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PERSONAL RULER SHIP IN CONTEMPORARY IRAN A HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY APPROACH TO SOME OBSTACLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY (1921-1941)

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ABSTRACT

This article explores one of the reasons which have prevented the civil society to be grown in contemporary Iran. Since every society has specific history and mutations, in this research, historical sociology approach is used. This approach, explored by many sociologists such as Max Weber, is widely used for understanding social and political structure in various countries and cultures. This article explores one of the main reasons of limitation of civil society in Iran, related to patrimonial culture and personal rulership in pre modern and modern Iran consecutively. In pre modern Iran there wasn't any law and everything referred to patrimonial ruler without having any limitation in power. After the emergence of modern state in Iran, patrimonial type of domination was reborn with a new face. Here it was the personal ruler ship which controlled all social groups and institutions; and civil society was too limited at this time.

Keywords: Historical sociology, Civil society, Modern state, Pre modern Iran, Patrimonialism, personal ruler ship, New patrimonialism, Constitutionalism, Reza shah, Iran.

INTRODUCTION

For understanding and having a better analysis of social and political changes, historical sociology approach is an asset for every political and social researcher. To have a deep analysis on social process, attention to historical distinctiveness is too significant. Historical sociology occupies an ambiguous place between history and sociology, but in fact one of its main concerns is the formation and transformation of modernity. In this respect the orientation of historical sociology concerns with the present, is viewed as both shaped by and shaping the past (Delanty, 2003). For example, "modern western societies are characterized by a differentiation of social space into a

public political sphere of the state and a private economic sphere of ‘civil society’ (Matin, 2007). This separation between private sphere and public sphere is a historical unique feature that is related to Western society. By emergence of capitalism and unique political and economical development in the west this question is aroused: Why the process of political development between Eastern and Western societies was different? It seems the approach of historical sociology would be appropriate to answer this question.

From Aristotle (384-322 BC) to Karl Marx (1818-1883) there was a discussion about differences between Eastern and Western political systems. For example Machiavelli (1469-1527) in his masterpiece “*Prince*” has spoken about differences between kings of France and Ottoman Empire. He explains that because of existence of barons and Lords and independent groups in Europe, governing is too difficult. They hold their positions not by favor of the ruler, but by antiquity of blood. In the West, there is no one in the state regarded as superior. But in the East all people and ministers should obey the kings. So in this system there is no individual security. (Abrahamian, 1974). Two centuries later, David Hume (1711-1776) shows that comparing to the East the West has a milder manner in governing. Besides Montesquieu (1689-1755) and Hegel (1770-1831) refer to the differentiation between Western and Eastern political systems in their works, however they emphasize on cultural features (Abrahamian, 1974).

For Montesquieu in Eastern political system there is no limitation for rulers and kings. In this political system the main reason for obeying is fear. According to Montesquieu in Eastern political system, especially in large empires, there is no law and hierarchy of institutions; and everyone is slave (Montesquieu, 1989). In Hegel ideas, in contrast to the German, there are no classes with their own independent rights and freedom in the East. According to him: “The East knew and to the present day knows only that One is Free; the Greek and the Roman world that some are free; and the German world knows that All are Free” (Abrahamian, 1974). After Hegel, Marx and Engels paid attention to socio-economic structure for explaining cultural and sociological features of political societies in the history. (Abrahamian, 1974). They attended to mode of production in their case studies. Marx theorized pre capitalist Asia by the term, “*Asiatic mode of production*”. Because of two reasons this term was used to describe the differences between Eastern and Western societies: First, the absence of private property and the second the geographical and climatic feature of Asiatic societies made them dependent on irrigation which in turn required centralized planning and leadership, thus increasing the role of the central state in these societies, led to an “oriental despotism” (McLean, 1996).

Karl Wittfogel revived theory of Marx about societies in Asia in his book “*Oriental Despotism*”. According to Wittfogel, oriental societies depended on massive irrigation which had to be centrally planned (McLean, 1996). He emphasized that hydraulic agriculture societies needed organizers and planners, so leadership and his aides had decisive role in accomplishing the major works of hydraulic economy. For managing this type of organization, those who controlled this network

were uniquely prepared to wield supreme political power (Wittfogel, 1967). Thus in these societies state is stronger than society, because state as a manager of hydraulic society wants to control all the body of society and it never lets nongovernmental forces to be independent from this body (Wittfogel, 1967).

Max Weber (1864-1920) another sociologist had studied ancient and modern societies. At the first step he separated feudal society in the West and patrimonial society in the East. He believed in a different kind of political and social domination (Weber, 1978, p.7). He detached the feudal society with property rights and patrimonial society in the Middle East and Asia with maximized arbitrariness law, absence of towns (as an independent zone against state), and state interference in trade (Turner, 1998).

In this preface the writer aims to explain the deep differences between Eastern and Western societies. These differences could explain ‘why the process of development in Western and Eastern societies is different’; so the theory of Max Weber “Historical Sociology” is used for studying some obstacles of civil society in contemporary Iran in *Reza Shah* era (1921-1941).*

Civil Society and the Functions

During two centuries Western societies increased their qualities in social, political, economical and cultural life. In this case, the role of “*civil society*” was significant. Civil Society has many different definitions and there is little agreement on its precise meaning (Anheier and List, 2006).

According to a definition by Cohn and Arato:

“We understand “civil society” as a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication. Modern civil society is created through forms of self constitution and self mobilization. It is institutionalized and generalized through laws, and especially subjective rights, that stabilize social differentiation. While the self creative and institutionalized dimensions can exist separately, in the long term both independent action and institutionalization are necessary for the reproduction of civil society” (Cohen and Arato, 1994).

According to this definition there is a separation among social structures, nongovernmental institutions and political institution. Everyone has separable zone and environment. Sociologists consider some features and functions for civil society, such as:

1. The limitation on state power by civil laws: trying to spread public opinion and create democracy and social freedom;
2. supervision on administrating civil roles as the goal;
3. Effort for civilizing democrat citizens; and defense on human rights;
4. Preventing religious, racist and tribal battles in national territory;

5. The existence of free trade without state interference (a private economic sphere) (Anheier and List, 2006).

So, civil society is related to democracy and democratization and capitalism. It has close relationship with constitutional rule and democratic revolutions which were emerged in Western societies; however its emergence in Eastern societies like Iran faced with some obstacles.

Traditional Type of Domination: Patrimonialism

Max Weber for analyzing legitimate orders paid attention to “the sociological point of view” by purely internal factors (Kalberg, 1994). Weber tried to analyze typology of legitimate domination in three types: legal-rational, Charismatic, traditional or patrimonial. Legal-rational type of domination -according to Weber’s handwritings- is related to Western modern societies. The current type of domination in political system was traditional one. Weber conceptualized traditional society as a continuum in which feudalism and Patrimonialism represent extreme poles. The most primitive form of traditional authority is Patriarchalism** which is the feature of a lord authority over his own household. The administrative staffs of such an association are recruited directly from the extended family of the patriarch. However when it is necessary for the administrative staff to be enlarged and developed, patriarchalism is transformed into Patrimonialism and feudalism which one of them emerged in Western society and another one emerged in the East. However there were some differences between these systems. Reinhard Bendix usefully summarized this distinction in the following terms:

“Feudalism is domination by the few who are skilled in war; Patrimonialism is domination by one who requires officials for the exercise of his authority. A patrimonial ruler is in some measure dependent upon the good will of his subjectsPatrimonialism appeals to the masses against the privileged status groups; not the warrior-hero but 'the good king', the 'father of his people', are its prevailing ideal” (Turner, 1998).

At the first of this essay the author explored some ideas about differences between Western and Eastern societies. The type of legitimate domination in Iran in pre-modern era was Patrimonialism, the features of which according to Weber and his followers are:

1. Political and official system as a private tool is in the hand of patrimonial ruler;
2. There is no separation between public and private space in contrast with Western modern rational bureaucracy;
3. Dependent capitalism is emerged instead of national capitalism;
4. Decision making in this system is related to patrimonial ruler, not official institutions;
5. In this political system, personal relationship can result in better political and social situation;
6. There is an emphasis on military forces as a personal property of patrimonial ruler;

7. There is deep relationship between religion and government for justifying patrimonial domination (Turner, 1998).

According to these features, in this type of domination, patrimonial ruler is at the head of political power and there is no limitation for his arbitrary power. This kind of legitimacy was dominated over centuries in Middle East and especially in Iran before the emergence of modern state.

Pre - Modern Iran: The Qajar* State**

Pre-modern Iran -in nineteenth century- had some features which couldn't be observed in the West. For example, one of them was having an arbitrary state without any active social class and property rights for them. There was no contractual security of title to ownership and no automatic rights of legacy. In such a society the most important form of property is state monopoly of property. Arbitrary rule in Iran could occupy the ownership (Katouzian, 1997). According to Abrahamian:

“In theory, the shah may have claimed monopoly over the means of violence, administration, taxation, and adjudication. His word was law. He appointed and dismissed all officials – from court ministers, governor-generals, and tribal chiefs, all the way down to village and ward head men. He made and unmade all dignitaries, bestowing and withdrawing honors and titles. He even claimed to own all property, treating the country as his own private estate” (Abrahamian, 2008).

Whereas in the West the king is apparently at the peak of the social hierarchic pyramid, the ruler in Iran faces a mass of people who are all equally subjected to his will. The reason for this typically Asiatic phenomenon is the lack of an aristocracy in the proper sense of the term, such as it is found in all Western countries (Hass, 1946). In fact in Europe every social class must have a legal status of its own, and must be hereditary with the qualification ...In other words, actual power is not enough and social privilege as well as hereditary succession should be recognized by law (Bloch, 2005).

In Europe the state was dependent to social classes. In Iran by contrast it was the social classes which were generally dependent on the state. In society of Iran in pre-modern era there was no law. It means there was no limitation on state power. According to these reasons some researchers like H. Katouzian and A. Ashraf believe that because of despotism and lack of immunity of property and domination of state on society, economic and political consistency didn't exist (see Ashraf (1969) and Katouzian (2004). According to Bill (1970) power relation in the traditional Iranian system was very personal. The rate of social mobility was high, and sometimes personalities from lower classes moved into the political elite. Because of personal relationship, organization, associations, and formal institutions were usually lacking and when they did exist, they were poorly organized and technically inefficient (Bill, 1970).

In contrast, in European society in the age of feudalism there were laws which were seemingly never changing. When liberal thinkers attacked to feudal systems they attacked on traditional legal system, not against arbitrary society, because there was no arbitrary society and state in Europe (Katouzian, 1997).

Constitutional movement occurred in Iran in 1906. Economical and ideological impact of the West was one of the main reasons of this movement. The leader of this movement tried to use concept of European law for limiting the state power. They observed free trade and liberal democratic and legal political system in the west and they desired it for Iranian society and its political system. In fact they tried to make a civil society in Iran according to Western civilization structure. In the absence of law and legal political system in Iran, the main wishes of intellectuals was making a court house and having limitation on arbitrary decisions of *shah* (king). Because of lack of law, political leader's behavior in Iran was not predictable. So the base of this revolution was on law, for predictability and equality in power structure. It was the first time in Iranian history that government was 'conditioned'(mashrut) to a set of fundamental laws which defined the limits of executive power, and detailed the rights and obligations of the state and society (katouzian, 2011). After 1906 a parliament (National Assembly) constituted, and representatives were selected by people, assemblies and parties. After collapsing the dynasty of Qajar, *Reza Shah Pahlavi* emerged as the king. At this time Iran entered into modern era. *Reza Shah Pahlavi* established modernization and modern state in Iran. He did great reformations in various dimensions.

Modern State and Its Features

Modern state is emerged at the end of the seventeenth century in Europe. The main feature of this system is that it is made up of sovereign territorial states. In fact the European model of modern state operated by law and specific rules. This kind of state spread in the entire world after colonialism. As a brief the main features of modern state are:

“1. It possesses a definite territory with clear boundaries and defines who may and may not reside in it.

2. It relates to all other institutions in that territory hierarchically, is the superior political agency, and determines the role and power of all subsidiary governments. Its rules, state law, take primacy over all others.

3. It has exclusive control of the territory it claims, that is, 'sovereignty'. No other agency can substantiate a competing claim to rule, whether in whole or in part.

4. It has a monopoly of the means of violence within the territory: the state determines who may possess armed force and sanctions its use.

5. It has exclusive control over the use of external violence: only the state or its agents can make war on other states.
6. States mutually recognize each other and each other's territories.
7. There is a system of uniform and continuous administration throughout the territory of the state.
8. There is separation of the personal affairs of the ruler from those of the state, and separation of the legitimate private business of subjects or citizens from public affairs" (Hirst, 2000).

These features of modern state were outlined by *Max Weber* (1864-1920). He believed "The claim of the modern state to monopolize the use of force is as essential to it as its character of compulsory jurisdiction and of continuous operation" (Weber, 1978, p. 56). He also believes that in modern state the base are bureaucracy and army. Modern bureaucracy is ordered by laws or administrative regulations. In other words bureaucratic acts are limited to official duties, so these duties and authority are distributed in a stable way and are strictly delimited by rules.

Weber believed that Modern army is a bureaucratic army, and officer is a special type of official. Therefore modern army depends on official manner not on a person or personal relationships (Weber, 1978 p.1393).

Neo Patrimonialism, Personal Ruler Ship and Modern State in Iran

In comparing contemporary Western societies with rational- legal political legitimacy, in other countries traditional legitimacy became disintegrated, but legal-rational systems didn't emerge too. So, for better analyzing different types of domination in Eastern countries some scholars pay attention to new kind of domination; which is called Neo Patrimonialism. This type of domination is different from traditional legitimacy in the idea of *Weber*. For example *Roth (1968)* made a separation between traditional Patrimonialism and personal ruler ship. According to Roth:"The basis of loyalties in this type of domination do not require any belief in the ruler's unique personal qualification, but are inextricably linked to material incentives and rewards" (*Roth, 1968*). As a brief, *Roth* believed pre-modern forms of social organization may survive into the modern era even in western industrial societies (*Theobald, 1982*). Neo Patrimonial type of domination has some features:

- The weakness of traditional and legal -rational legitimation
- Appearance of arbitrary rule according to personal ruler ship; favoritism and penetrating clan of ruler and his dynasty and lack of meritocracy
- The prominent role of police and army for using violence for survival of the regime
- The belonging of right of sovereignty to a person; and existence of no law or official status in these regimes.

In Iran during *Reza Shah* Rulership, Neo Patrimonial features emerged, however not at the initial years. Initially *Reza Shah* depended on some social groups like intellectuals and some *Ulama* (Clergymen). So, his Rulership had social base. After the First World War (1918) due to the lack of authority there was a native and endemic chaos in Iran. The intrusion of Russian, Turkish and German forces and active agents in Iran intensified the situation (Katouzian, 2003). Because of chaos and insecurity in Iran, all the political parties and intellectuals even mass of people wished the emergence of somebody who has authority for dominating chaos and turbulence, and accomplishing the programs. For instance the program of *Revival* party included the separation of religion from politics, creation of a well-disciplined army, well administered bureaucracy, ending the economic capitulations, industrialization, replacement of foreign capital by native capital, transformation of nomads into farmers, and the expansion of educational facilities for all (including women). This party who was made up young Western educated individuals such as *Ali Akbar Davar*, *Abdol Hussein Timourdash*, and *Muhammad Tadayon* helped *Reza Shah* to gain power (Abrahamian, 1982). During this era new institutions were founded such as national army, secular educational curriculum, national monetary system; and even the judicial system became secularized (Atabaki and Zurcher, 2004). *Reza Shah* consolidated his power by building and strengthening his support on three elements including the new army, the government bureaucracy, and the court patronage. By these pillars *Reza Shah* established a New Order (Abrahamian, 1982).

At first the government of *Reza Shah* was authoritarian and some social groups supported him. But after some years his ruler ship changed to personal ruler ship or New Patrimonialism. *Reza Shah* made fundamental and deep reforms within the society of Iran. He tried to Europeanized the appearance of its people not by law, but by force (Chehabi, 1993). The surface of constitution and National Assembly was kept, but the power of *Reza Shah* was personal and authoritarian because he could tolerate nobody in his power structure. In this regime the boundary lines between court and state, between personal and the public, became confused to the point of vanishing. So some researchers like Chehabi (1998) analyzed *Reza Shah's* regime as a Neo-patrimonial state and applied this term for *Pahlavi* era (Chehabi, 1998). Without any control on power, *Reza Shah* destroyed or exiled his nearest persons in regime.

Mokhber al-Saltaneh (Hedayat) who was *Reza Shah's* prime minister for more than six years, and was by no means a hostile critic, in his memories wrote about the years beginning in 1929:

“In this period the [parliamentary] immunity of some Majlis deputies – Javad Emami, Esma‘il Araqi, E‘tesamzadeh and Reza Rafi [all of them old pro-*Reza* campaigners] – was withdrawn [and so they went to jail]. The minute anyone so much as mentioned the Shah’s name they would grab him and ask him what he meant. Sometimes they would make up a story for it, and this would help to line up the pockets of agents of the police . . . We have reached the point that the Shah expects to be worshipped” (Katouzian, 2004).

He continued:

“Under [Reza Shah] Pahlavi, no one had any independent power. Every business had to be reported to the Shah, and every order issued by him had to be carried out. Unless there is some degree of independence, responsibility would be meaningless . . . and no statesman would be left with a will of his own” (Katouzian, 2004).

However in constitution rule, the right of assembly, press, parties and voluntary association were acceptable and respectable, but *Reza Shah* restricted all the civil society sections.

The clash of *Reza shah* with social and tribal groups was violent. For example he disintegrated Bakhtiyari^{****} Power in Iran in 1921-1934. However Iranian nationalists insisted on a unit sovereignty and independency against foreign powers (specifically Russia and Britannia), but the act of *Reza shah's* army against tribal groups like Bakhtiyari was too violent. In fact *Reza Shah*, like his predecessors in Qajar time, destroyed the social and economic foundation of nomadic tribes by force (Ward, 2009).

The essence of personal Rulership, as the writer said, couldn't tolerate the civil society and independent groups, because the main function of civil society is to impose restriction on state power. State power in New Patrimonial state like Iran during Reza Shah Era (1921-1941) was personal and arbitrary. In this situation *Reza Shah* as a personal ruler tried to control social classes and ethnic opposition; therefore in this type of domination civil society was restricted and limited. As a brief, contrary to the western modern state, in Iran, army and bureaucracy were as instruments in the hand of *Reza Shah* for dominating the social groups, tribes, and civil society independent institutions. There was no official rule, but there was personal rulership. *Reza Shah's* government showed high degree of independency from civil society: no person or class of people was able to claim any right. This is the structural- historical feature of Iranian society (Katouzian, 2003A). In fact the weakness of Reza Shah's government was in lacking any popular and legal legitimacy and one of the main reasons of his collapse in 1941 was the absence of this popular- legal legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

In a historical sociological approach there is a difference between Eastern political system and the Western ones. The writer reviewed some sociologists' ideas from Machiavelli to Karl Marx, Max Weber and his followers such as Roth and Turner. In this study the focus was on Max Weber's and his followers' (like Roth) typology of domination and legitimacy, specifically Patrimonialism, New Patrimonialism and personal ruler ship. In pre modern Iran there was not any rule and law so no region could grow outside the state with arbitrary ruler. After constitutional revolution and emergence of parliament for restricting the act of state, *Reza Shah Pahlavi* emerged as a ruler (1921). Reza Shah founded the modern state in Iran and extended its features. However in Western societies there was a high level of accountability of modern state, but in Iran this feature couldn't be seen. At first Reza Shah depended on some intellectuals and social groups, but after some years

he deleted all his rivals who supported and helped him to gain power. *Reza Shah* as a personal ruler controlled all social groups like intellectuals, representatives and other civil society's assemblies, even the parliament and judiciary system. In this situation civil society was so limited and the personal security was destroyed. So the feebleness of Reza Shah's government was in lacking the popular and legal legitimacy and it could be mentioned as the main cause of Reza Shah's collapse in 1941.

Notes:

*Another influential representatives in Historical Sociology are Marxian and Annals traditions (developed by Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein). Furthermore some sociologists such as Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) on one hand and some philosophers of history like Vico and George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) on the other hand had deep influence on Historical Sociology.

**Patriarchalism means the authority of the father, the husband, the senior of the house, or the elder sib over the members of the household and other sibs; the rule of the master and patron over bondsmen, serfs, freed men; or the lord over the domestic servants and household officials; of the prince over house- and court-officials, nobles of office, clients, vassals; of the patrimonial lord and sovereign prince over the 'subjects' (Gerard Delanty (2003) Handbook of Historical Sociology, London, Sage: p.347).

*** Qajars, was a Turkic-speaking tribal confederation, conquered the country (Iran) piece by piece in the 1780–90s, established their capital in Tehran in 1786, founded their dynasty in 1796, and proceeded to reign for more than a century.

**** Bakhtiyari, is one of the major tribes in contemporary Iran. They had influence on political power in pre-modern Iran.

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