

An Analytical Venture into the Spatial Foundations Affecting the Slow Formation of Modern Government in Iran Before the First Pahlavi Era (1925-1941)

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Political sociology texts consider the rise of the first Pahlavi government in Iran at 1925 as the inception of the formation of a modern government in the country. Meanwhile, from a temporal perspective, the emergence of modern government in Iran has been delayed compared to European and even Asian societies. The present study seeks to analyze the causes of the slow emergence of the processes and institutions of a modern government in Iran by means of a descriptive-analytical method and from a political geographical perspective. Research findings show that a set of factors, including the environmental origins of Iran, have contributed to the formation of a nomadic livelihood in the history of Iran. Furthermore, the ethnic heterogeneity and risk-prone geographical location of Iran from a geopolitical perspective meant that only leaders with a divine charisma could create unity among these challenges. The amalgam of these factors delayed the process of establishing modern governmental processes in Iran until the rise to power of the first Pahlavi king.

Keywords: Modern government, Formative delay, Natural environment, culture, Iran

Introduction

Modern government emerged as an institutional framework through which all judicial, military, educational, and financial matters within the confines of a territory were in the hands of the government as the greatest controlling power. With its creation, all means of power and political-military influence that were previously scattered among echelons, classes, tribes, guilds, etc. were gradually transformed into this institution, and the ternary elements including land, nation, and government became spatially adapted to each other (Ertman 2005, 367). Historically, the formation of an inclusive government in Europe was due to the capitalist economy's need for an institution to guarantee social contracts, provide security, control territorial borders and strengthen the process of free trade beyond territorial borders (Badie and Birnbaum 2008, 35).

Furthermore, understanding how modern government emerged and evolved is one of the most important issues in social and political

scientific studies, and it is difficult to imagine social life independently of its function (Vincent 2006, 15). Meanwhile, in Iran, modern government with the specified characteristics formed only very slowly in comparison with European countries. Its initial foundations were laid in the first Pahlavi era (1925-1941). To strengthen the central government, the first Pahlavi regime founded a new political order that weakened the traditional centers of power, i.e., the landowner oligarchy, tribal heads, and religious institutions, and they thus added the implementation of a set of economic and social policies of the working and bureaucrat classes to the urban system of Iran. After the fall of the Qajar dynasty in 1925, the traditional bureaucratic system that had established the center of government in cities and the center of power outside cities and within tribes gradually declined, causing the roots of power and government to be established within cities. Urban society and city dwellers appeared on the political scene as the agents of government and gained more economic agency than rural communities. In other words, there was a geographical shift in the production of wealth from the agricultural and livestock economy to an industrial and service economy.

Nonetheless, this process was different and substantially delayed in comparison with other societies, especially European countries. That is to say, before the first Pahlavi government, the function of the central government in Iran was limited to collecting taxes and maintaining public order and security, while public services, such as education, health, judicial courts, public welfare, etc. fell outside governmental structures and authority. During the Qajar era in particular, none of the social forces, whether the nomadic leaders, aristocratic landowners, urban tradesmen or the clergy, were able to overcome the central government and other social forces or to form a modern government (Armaki and Nosratinejad 2010, 24).

In this connection, several views and theories have been proposed in political sociology to identify the cause of this delay, but it would appear that these studies have paid less attention to geographical factors. Basically, the way by which modern governments are formed in different societies can be derived from the geographical origin of the country in question, and it is thus evident as a working hypothesis that the features and institutions related to political power are significantly formed within the scope of the requirements of the spatial structure of that territory (Meehan 2014, 230). In this context, researchers criticize the recognition of modern government as an abstract entity and consider this institution the result or product of geographical exceptions (Wainwright and Robertson 2003, 202). In other words, the spatial context of a country has a significant impact on the emergence of the features of that country's governing system, and its study necessitates a closer look at this issue. Hence, dependence on space and consideration of it as an a priori factor

in political geography is in contrast with those theories that try to identify a generalizable set of causal processes for the difference between diverse societies (Harris 2012, 31).

Moreover, most generalizing theories in political sociological studies on the evolution of modern governments have utilized examples in Western countries, and as a result, they cannot be generalized to other societies without regard for spatial and temporal conditions (Naqibzadeh 2011, 48). Theories based on a single economic, political, class or other factor cannot fully explain the reasons for the slow emergence of modern government in Iran. In addition, ignoring the constructive foundations of the governance system leads to the inefficiency of imported political development models in many developing countries (Heshmatzadeh et al. 2017, 8). Examining the spatial dimensions in each country enables researchers to explain some of the reasons for the emergence of the features and characteristics in the governance system and its evolution (Bai 2009, 11). The present study seeks to analyze the geographical dimensions of the developmental delay of modern government in Iran from the viewpoint of political geography.

Theoretical Foundations

Modern Government

By the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of Renaissance in Europe, traditional governments gradually underwent transformations in function. In other words, a set of changes related to modernity, such as changes in production methods, changes in urban-rural relations, and increasing domination of specialization in guilds and occupations, paved the way for a transformation in the functions of traditional government. For instance, urban social classes changed with the expansion of industries and services, and the development of the bourgeoisie and the increase in migration from rural to urban areas (Keddie 2006, 156-157). The development of urbanization and the expansion of the urban bourgeoisie required the formation of a more organized political system to be able to guarantee the rights and duties of individuals. At the same time, the competition of the feudal lords and the migration of peasants to cities also reduced the power of the feudal society and formed the basis for the formation of a modern government based on political supremacy over the territory. This process made them more independent of feudal governments and paved the way for their supremacy over the political authorities. In the context of this functional transformation, as local markets were integrated into the national market and bureaucratic institutions were formed, the destinies of the inhabitants settled in the space of a territory became further interconnected to each other.

Eliminating the local powers and developing a shared language and identity by establishing a uniform education system, the modern government formed the political structure of an organized human society under the name of the nation (Naghizadeh 2007, 179). With the formation of modern government, identity construction also took on a political aspect, and governments instilled in their inhabitants the idea of having a shared territory, history, and homeland, and the nation-building process thus emerged. This institution has had the highest coercive power and governed all the processes that took place in its territorial space and at the beginning of its formation; it has generally emerged as an absolute government for structural reasons. Gradually, however, the processes of distribution of political power at the political-structural and institutional levels laid the groundwork for the democratic forms of the modern government.

From this time and with this institutional change, the political territory became directly linked to sovereignty, and social processes were formed directly or indirectly under the influence of the policies of this political institution. In addition to defending against foreign aggression and maintaining public order on a national scale by forming an organized military force, the modern government is also responsible for meeting the basic needs of the society, such as education, health, public welfare, and supporting the citizens in different social classes and positions (Muir 2000, 152). It is thus related to all aspects of citizens' social life. Furthermore, the establishment of political and legal authority, the creation of ideological symbols, the enforcement of regulations in domestic markets, and control of the means of violence are also gradually recognized as the most important functions of modern government. In a modern government, institutions persist despite the change of rulers, because the function of institutions and political actors is the result of loyalty to the territory and its inhabitants, which is a fixed and less fluid phenomenon.

Research Findings

As mentioned above, investigating the causes of the delay in the emergence of the modern governance system in Iran necessitates a closer look at the natural-human characteristics governing Iran. Through this prism, we can identify a regional statement on why the formation of a modern government in Iran had such a slow pace in its political system of Iran before the first Pahlavi era.

Natural Environment: Nomadism and its Effects on the Governance Model of Iran Before 1925

About 10 to 15 thousand years ago, humans living on the plateau of Iran used to hunt for food (Bakhshande Nosrat 1999, 114). From the mid-first

millennium BC, tribes emerged in the mountainous parts of Iran who were called “nomads”. The tribes and nomads of Iran formed a significant part of the country’s population until modern times and were mainly engaged in animal husbandry. They moved from one region to another in accordance with the changes in seasons and the multitude of herds so as to consistently use natural pastures to feed their livestock (Alizadeh 2006, 107). As a matter of fact, vast mountainous territories, scattered rainfall, and temperature differences were among the natural grounds for the emergence of nomadic social and economic systems in Iran. Resorting to a kind of ecological mobility was thus the most reasonable and plausible quick solution in this society, and the response to the instability and disproportion in natural conditions thus manifested as a sort of efficient mobility on the territory and its consequential effects on the formation of social life (Shabani 2011, 58).

The Alborz Mountain range in the north and northwest as well as Zagros heights in the west and the dry and semi-arid central plains along with dozens of independent and separate geo-morphological and hydrological units in Iran are the main factors underlying the survival and continuation of nomadic life in the history of Iran. In fact, the nomad population at the end of the Qajar dynasty reached 50% of the total population of Iran (Issawi 1983, 48). In 1873, the population of Iran included 13% urban, 43.5% rural and 43% nomadic residents (Haghdar 2001, 54).

Nomads have had an active role in political affairs and the protection of the borders of Iran during the past three thousand years. The relationship between nomadic tribes and settled communities (urban or rural) has always had some ups and downs. Before the first Pahlavi era (1925-1941), nomadic tribes, who had military power, were often at the head of the dynasties ruling Iran, and the leaders of these nomadic tribes played an effective role in the overthrow and formation of pre-modern governments. In general, before the formation of a regular army, Iran’s armies were mainly constructed by nomads. As they were a consistently armed group, despite accepting the Shah’s allegiance, nomads were an important factor involved in the disintegration of the central political power. The pattern of transfer of political power in Iran before 1900 thus included the rise to power of a tribe and the election of a monarch by the head of that tribe.

Moreover, the tribal force and its relations were based on completely authoritarian organizational methods as a result of its temperament and the habit of living in the heart of a strictly rough and combative natural environment (Sinaei 2006, 41). Warriors served as the main element of the Iranian armed forces, unlike the Ottomans, who had largely eliminated tribalism especially in the Turkish-speaking part of the country, and

reflected the military significance of tribes in Iranian society. Lambton elaborates on this point, noting that during Qajar times, apart from the Qajars themselves, the most powerful groups were the Bakhtiari, Kurds, Afshars, Qara Quzlus, Qashqais, and Persian Arabs, and the power of tribal leaders came from the military force that they could quickly assemble and rush to the king's aid if necessary (Lambton 1984, 180). For the most part, the heads of the tribes were undisputed ruling powers in their area of control, and with the advent of powerful kings, they were completely obedient to the government. They sometimes established a government and sometimes overthrew another; sometimes they went to war with neighboring countries at the borders in support of the government of Iran, and sometimes they invaded the country with the cooperation of neighboring countries; they robbed the trade caravans and raided cities in times of drought.

In general, tribal society was independent in its affairs and scope of influence, and the leading institution of the tribe would meet various internal needs and adjust the relationships with exterior territories. In fact, the identity-based attachment of individuals to their tribe functioned as a barrier to the formation of a national identity (Cottam 1999, 54) and tribes had no national sentiment and awareness about a meta-tribal identity (Hajieyani 2001, 120). As a result, whenever signs of weakness appeared in the dominant government system, the divergence of tribes and clans became manifested, and the spirit of government aversion and anti-government feelings in times of weakness of the central government were one of the persistent indicators of the government system in Iran. More particularly, tribes and nomads in the surrounding regions and far from the capital used this geopolitical capability more to their advantage and were more effective in the political structure. This process was effective in slowing down the formation of political borders in a linear form in Iran.

Thus, before the formation of absolute government in Iran, the construction of power was based on the multiplication and dispersion of sources of power, and even though the method of exercising power was authoritarian, the power structure was decentralized and feudalistic. According to some experts, this culture is largely in fundamental conflict with the contexts of formation of a modern government, because in the history of Iran, the rise to power of a tribe has meant the elimination of the ruling tribe, and any tribe that came to power conquered the other tribes by force and intimidation.

In the Qajar era, tribes formed independent social units, and their social hierarchy, high internal cohesion, and self-sufficient economy put them in a state of constant mobility and readiness for defense and attack. Therefore, the study of the history of Iran is the study of the history of

the rise and fall of nomads and concerns the nomadic geography of Iran. The potential and actual capacity and power of nomads meant that the ruler of the whole country would rise from the nomadic sphere (Rabanei and Shayeganfard 2010, 133). The tribal heads had their own foremen and soldiers, and the feudalistic economic system formed the basis of the political management of Iran's territorial space. The legal system and decision-making of the tribes were based on the three pillars, namely a unified leadership, military power, and ethnic solidarity, none of which were related to the characteristics of a modern government.

In general, until the end of the Qajar era, the political management of space in Iran was based on individual monarchy, and in terms of form, its characteristics have been extant over the past 2,500 years. Thus, if sovereignty is considered a "monopoly on the legitimate exercise of physical power within a particular territory", it must be acknowledged that Iran did not have a modern government before the 1920s. Although authoritarianism or dictatorship are general features of the old political systems, the construction of political power had a scattered and parallel nature until the first Pahlavi era. Before the Persian Constitutional Revolution, the feudal structure of the Iranian society included a kind of formal dispersion of powers that limited the integration of local identities and economies with each other inside the territory of Iran (Azghandi 1997, 112-124). Consequently, the political management of space in Iran was structurally and institutionally centralized, but spatially pluralistic and based on the actions of major landowners and tribes in their territory of influence.

The main nature of the transfer of political power in Iran before the first Pahlavi regime (1925- 1941) was such that urban areas were always influenced by the exercise of tribal powers and were far from the power structure in decision-making, despite their fundamental importance in fields of economy, trade, and bureaucracy. What persuaded the tribes to occupy urban areas most was their need for financial and economic provision by means of taxes on cities. For precisely this reason, the first demand of invaders after entering cities was to demand taxes and levies from the urban merchants and guilds. Furthermore, the inability of the heads of tribes to administer court and administrative affairs inevitably made them dependent on urban bureaucrats for the continuation of the government administration and territorial management. The classes and social groups familiar with administrative and judicial affairs had a significant presence, especially in large urban centers (Motevalei 2012, 69). Despite the dependence of the financial and administrative system and judicial affairs on the social forces of cities, the institutions and social actors of cities were still not independent of the government-tribal system and were under their influence.

In general, in the historical geography of Iran and before the early 20th century, nomads enjoyed better advantages than villagers and townspeople and could quickly move away from unsafe and high-risk regions. Meanwhile, townspeople and villagers were usually much more vulnerable, and villagers were even attacked during the harvest of their crops. On this basis, the evolution of urbanization in Iran displayed a major difference compared with urbanization in the Mediterranean, including Greece. The urban system in the Mediterranean was based on a kind of aristocratic democracy, and their survival and development depended principally on their commercial position. Meanwhile, the livelihood of townspeople in Iran has always been dominated by rural livelihoods and nomadic life. As a result, authoritarian and patriarchal rules and dynastic empires with a caste system influenced by the nomadic and rural livelihood pattern dominated in Iran up to the first Pahlavi era. This contrasted with the pattern of formation of independent urban classes in Europe, and this process thus delayed the formation of a modern government in Iran.

Moreover, Iran's urban network was relatively homogeneous until the establishment of the capitalist system. In other words, without a major metropolitan core, there was an organic relationship between small and large towns and rural centers of the hinterland, and the spatial network of settlements was formed regionally over time and based on geographical and historical features and the social structure (Veicy and Mehmandoost 2015, 213). The political divisions of the territory were also formed based on the above conditions and as a result of the talents within the region, and without connection with other regions (such as Azerbaijan, Khorasan, Fars, etc.). In the meantime, each region had its major city, which tended to its relevant functions, and the regional centers were in contact with the capital only for matters of tax and security issues.

During this period, the territory of the country was divided into units and a ruler was appointed to each by the central government to politically organize the space. Nonetheless, each of these units had considerable freedom in managing their internal affairs and they were less dependent on the central government by relying on a agricultural and livestock economy (Hafeznia 2002, 395). The central government had to deal with the widespread decentralization of power and the formation of local powers due to the lack of proper communication channels between the political base of the government in the capital and different parts of the country, as it needed the cooperation of these local institutions to maintain public order and collect taxes. This policy led to regional development based on the ecological potentials of each region and the urban network of Iran established an organic connection between small cities at

the regional and national level without the existence of a major metropolis (Nazarian 2009, 89).

This situation did not change much throughout history during the political ups and downs due to the geographical differences between different regions, and this issue delayed the interconnection of the trade and economy of different regions and the integration of markets as one of the infrastructures of a modern government. However, especially after the emergence of the Iranian economy's greater dependence on oil, social classes became more dependent on the government, especially in cities, and the higher in wealth and influence an urban class, the greater its dependence on the government. This is why the capital city of Tehran found a more prominent role in the political management of Iran, which caused the population of this city to rise from 210,000 at the beginning of Reza Shah's reign in 1925 to 700,000 in 1940 (Madanipour 2002, 25). By contrast, the population growth rate of Tehran was very slow before the Pahlavi government.

Ethnic Pluralism, the Leadership of Divine Charisma, and the Construction of a Court System in Iran Before the First Pahlavi Regime

Another obstacle to the formation of a modern government in Iran was the lack of sufficient cohesion between the people in terms of ethnicity and culture. The diversity of natural and climatic conditions in the plateau of Iran led to the emergence of subcultures in the territory of Iran. In other words, due to the arrangement of mountain ranges, rivers, deserts, forests, etc., various subcultures and local symbols emerged in Iran, and with their natural separation of the center from the periphery in the tectonic dimension, the Alborz and Zagros mountain ranges caused the emergence of distinctive subcultures in the Iranian territory. Hence, the diversity of the natural environment is a reason behind the cultural diversity in Iran and human settlements often formed in the context of relatively closed and limited areas, thus leading to self-contained and introspective cultural and economic systems.

The greater expansion of the territory of Iran in latitude and longitude prevented the creation of a shared nation and culture in the country (Lashgari 2018, 229). This greater expansion of the territory of Iran served to prevent the creation of a unique shared culture, climate, and nature in the country, and the geographical-political borders of the state do not coincide with the cultural and natural boundaries. The different inhabitants of Iran throughout history have been and are a heterogeneous set of different ethnicities and nationalities with different racial, linguistic, religious, cultural, and national features, and in no period of their shared history in Iran have they had the necessary social cohesion and homogeneity. For this reason, the seeds of an ethnic crisis have always

been ready to sprout among them. In other words, from the perspective of the cultural geography of the country, Iran had scattered or cohesive minorities that were capable of dispersion and divergence when the central government showed weakness, and the historical experience also indicated that charismatic governments and leaders have been better able to manage these crises and have reduced cultural differences by adopting different strategies – the result of which has been the establishment of order, balance and security in the society .

Therefore, the praise of charismatic political leaders has therefore been welcomed by the people and the political elite. In other words, in Iran before 1925, the existence of a diverse set of tribes and clans meant that only a person with holy and divine characteristics was able to unite disparate tribes, and all tribes and clans were considered among the subjects of the Iranian society only on condition of obedience to the king (Bashiriyeh 2004, 60). Hence the charismatic court system, consisting of servants and emissaries of the ruling person who had no relations with modern bureaucracy, the most important functional aspect of which is the impersonal nature of institutional relations.

Religions, the System of Governance and the Evolution of Bureaucratic Institutions in Iran Before the First Pahlavi Regime

In the cultural geography of Iran, especially from the Achaemenid period onward, religion has always been very much integrated with the system of governance, so that from the Achaemenid period onwards, a new class called the clergy was added to the social classes, which has greatly influenced the construction of the political culture of Iran. During the Sassanid period, religion and politics were completely intertwined, and for the first time in the history of Iran, religion penetrated the ruling system to the degree that Ardeshir Babakan acknowledged that the throne and the fire temple are inseparable. In the Sassanid period, the clergy gradually became the elite social class. After the arrival of Islam in Iran until the present period, religion has always existed in the arena of governance and the system of government in a prominent form. The extent of this matter is such that the religious leaders have always been one of the important forces influencing the political geography of Iran (Mossalanejad 2014, 116). Therefore, in the political culture of Iran, due to the integration of religion with political power and the legitimacy given to it through religious institutions, its distribution in the territorial space and the greater contribution of specialized bureaucratic institutions, regardless of the will of the monarchy, dynasties have become less plausible.

Furthermore, the political culture of the people and non-governmental elite is largely sacred, inward-looking, mystical and deterministic in nature (Beeman 2002, 108). Moreover, the lack of reflecting on how to

form a government prevailed in this political culture, which was not completely unrelated to the geopolitical requirements of Iran. In other words, given the particular position of Iran standing between the world powers after the fall of the Sassanid Empire and the atrocious wars and calamities that arose in this territory, taking refuge in God from invading and oppressive tribes has been one of the foundations of the emergence of this culture in the geography of Iran. Therefore, as Iran was located standing in the way of the world powers, invasion and exploitation have always threatened this territory and actually materialized in many instances, and this matter has contributed to the emergence of mysticism and Sufism in Iran and a refusal to reflect on how exactly to form a government. In particular, Sufism further developed during periods of great invasions and the decline of urbanization and the increasing expansion of tribal life, which then caused a decline in the level of social rationality and reflection.

In this regard, it is natural for people who have lost their social security in various periods to seek peace in metaphysical beliefs without philosophizing about how to form a government. Obviously, the great significance of some resources in this country, such as the importance of the land in terms of its geographical location, the existence of pastures and a climate desirable for neighboring tribes in the ancient world, and the existence of oil and gas resources in the nineteenth century, are other factors involved in the emergence of this trait in the cultural geography of Iran (Solasi 2010, 202). This pattern lead to a tendency in Iranian culture to consider human destiny an inevitable fate and underestimate the human will in the face of the wishes and destiny of political powers. Likewise, it spurred a proclivity not to reflect much on reforming the system of government and creating new institutions related to modern government and its structures. Therefore, the deterministic views of thinkers up until the formation of the first Pahlavi government was directly linked to the natural and human characteristics of the space and the centralized decision-making system in this area, because the masses were unable to counter the powerful compulsive force of those occupying the space. Hence, the distribution of power has rarely been reflected upon in the discourses of Iranian religions. Rather the origin of politics has been based on the definition of community leadership. Politics was thus not a worldly phenomenon, but a sacred and non-secular one. Meanwhile, in feudal Europe, the independence of the government from religion specifically helped the construction of independent territorial units in which the governmental system possessed the power to make public policies. Conclusion

In sociological theories, the reasons for the slow formation of modern government are often explained within the framework of futuristic views

and independent of the realities of political geography. Understanding how modern government works from the perspective of political geography should be in relation to the natural and human characteristics of a country. In Iran, before the first Pahlavi regime, understanding the causes of the delayed development of a modern government compared to other societies, especially in Europe, can be attributed to the impact of certain identifiable natural and human characteristics in Iran. In this regard, the way the natural environment of Iran has led to the sustainability of nomadic livelihoods has made independent urban classes less capable of playing a part in shaping the institution of government. Nonetheless, despite being in a position of political power, the nomadic social life model has not been able to form independent social classes in cities and integrate local markets with each other. In this respect, underdevelopment of the division of social labor between agriculture, trade and industry, and the lack of an urban bourgeoisie as a class, have also played a key role in this process and its evolving dynamics.

Furthermore, the ethnic pluralism in the Iranian plateau as well as Iran's competitive geopolitical position meant that individual charismatic leadership was better able to overcome the existing security-political challenges than the functioning of government institutions. As a result, the means of materializing a proper government was never discussed in the political literature emerging in Iran, and the improvement of governments' performance was only sought through the moral advice of the rulers to adhere to social and political justice. Additionally, the active role of the factor of religion in the community also influenced political leaders to always have a sacred and metaphysical position. These reasons rendered it difficult for government to be independent from religion in the political-historical geography of Iran and delayed the process of the formation of bureaucratic governmental institutions.

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