions, as well as, behaviors. Hence, using a descriptive-analytic method, were going to find a convincing answer for the question that: how could we explain the raise of modern state in Iran by application of Durkheim's theory *Di-*

vision of labor. Therefore, the hypothesis implies that given the increasing qualitative/quantitative extension of social arena and development of professional-occupational fields, as well as transformation of social structures toward an incorporation in global system at large, new institutions with differentiated functions appeared that facilitated the only modern state-building in Iran at the time of Reza Shah's rule.

Modern state

Despite traditional political organizations, modern state enjoys certain determined boundaries with other institutions as such, located within a principally ordered space of international relations to nation-states worldwide. In comparison with pre-modern governments, this new political entities seek mostly for compromise and consensus between nations, meanwhile possess maintained institutional arrangements which remain unchangeable even after substitution of ruling bodies and authorities. Actually, a particular kind of public order concentrated in a geopo-

litical region integrally to the extent that state is the only source of political authority claims the exclusive application of legitimated power, demands for loyalty of its citizens and residents to the homeland and finally, exerts immediate governance over subordinates through bureaucracy structures. While traditional pre-modern states employed hired military forces as needed, modern one establishes permanent armies equipped by regular recruitment provides it with reliable highly committed military forces. Furthermore, the modern state follows Nation-building process regarded as "*cultural homogenization*" by means of strategies such as: development of public education, creating national anthem, standardization of units, renewal and appreciation of cultural memorials.

In sum, main characteristics of absolute state and its major differences from previous political units which had been primarily based on empire governments would be illustrated using the table below (Azad armaki, 2010: 15)

Empire	Modern state
Hired military forces	United armies based on recruitment
Tribute amassment	Regular taxation
Limited and superficial bureaucracy	Open/extended/differentiated bureaucratic structures
Various local authorities with partial legitimacy	Single legitimated source of power exertion in the country domain
Indirect governance over subordinates	Immediate/concentrated governance over citizens
There are certain fronts and frontiers (instead of boundaries) deeply rely upon the Centre.	Enjoys specific boundaries
There's no specific standard of ruling in local entities.	Standardization of governance criteria
Empires doesn't tend to unification	Seeks to homogenize cultural structures and divergent identities

Modern states differ considerably in terms of emergence contexts both temporally

and spatially, but generally many modern states are characterized by consequences of

increasing global system development. Similarly, in case of Iran a complex set of subjective and objective grounds in line with capitalism's development around the world provided a basis for socio-political structural transformations and new pattern of division of labor embodied lastly in the formation of absolute state. Although the concept *division of labor* has a long and illustrious history in social life evolution, certainly since 18th century it had been posed as a problematic reality in society. Indeed, Adam Smith noticed as the first theorist formulated the concept successfully and, of course, posited the term "Division of labor" for the first time.

Theoretical framework

Emile Durkheim in his prominent work *Division of labor in society* (1893) suggested that in a "primitive" society, mechanical solidarity, with people acting and thinking alike and with a shared collective conscience, is what allows social order to be maintained. In such a society, Durkheim viewed crime as an act that "offends strong and defined states of the collective conscience", though he viewed crime as a normal social fact. Because social ties are relatively homogeneous and weak throughout a mechanical society, the law has to be repressive and penal to respond to offences of the common conscience. In an advanced, industrial, capitalist society, the complex system of division of labor means that people are allocated in society according to merit and rewarded accordingly: social inequality reflects natural inequality, assuming that there is complete equity in the society. Durkheim argued that moral regulation was needed, as well as economic regulation, to maintain order (or organic solidarity) in society with people able to "compose their

differences peaceably". In this type of society, law would be more restitutive than penal, seeking to restore rather than punish excessively. In fact, Durkheim believed that greater concentrations of productive forces and capital investment seemed to lead modern industry, business, and agriculture toward greater separation and specialization of occupations, and even a greater interdependence among the products themselves. And like Smith, Durkheim recognized that this extended beyond the economic world, embracing not only political, administrative, and judicial activities, but aesthetic and scientific activities as well. Even philosophy had been broken into a multitude of special disciplines, each of which had its own object, method, and ideas. As Giddens pointed out, we can classify societies based on distinction of aforementioned economic sectors. So, third world countries characterized by concentration on primitive forms of agriculture, whilst industry and service sectors share a relatively little portion correspondingly. Conversely, in developed countries like Great Britain only a minor share of economy, usually less than 5% is occupied by agriculture (Giddens, 2000: 220).

Gradual integration into Global system

The late Safavid period witnessed official Iranian presence in global system led to broad changes in economy and society that in a certain historical process gave birth to an absolute modern state in Iran mainly by introducing a new division of labor in Iranian society. In spite of the fact that Iranian empire in Safavid period (nearly 400 years ago) has been a critical economic pole in the growing capitalist system, it is clear that after Safavid's fall, Iran has experienced at least

80 years of economic depression derived from lack of a central government and decline of its economic status in the world simultaneously (Foran, 1992, 1993).

Reza Shah took power in a military coup in February 1921 and by December 1925 he had a constituent assembly deposing the last Qajar Shah and declaring him the shah of a new dynasty. He rose to power in an atmosphere of political demoralization. Despite the military victory of the constitutionalist forces over the absolutist monarch Mohammad Ali Shah in July 1909, the following decade witnessed such a deep disillusionment with constitutionalism that by the 1920s Iranian reformers were talking of the necessity for a “revolutionary dictator”. The Constitutional Movement eliminated the monarch as the effective head of the state. It created a strong legislative body, by transferring much of the royal prerogatives to the Majlis, but had no plan for building a functioning executive power. Formally the monarch, and through him the prime minister, headed the government. But in fact by destroying the old authority of the Crown, there seemed to be no executive power left in the country. Majlis proceedings increasingly looked like endless pointless squabbles, a waste of time that got the country nowhere. While the country was burning, it seemed that the Majlis was playing second fiddle to the parliaments of Europe.

The establishment of modern army

The first generation of Iranian reformers had been primarily attracted to the constitutional monarchies of Europe. Now, a new generation increasingly found Italy and Germany more suitable models for Iran to follow: “our only hope is a Mussolini who can break the influence of the traditional authorities, and thus create a modern outlook, a modern people, and a modern nation”. The terms of po-

litical discourse had drastically changed. While the early generation of reformers saw progress as possible only through a constitutional regime, the reformers of the 1920s began to see democracy as an impediment to progress. This apparent contradiction between democracy and progress haunted the country for the next half a century. Reza Shah took power in an atmosphere of craving for a strong central state, for statist policies, for law and order, for a regime that got something done, almost regardless of how it got it done. It is this political atmosphere that made it acceptable to see the army as the agent of progress: perhaps the army could succeed where administrative, educational, and constitutional civil reformers had failed. In other words, Reza Shah’s vision of the centrality of building the army to building the country coincided with the new orientation of a whole stratum of statesmen and intellectuals.

For Reza Shah the new state consisted above all of a modern army. He repeatedly emphasized that “the greatness of the country depends on the progress and strength of its army, weakness and decay of the country results from the incapacity and degradation of its military forces. This did not simply mean a high priority for building a strong army (“An army before and above everything. Everything’s first for the army, and again for the army”). But more importantly, for Reza Shah the army was a model for the construction of a nation-state. His idea was to create a nation of disciplined, obedient, efficient citizens. His remarks about the reasons for Ataturk’s success are indicative: the Turks are more submissive and easier to lead. The Iranians are more capable, but undisciplined! He hoped to introduce military discipline into all other branches of government and upheld the soldier as a model for citizenship. At a ceremony in 1933, at the

newly established National Bank of Iran, he demanded of the Bank employees to “act as soldiers. A soldier gives his life for his country on the battlefield. You should do the same thing. You must sacrifice yourselves for the prestige of your country”. It is symbolic of the importance of the army in Reza Shah’s mind that he appeared on all public occasions in military uniform? This vision of the army-as-model implied a strong drive towards the creation of uniformities. The dress code for civilians (men and women) was just one aspect. So was the abolition of traditional aristocratic titles and the requirement for registering under a surname.

The extension of governmental domain

For Reza Shah, it was more than that. Introducing a uniform into the army had been an important measure in constructing a modern army based on conscription, instead of the hodge-podge of tribal levies and various military units. In a similar vein, the introduction of “civilian uniforms” was not simply a discarding of traditional garb and imitation of everything European. It signified a step towards the creation of the citizen-soldier, those “instruments” with which he intended to realize his vision of Iran, “the bones and muscles of the reconstruction” for which “he was its mind”. For Reza Shah it was a duty as well as a privilege for a citizen to serve the state. More concretely, citizens were expected to contribute to the building of a new society by becoming part of the growing state bureaucracy. An attitude was cultivated that looked down upon those not inside the state apparatus, as if working for the state were now the ultimate expression or test of good citizenship.

Marginalization of Rohaniyyat (the clergy)

The specific circumstances of Reza Shah’s rise to power further accentuated this uneasy alliance between Iranian nationalism and Shi’ite particularism. Unlike Ataturk, Reza Shah came to power through a military coup. His new power was not consolidated on the basis of a social movement or a social class, but by building a modern army. While building the army, militarily and in terms of the legitimacy of its authority, through various campaigns to suppress provincial movements and tribal unruliness, he astutely maneuvered himself into the space created by the mutual hostility and suspicion of two major political forces: secular democrats craving for a strong modern leader to eradicate clerical influence and save the masses and the country, and the Shi’ite clergy, threatened by the rising influence of secular anti-clerical intellectuals and politicians, who were deeply worried by the developments in Turkey. He used the former to push through such laws as the conscription act, against the protests of the clergy, and used the latter’s support to dethrone Ahmad Shah and clamp down on the unruly press and political debates.

Under Reza Shah Reformers of the constitutional era faced a dilemma: many of their projected reforms were possible to achieve, not through their original vision of a parliamentary system, but through the construction of a corporatist state, that would not tolerate any independent citizens’ initiatives. For example, by the mid-1930s all independent women’s societies and journals were closed down at the same time that the state took over the implementation of their specific reforms, such as opening up schools for girls, encouraging higher education for women, female employment in state bureaucracy, opening

some public arenas to women's participation, and requiring the discarding of the veil. We know from existing historical accounts that many of the male reformers and intellectuals faced a bitter dilemma. When for a brief period Reza Khan launched a campaign for abolishing the monarchy and establishing himself at the head of a republic, many republican intellectuals campaigned against a republic to stop his rise to power? (With historical hindsight, the wisdom of this counter-campaign is debatable, since Reza Khan established himself as a dictator in any case, but as a dictatorial shah rather than a president.) Other reformers soon decided that opposition to Reza Shah was fatal and futile, and resigned from active politics. Yet others felt whatever reforms could be achieved through serving a corporatist state were crucial for the re-vitalization of Iranian society; indeed some identified the very construction of a strong centralized corporatist state as the embodiment of new Iranian nationhood.

Cultural homogenization of identities

It is expected that each modern state appeals to nation building with a great attention to maintain nationalist feelings and commitments in order to ensure the efficacy, coherence and sufficiency of its functions. Among different cultural approaches to nation-building, homogenization and unification of various identities under a single umbrella called national identity is of a great importance and applicability. Accordingly, first Pahlavi regime implemented a wide range of programs to realize the objective of nation-building; policies and interventions include: Public education development, dress codes assignment, appreciation and representation of historical legacies, cultural segregation and sweeping the non-Iranian components of current identity, promotion of Persian lan-

guage, prohibition of hijab using punitive prosecution, imposed sedentism of Nomads and establishment of culture-oriented institutions like Academy of Persian Language and Literature. As a key topic of cultural regeneration in this period, the role of women in Reza Shah's vision can be situated within this larger project of state-building. Like men, women were expected to contribute to the building of the new society through hard work and participation group of teachers and female students on 8 January 1936.

Women in this country [prior to this day of unveiling] could not demonstrate their aptitude and inherent qualities because they remained outside of society, they could not make their proper contribution to the country and make appropriate sacrifices and render their services. Now they can proceed and enjoy other advantages of society in addition to the remarkable task of motherhood ... I believe that for the progress and happiness of this country we all must work sincerely, there will be progress if government employees work, the country needs effort and work ... Now that you, my daughters and sisters, have entered the social arena ... you must know that it is your duty to work for your country. Future prosperity is in your hands. You train the future generation. You can be good teachers and good people can emerge from your training. I expect of you, learned ladies, now that you are going out in the world to learn about your rights and duties and to perform services to your country, you should be wise and work, become accustomed to frugality and avoid luxuries and overspendings! This is not the same as encouraging women to join the labor force because of the need of an emerging capitalist economy for an expanded labor force, as has sometimes been argued. Women were urged to go to universities, become teachers, and join the expanding

ministry that is to participate in the building of a newly forming state bureaucracy, rather than become part of the labor force in factories. The development of a market economy as such was marginal to Reza Shah's project. This limited the project from the start to certain sections of upper and middle class urban women. The new state, moreover, was to be a modern one, eliminating whatever was seen as vestiges of backwardness such as the veil. The model of a modern state was ultimately a European one, but this was in great part mediated for Iran through the model of the emerging Turkish state under Ataturk. In fact, from the early nineteenth century, Ottoman reforms and reformist literature had provided aspiring Iranian reformers and intellectuals not only with a model but also a certain legitimacy: that another Islamic state had already adopted administrative, military and legal reforms to buttress its stand against European encroachment made the argument for the compatibility of reform with Islamic requirements more convincing. Not only were Qajar reforms largely modeled after their Ottoman counterparts, who sometimes had preceded them by several decades, much of Persian reform vocabulary was borrowed from the Ottomans.

Conclusion

As a result of integration in global system during Qajar period was a considerable pressure on state for accelerating and facilitating the modernization process. Lack of required capable in Qajar political organization ultimately initiated the Constitutional Revolution that later became a determining basis for emergence of state in its modern sense. Nevertheless, modern state seems to be represented in a fairly absolute form due to being

the ultimate source of power and taking the entire control of country exerting direct governance over subordinates. Now, we can see Reza Shah's dominance along with the Qajar's failure in recognition of Constitutional state, but the crucial point is that such cumulated pressures for modernization forced the recently emerged state pursuing modernization processes as well. Our main claim was that a prior set of proceedings required for modernization made state-building possible in Iran had been well-organized changes in division of labor. Briefly speaking, these proceedings or in a wide sense strategies can be summarized here as follows:

1. Establishment of a permanent army and integrated military force
2. Continuous battle against opposing movements and local governors
3. Marginalization of ethnic groups and major tribes, especially Nomad tribes
4. Creation of modern judicial and legislative structures toward constitutional law
5. Development of bureaucracy as an official relation-oriented connection between people and authorities.
6. Redefinition and reconfiguration of national identity focusing on ancient historical components and symbols under a homogenization process.

It is concluded that radical consequences of Reza Shah's state-building period in redefining the terms of the "identity question" became evident after his abdication in 1941. The rise and consolidation of a corporatist state found its oppositional political reflection in totalizing party political platforms. In the open political turmoil, public debates and political re-composition of 1941-53, Iranian politics was molded around party political

platforms and organizations such as the Tudeh Party, the Democratic Party, and the National Front. Correspondingly, the “identity question” became part of broad political utopias, with packages for social change, rather than issue-centered, for instance, around female education and family laws, as had been the case during the constitutional period. More significantly, from this period onwards, cultural organizations tended to become formed largely as de-facto auxiliaries of political parties. This implied a clear hierarchy of priorities. Subordination and absorption of the “identity question” into the cause of state-building under Reza Shah now found its oppositional echo in its subordination to higher political causes. This redefinition and **hierarchization** was only partial in this period. In the subsequent consolidation of the state under Mohammad Reza Shah, it became total.

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