**Tradition and Modernity: Reflection on the historiography of transformation and change in Modern Iran**

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**Abstract**

The history of non-Western countries in the last two centuries is perceived as, and marked by, antagonism between tradition and modernity. After a critical survey of a sample of the current historiography and by focusing on the Iranian case of modernisation, this essay contends that since the colonial period, modernity has been perceived and applied differently in the West to many non-Western countries: In the West, modernity is made of a process of evolution and transformation of society and politics. In non-Western countries, on the other hand, modernity is “imported” rather than associated with a process of transformation and modernisation of local resources. I argue that this is mainly a consequence of the colonial period, which has deeply marked history and society to such an extent that both modernists and traditionalists share a common historical perspective: antagonism between modernity and tradition. Inspired by “constructivist” approach, the essay provides a different reading of history where modernisation is a historical process in which both tradition and modernity are involved, with local resources playing a key role in the insemination, implementation and adaptation of new ideas and institutions. By drawing on a selection of case studies in Iran, it demonstrates how the practice of “modernisation” in non-Western countries is informed by the above-mentioned perception of modernity and why and how the history of modernisation should be rewritten.

“If I explain that revolutions attempt to abolish the past but cannot do so, I again run the risk of being taken for a reactionary. This is because for the moderns – as for their antimodern enemies, as well as for their false postmodern enemies – time's arrow is unambiguous: one can go forward, but then one must break with the past; one can choose to go backward, but then one has to break with the modernizing avant-gardes, which have broken radically with their own past. This diktat organized modern thought until the last few years – without, of course, having any effect on the practice of mediation, a practice that has always mixed up epochs, genres, and ideas as heterogeneous as those of the premoderns.”

 Bruno Latour, *We have never been modern,* p. 69.

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On 15 January 1810, at a dinner in Downing Street organised by the Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval, where men and women sat together, Mrs Perceval talked to Mirzâ Abolhassan-Khan-e Ilchi (ambassador), the first ambassador of the Qâjâr Shah to the West, in the following terms: “I see that you are surprised to find men and women eating together. But be fair! Is not our custom better than yours, which keeps a woman hidden behind the veils?” The Ilchi admitted that it was “better indeed,”[[1]](#footnote-1) thereby going against both the advice of Islam, that wanted women “veiled, with downcast eyes” and against the dominant practice, amongst the nobility in Persia to which he belonged, of gender segregation.[[2]](#footnote-2) However trifling the issue of mixed male-female society might appear in the context of the Ilchi’s diplomatic mission in England, it matters, because it heralds a new era in the history of Iran in which, according to Afsaneh Najmabadi, a process of heteronormalisation or heterosocialisation of public space as the landmark of modernisation, took place.[[3]](#footnote-3) Indeed, heterosocialisation of public space would, in time, become the symbol of “modernity” and a major step in “modernisation” under the Pahlavi dynasty.[[4]](#footnote-4) The ambassador’s expression of preference for a mixed party over the seclusion of women might have stemmed from his masculine drive but this was not the only thing that prompted his preference for what he saw in England. Throughout his journey, from the very first moment he landed in Plymouth, whatever he observed seemed to him better than Persia, with its: “Straight streets without twist or turn, smooth as marble, with houses of four and five storeys, all alike”.[[5]](#footnote-5) Carlton House in London was “marvellous (…), with a garden to compare with the Garden of Eden”.[[6]](#footnote-6) The new machines to improve productivity and lower cost in agriculture helped the Ilchi to realise how the techniques used at home in exploiting the soil were primitive and outdated.[[7]](#footnote-7) The political system in England also drew his attention: he noted that the powers of the English King were limited, in contrast to the Shah’s unlimited power in Iran,[[8]](#footnote-8) so that: “even in the event of the war the King may not act alone but must consult his councillors and subjects.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

The extent of the gap he observed between Persia and England in every corner of life was the subject of his diary, *hayrat-nâma* (The Book of Wonders). These wonders made him conscious of how different (if not, backward) Persia was, compared to Britain. This experience made the Ilchi look at his country with alerted eyes. It is not hard to imagine how, in the eyes of the Ilchi, imperial Persian power and its universal model crumbled and the Western model became a reference instead.

**“Modernisation” as state project and as a social process**

Whatever ideas the Ilchi formed of differences that he perceived between England and Persia during his visit, his experience was reflected, shortly afterwards, in the first “modernisation” to date under the Qajars, namely the creation of an army called the “*nezâm-e jadid*” ( modern army) based on the British military in the second decade of the nineteenth century. This “modernisation” consisted in creating a “modern” army division but without undertaking any reform in the (traditional) infrastructure of the country. This type of modernisation continued to be implemented throughout the century, and the political subjectivity that arose from this historical experience is behind a perception, in which modernisation is the adoption of a Western model without involving any local factors or resources. Even those who believed that modernisation has become “a native movement [in Islamic countries]” were convinced that its standards are set by Western society and history.[[10]](#footnote-10) In this essay, on the other hand, modernisation is understood as an integrative process that involves the interaction of all existing social and cultural components and actors in society. I mean a “historical dialectic” and negotiation between what we call tradition and what we perceive as modern. This is, in fact, a process of “modernisation” and “change” that according to all evidence took place in England and there is no reason to suppose that any change or transformation in other countries was “essentially” different. However, the staggering difference between Persia and Britain in the early nineteenth century, observed by the Persian elites who had already been experiencing the trauma of defeat from Russian forces in their own country, instilled an idea of modernity in Persia that contrasted with “tradition”. As a result, they set aside the local system instead of trying to transform it. At the same time, this went hand in hand with the fact that any transformation of internal resources could be detrimental to their established power. We are therefore facing two perceptions of modernity: one for the West, and the other for non-Western countries. Modernity for the West represented the outcome of developments that had taken place over decades and centuries, whilst Western scholars, such as von Grunebaum and Gibb, found that Islam lacked dialectical potentials to transform. If such a verdict was based on both their Weberian approach and Orientalist perspective,[[11]](#footnote-11) for the Iranian elite of the early nineteenth century, modernity, for practical rather than any theoretical reasons, was an off-the-shelve product and not the “modernisation” process itself.

In the pre-modern period, the term “tradition”, in the modern sense did not exist. It is the creation of “modernity”.[[12]](#footnote-12) Prior to the nineteenth century, distinctions between the old and the new might be made but not in terms of ‘progress’ and change. In most scholarly texts, the opinions and knowledge of the previous scholars were referred to as *moteqaddemin* (those who came before/first) as opposed to the *mote’akherin* (the more recent scholarship). Unlike the ‘celebrated *querelle des anciens et des nouveaux*’ under the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment,[[13]](#footnote-13) there was no meaningful opposition between the old and the new. The old/new dichotomy referred to epochal distinction between two ideas or things and not to their difference in terms of content. When conceptual differences were acknowledged, an attempt was made to reconcile, if not combine them, since they were perceived as complementary and not contradictory. In the nineteenth century, combination of the old and the new was still the dominant form of scholarship in Iran. A perfect scholar was the one who knew both traditional and modern science. However, this combination provided conditions for negotiation between the two, leading to a new form of relationship between the traditional and the modern that, as we will see later, has been ignored by the “modernist” historiography that, as B. Latour argues, invented the idea of “radical revolution to explain the miraculous emergence of new things.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

In most studies of modernisation, attempts are made to situate where and when the major changes occurred and modern society appeared. These major changes can be regrouped into two kinds: change in ideas or discourses and change in social, political and economic practices.[[15]](#footnote-15) Their occurrences are situated in different periods, from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries, with radical developments, such as the industrial revolution and the French (amongst others) Revolution; the rise of subjectivity; secularisation; the introduction of democracy; the end of empires and the creation of nation-states.[[16]](#footnote-16) The present essay is not concerned with the question of where and when modernity occurred but with how it did occur. The timeframe of this study is what in Iran is conventionally known as the modern period, namely from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, although Iran did come into contact with aspects of modernity under the Safavid Empire, which, according to Amanat, was “very much part of the process that transformed the world (…) marked by new religious impulses, broadened geographical horizons (…) technological breakthrough and new thinking about humanities.”[[17]](#footnote-17) This resulted from the integration of the empire into the global network of international trade dominated by the rising European powers.[[18]](#footnote-18)

There is a wealth of scholarly work on the definition of the modern, modernisation, modernity and change.[[19]](#footnote-19) The approach here is to examine modernisation as continuum throughout which both institutional and intellectual transformations took place or are taking place. As R. Bendix indicates, “no society is without some elements from both ends of the continuum, leading some writers to use phrases such as ‘the modernity of tradition’ or ‘the tradition of the new’”.[[20]](#footnote-20) Accordingly, in this essay, the focus is on “modernisation as a process”, which is not synonymous with modernity (which is a condition). Using the terms of Shilliam, quoting Habermas,[[21]](#footnote-21) we might say that the modern is “temporally” distinct from the tradition but “geoculturally” the modern and the tradition are parts of a continuum that harbours an interactive relation between the two. In reality, isolating modern and traditional is not feasible because the modern emerges within the dynamics of the tradition and therefore, bears marks of the tradition. The claim I make in this essay is that an approach like this is absent – or at least has not been duly employed – in the literature relating to modernisation in non-Western countries and Iran in particular.

Even for scholars, such as S. N. Eisenstadt, who do not subscribe to the classical modern-tradition dichotomy, the idea of inherent continuum and transformation of social, ideological or intellectual factors is absent. Eisenstadt, who opposed to the “homogenising and hegemonic assumptions of Western modernity”,[[22]](#footnote-22) does not seem to be concerned with the internal process of modernisation either in Western or in in non-Western societies. Instead, he tends to see modernisation as the outcome of tension between traditional and modern sectors of society, which suggests distinction and antagonism between the traditional and the modern.[[23]](#footnote-23) Transformation would take place through centre-periphery, or intercultural relationships, with the reconstruction of new identities and new modernities. In the case of India, he refers to the study by S. Kaviraj, which discusses transformation caused by the combined impact of historical traditions and the ways in which they become incorporated into the new world system. However, Eisenstadt stops short of discussing further similar cases.[[24]](#footnote-24) He elaborates instead on contemporary religious movements, including the fundamentalists, finding them similar to the earlier reformist religious movements (in Europe). In this case, he argues that their “reform” consists in “intensive selective denial of some of the premises of modernity and their confrontational attitude to the West, indeed anything conceived as Western, seeking to appropriate modernity and the global system on their own, often anti-Western, terms. Their confrontation with the West does (…) take the form of wishing to appropriate the new international global scene and the modernity for themselves, celebrating their traditions and ‘civilisations’”.[[25]](#footnote-25) In any case, Eisenstadt does not examine whether the religious movements in question undergo internal change and transformation as a result of this “appropriation” and “adoption”.

For modernisation in Islamic countries, Sami Zubaida points to the co-existence of modern and tradition, where the “modernist” governments parties, such as the Wafd party and then the Nasser government in Egypt, that Zubaida calls them “the ideological class par excellence”, endeavoured to use the traditional groups or institutions to implement their reform projects, such as mobilising the tribes in the movement for independence or in parliamentary elections.[[26]](#footnote-26) However, the elite based their project on the Western blueprint and the mobilisation of the tribal groups was an instrument to achieve their political agenda in the first place. What Zubaida fails to explore is whether, the Egyptian elites by employing the traditional and local resources and institutions also meant to transform and modernise those institutions and, more importantly, the extent to which the mobilisation of local resources for a modern project had an impact on, and transformed, those resources. The approach this paper suggests is to describe the conditions within which any kind of change has taken place and how these conditions informed the way these changes, or the so-called “modernisation” processes, operated. I argue that before the introduction of the idea of “modernity” (*tajaddod*), the general pattern was that any change or transformation was both empowered and conditioned by its internal dynamics, involving the relationships between various objects and ideas, which are nowadays considered contradictory, between modern and traditional, Iranian and Western. Such processes have been at work in different periods and countries but as G. Prakash, who calls them “the oppressed’s lived experience”, says, they have been ignored and the “subjectivity” and “agency” of those involved stolen or denied.[[27]](#footnote-27)

As indicated above, the distinction between the *moteghaddemin* (previous or earlier scholarship) and the *mote’akherin* (recent or modern scholarship) that was still current in nineteenth-century Iran, does not imply a process of progress from the old to the new but refers to two different sources of knowledge. It was with the introduction of Western science and the idea of ‘progress’ that the term *‘olum-e jadid* (modern sciences) appears for good in political and educational jargon and subsequently in historiography. Whilst in previous centuries, the old and the new in scholarship were deemed complementary, from the latter part of the nineteenth century marked by the idea of “progress”, *taraqqi*, and “modernity”, *tajaddod*, the division between *qadim* (old) and *jadid* (modern) implied antagonism between the two, with a growing preference for the ‘modern’ to the detriment of the ‘old’. The dramatic encounter with the West in the nineteenth century gave a political and ideological undertone to this antagonism that has characterised Iranian history ever since.

**Historical and historiographical contexts**

What did happen in the nineteenth century that it is seen as a watershed demarcating the modern from the pre-modern or medieval period? If we subscribe to Hegelian “freedom of subjectivity”[[28]](#footnote-28) as a landmark in history that heralds “modernity”, we might say that this “subjectivity” or socio-political “consciousness” in Iran appeared when the elites became aware of the state of society as a result of continuous defeats they suffered from rising Western powers. That which prompted Iranian elites to reflect on their history was pressure from an outside factor, namely Western influence. It was in reaction to the Russian expansionism in the Transcaucasia in the first place that the Iranian elite came to think that the creation of a modern army on the Western model would both enable them to resist foreign intervention and strengthen their authority inside the country over the local tribal chiefs,[[29]](#footnote-29) no matter if the objective could not be achieved given the limited extent of the military modernisation. What prompted modernisation was an external factor and not internal development, such as change in land ownership, or a change in the taxation system, leading to a change in financing the standing army; or reform in the relationship between the central state and provincial governments, and in the allegiance of troops to a central commandment rather than to tribal chiefs. Instead, the modern army was conceived and financed by foreign powers and supplied by expensive western weapons that were a heavy burden on the finances of the government.

In order to better grasp the nature and significance of this experience in Iran we might contrast it to the profound social changes that took place in France prior, and leading, to the 1789 Revolution. It appeared surprising to Tocqueville that the Revolution, which was going to abolish all the institutions of the ancient regime, appeared in regions where such institutions were weak. It did not happen in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century where serfdom was in full operation and peasants were bound to the land and could not leave it without permission of their lords. It happened in France, where, for quite a long time, peasants were not only not tied to the land but could also acquire properties; and where large estates were divided, in one way or the other, into many small properties. In fact, the Revolution happened because the land system had already been thus transformed. In other words, Tocqueville finds the genesis of the revolution in the very texture of society and economy or in the way “villages were administered before 1789.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

If, in the West, socio-political, economic and intellectual conditions informed the emergence of so-called “modernity”, in Iran the encounter with the West brought about a new “condition”, characterised by Western supremacy and the subsequent power relationship that decided the economics of modernisation. Such a condition was constitutive in the Western/Iranian or modern/traditional dichotomy, even though seeds of the tradition impregnated the “modern” item of this dichotomy, whether in the military, administration, or education. From now on, “modern” economy, science, politics, and so forth, in Iran, unlike in the West, did not arise from the development of the existing economy, science, and education, but were imported items or were perceived as “imported”. Western science, technology, and institutions were deemed too superior to non-Western science and knowledge to leave any scope for exchange or interaction. Amin Banani, maintaining that interaction of cultures is not a modern phenomenon and that societies influenced each other throughout history, concludes, however, that: “what is peculiar of our time is not the fusion of cultures (…) or the interplay of civilizations, but of the impact of the West on the rest of the world”.[[31]](#footnote-31) It is to respond to this paradigmatic dichotomy rooted in colonialism that the movement of knowledge indigenisation took shape.[[32]](#footnote-32) In this movement, globalisation is perceived as the outcome and instrument of the supremacy of Western values, ideas and methodology and not as a network phenomenon with horizontal rather than vertical relations between its components. Although the advocates of knowledge indigenisation find legitimate “constructive” adoption and integration of Western sciences that informs modernisation of local resources, they still view Western sciences as inherently eurocentrist; and they view the “Western social scientists as children of the Enlightenment” whom they want to confront by creating their own “home grown rereading of sciences to redefine a separate path to development (…)”.[[33]](#footnote-33) The problem here is that despite the idea of a “constructive” approach to the modernisation of knowledge, the proponents of knowledge indigenisation ignore the fact that the “network” system that makes “constructive adoption” possible, does not operate on the basis of a centre-periphery, or a Western-non-Western dichotomy.

In the West, the great revolutions did not necessarily represent a break with the past. They resulted from a conceptual development that entailed a process of evolution involving elements of the past or tradition. In the American Revolution, for instance, those who fought for it were loath to make a radical departure from the past and the emphasis in revolutionary rhetoric “was on the desire to conserve the previous achievements of the past”.[[34]](#footnote-34) Likewise, the opposition of Edmund Burke to the French Revolution was premised on the idea that “the society and the government is built on what has preceded it, that the Estates had already carried over the seeds of a ‘representative’ government.”[[35]](#footnote-35) Most scholars in their studies of Western history, society and politics always discuss and describe a link between the old and the new or traditional and modern orders.[[36]](#footnote-36) Even those who emphasise a break between the two, discuss this within the framework of a continuum, a common backdrop that relates them in one way or the other, be it in the form of a “narrative” (McIntyre), a “unified experience” (Taylor), or a linear development that cuts through cyclical patterns of history (Arednt).[[37]](#footnote-37) On the rise of the nation-state, to give another example, Hardt and Negri argue that the concept of “nation” in Europe developed in the terrain of the patrimonial and absolutist state: “the modern concept of nation thus inherited the patrimonial body of the monarchic state and reinvented it in a new form”.[[38]](#footnote-38) Modernity was born within the matrix of the medieval society: in politics, “humanity reappropriated (…) what medieval transcendence had taken away from it”, namely that the church became a multitude of the faithful, “meaning that it is not superior to and distinct from the community of Christians but immanent to that community”[[39]](#footnote-39). Such a historiographical perspective has not been applied or even deemed possible in studying the evolution of society and politics in Iran. For example, Homa Katouzian excludes any concept of continuity (and as a consequence, evolution) in his study of the history of Iran. This is, according to him, due to the inherent antagonism between the state and society, which has led to cyclical and repetitive changes without any meaningful relation between them. Even the overarching “pre-Islamic” and “Islamic” cultural [or perhaps civilizational] backgrounds to which Katouzian refers, are not seen as a factor in bringing harmony between state and society or different parts of the society. Katouzian rightly distinguishes between “arbitrary rule” that characterises the Iranian political class, and absolutism (or despotism) that distinguished European states before modern times.[[40]](#footnote-40) However, he not only fails to see any relation between the unification of the kingdom based on the patrimonial system before the twentieth century and the creation of the nation-state, he also fails to explain how the arbitrary rule of the Shah in the twentieth century becomes a mixture of arbitrary and absolutist, even though he admits that at some stages Mohammad Reza Shah became either absolutist or both arbitrary and absolutist.[[41]](#footnote-41)

In the history of modern Iran coinciding with the increasing Western influence from the second part of the nineteenth century onwards, anything modern is construed as of Western origin and not the consequence of a process of evolution in society. This concept of modernity imbued with the idea of contrast between the modern (identified with the West) and the traditional (associated with the local) had a long lasting impact on projects of modernisation and also on the historiography of modernisation in Iran. That is why historians often discuss modernity and modern ideas or institutions in isolation from existing social norms, structure, organisations, economic system and culture.[[42]](#footnote-42)

A large number of scholarly works have described, analysed, and scrutinised modernity and modernisation in Iran.[[43]](#footnote-43) None of these sources, however, discusses the mechanism of modernisation that involves the engagement of traditional resources from intellectual and / or institutional points of view. Although some authors recognise a conceptual and/or societal link between tradition and modernity, they do not duly examine how traditional society or individuals engaged with modernisation.[[44]](#footnote-44) In an interesting study on the emergence of modern astronomy in nineteenth-century Iran, Kamran Arjomand discusses the transition from astrology to astronomy in terms of modern versus traditional concepts. This article, however, does not explain how both traditionalists and modernists endeavoured to make sense of theoretical developments. This is omitted even in the case of Mirzâ Mohammad Vali who despite his insistence on the Ptolemaic system acknowledged its weaknesses while recognising the virtues of the Copernican system.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Asghar Fathi discusses social aspect of relationships between tradition and modernity by examining the role of (marginal) traditionalist individuals in the modernisation process claiming that their traditional legitimacy worked as an engine to gather social support for change. Taking the case of the Constitutional Revolution of 1907 in Iran, he argues how the motivation of traditional authorities, such as Sardâr As‘ad Bakhtiyâri, informed by their projects and ideas of reform combined with their traditional legitimacy, worked as an engine for socio-political movements and for implementing changes. However, Fathi does not explain whether or how these authorities bridged the conceptual gap between tradition and their modern ideas to persuade their followers even though the institutional and material conditions rooted in tribalism realised by the Bakhtiyâris contributed to the triumph of the Constitution. In fact, Fathi specifies that the role of the traditional elite in modernisation was not based on the intellectual persuasion of their followers. Indeed, most followers adhered to new ideas because they obeyed their leaders due to their traditional legitimacy and not their ideas.[[46]](#footnote-46) In support of his argument, Fathi refers to Sardâr As‘ad Bakhtiyâri, who commanded the Bakhtiyâri tribesmen “in the attack on the capital Tehran and helped the restoration of the Constitutional government in July 1909, a move due to his modernist ideas, as he frequently visited Europe and was in contact with the intellectuals and exiled leaders of the Constitutional movement in Paris.”[[47]](#footnote-47)

Ali Mirsepassi adopts quite a similar approach to discuss the current “democratic” movement in Iran. This movement for Mirsepassi is not based on Western value but is the outcome of interactions between various local factors, including traditional ones. He rightly rejects the “essentialist” perspective that finds an epistemic rupture between tradition and the modern, between Western and Iranian, or secular and religious. He seeks the roots of the movement in the “political tradition of peaceful mass mobilisation” that was at work during the Tobacco Movement in 1891, the Constitutional Revolution of 1907, the Oil Nationalisation in 1953 and the 1979 Revolution, in which activists of all persuasions took part.[[48]](#footnote-48) Inspired by Marshall Berman’s sociological – as opposed to epistemological – approach, Mirsepassi’s analysis and critique of modernity is mainly based on the institutional, the material and “every day” life.[[49]](#footnote-49) There are two issues with Mirsepassi’s analysis of modernity. The first is that although he adheres to the idea of multiple or local modernities, “modernity” remains for him a principle, an essence with no clear root in history: “(…) the current struggles in the non-Western world are for the heart and soul of modernity. Yet, for modernity to survive, it must recognise its own inner capacity for flexibility and creativity”.[[50]](#footnote-50) Furthermore, whilst he rejects epistemological break in history he overlooks conceptual transformation in the light of (or possibly because of) his focus on the institutional matrix in the study of “modernity”.

In his *Recasting Iranian Modernity*, Kamran Matin provides a critical analysis of eurocentrism that has informed the history of modernisation. He finds that the theoretical origin of such perception lies in what he terms the “singular ontology” of the social and “unilinear universalism” that can also be seen in the works of Karl Marx, and Max Weber. Following his project of incorporating international relations into social theory and inspired by Trotsky’s idea of “uneven and combined development”, Matin proposes “interactive and multilinear development involving external and internal products” that is based on what he calls “ontologically plural conception of society”.[[51]](#footnote-51) However, “because of the unevenness”, Matin continues, “a society can, and almost always does, adopt and adapt other societies’ products without undergoing the developmental processes from which these products had originated in their host societies.”[[52]](#footnote-52) He does not explain what the pattern or process of development would be, other than adoption of external products. In fact, this question is not posed at all and becomes irrelevant because, following Trotsky, the “backward” non-Western countries, have no other solution than the “adoption of whatever is ready in advance of any specified date, skipping a whole series of intermediate stages.”[[53]](#footnote-53) Furthermore, this contradicts the definition of “plural ontology that posits relationships and processes between and within societies as mutually constitutive and development as intrinsically interactive and multilinear”.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Timur Kuran discusses the institutional and legal conditions that underpinned underdevelopment in the Islamic countries, including early and late institutional features in Islam such as inheritance law, apostasy, waqf, Islamic law for partnership, and so on. According to this author, the economic failure caused by these factors in turn generated inward-looking ideologies like Islamism that tends to limit adaptation. He consents, however, that despite these historical factors Muslim societies in the modern period have adopted or transplanted modern institutions, such as banks, corporations, commercial courts and so forth. The question is then why still these societies lag behind the West? His answer is that the same institutional issues that inhibited economic and political development in the Middle East before the nineteenth century, have persisted causing these societies to adapt the Western institutions only incompletely, whilst their lack of cultural and intellectual understanding of these modern institutions cause that the latter become dysfunctional. Even though Kuran touches upon the necessity of accompanying transplantation of modern institutions with accepting “historical baggage” that created those innovations and refers to the “indigenous” modernisation, he does not dwell further and insists instead on the concept of transplantation of modern institution and not on the transformation of local factors.[[55]](#footnote-55) Elsewhere, Kuran talks about “fundamental reform” in the Islamic countries in the nineteenth century in the sense that the elite proceeded to “selective” adaptation of Western institutions to adapt the local conditions: “Various Turkish, Arab and Iranian reformers” tried to “adjust transplanted institutions to local circumstances”.[[56]](#footnote-56) Kuran, however, stops short of delving into any internal transformation or “indigenous modernisation” subsequent to this purposeful and “selective” adaptation of Western institutions.

Even in the case of new ideas or institutions that are “transplanted” rather than generated from an internal dynamic (social or intellectual), their assimilation cannot be realised without intellectual debate and material readjustment. Intellectual engagement, taking the form of dialectical process, can take place during the transfer of knowledge involving mere translation or re-adaptation of knowledge in a local context, or the creation of new understanding, new knowledge. Even contemporary sociologists, like Alexis de Tocqueville, who were in favour of colonial domination, believed that the French colonial government in nineteenth-century Algeria should “learn” local custom and avoid destroying and “substituting” or “imposing” in their place the French administration.[[57]](#footnote-57) Tocqueville believed that “In Algeria as elsewhere, the main duty of a new government is not to create what does not exist, but to use what does”.[[58]](#footnote-58) In fact, he recommended that unlike exclusivism and prejudice characteristics of the Arabs, the “enlightened” Europe should “establish a lasting bond between them and in the end form from these two races a single people”. In fact, Tocqueville provides a relevant case history to feed into Habermas concept of “intersubjectivity” in bourgeois democracy.[[59]](#footnote-59) The Europeans proved to be more open to the local knowledge in the field of science and economy. The British colonisers in India, for example, endeavoured to learn from local expertise, whenever appropriate, and did not systematically reject offhand whatever was local and found sometimes more intellectual affinity with the local doctors than with their counterparts in the metropolis.[[60]](#footnote-60) This would call into question the “conventional view that modern medicine was something exported *to* the colonies.”[[61]](#footnote-61) In fact, considering that colonialism was realised only in relationship with the rest of the (colonised) world by draining both material, money and human resources,[[62]](#footnote-62) the industrialisation and development of capitalism that derived from it cannot be a *one way* process but is the result of exchange.[[63]](#footnote-63)

There are, however, some exceptions to the above historiographical view. For one, Byron J. Good, rejecting the diffusionist approach of modern historiography based on the superiority of the Western or cosmopolitan medicine and health care system and its transfer to non-Western countries, analyses “the relationship between changes in Iranian health care and political and socioeconomic transformations”.[[64]](#footnote-64) Likewise, Mangol Bayat-Philipp provides a historical account of reform in nineteenth-century Iran that was inspired by both Enlightenment ideas in the West and the tradition of Shiite mystic-religious thought, illustrated in Ibn Arabi and Mulla Sadra’s works, according to which religion is revealed progressively in line with the development of mankind.[[65]](#footnote-65) According to Mulla Sadra’s theory of *harekat-e jowhariyyeh* (substantive movement), existence cannot be static and movement occurs in the very substance as well as the quality of things.[[66]](#footnote-66) Nevertheless, Bayat-Philipp’s analysis of the relation between the modernist movement and Sufi or mystic thought is ambiguous in that on the one hand she states that the reformist intellectuals were inspired by the theory of “substantive movement” of the Sufis or Urafâ, and on the other hand, she considers that they referred to this religio-mystic tradition out of convenience: “ … given the socioreligious climate of the time, and considering the fact that, with the exception of Malkam Khan, all of those secular thinkers were first brought up in the traditional Shi’i schools of thought, it is only natural that these men, including Jamal al Din Afghani, Mostashar od-Dowleh, Talebzadeh, Malkam Khan, and Mirza Agha Khan Kermani, either thought to accommodate Western ideas to Islam and/or called for religious reform”.[[67]](#footnote-67) In her earlier work, written shortly before the 1979 Revolution, Bayat-Philipp also finds that those who referred to Islam to defend the constitution or nationalism, were either free thinkers or used Islam as a: “cloak to cover their secularist ideas”, like Seyyed Jamal al-Din Afghani. At best, she found they were influenced by secularist ideas, like Mohammad Hossein Na’ini.[[68]](#footnote-68) This analysis suggests that this author does not see a conceptual familiarity between the theory of change and evolution in the tradition of mysticism, and social and intellectual development in the nineteenth century that would have triggered the reformists’ projects.[[69]](#footnote-69)

According to some scholars, the concept of “subjectivity” that for Kant and Hegel constitutes the foundation of modernity is not exclusive to the West and can also be found in Islamic culture and religion, for instance in mysticism and in faith (*imân*).[[70]](#footnote-70) The process of subjectivity in modern Iran, however, as stated by Farzin Vahdat, took on two contradictory trends: one, represented by Shariati and Sorush, tends towards liberalism, human rights and civil society, and the other, represented by Fardid and Dâvar, negates the independence of the individual and asserts its submission to the absolute power derived from God.[[71]](#footnote-71) The case study of Haeri Yazdi’s discourse of modernity, examined by Vahdat, provides a clearer dialectical relation between tradition and modernity, as demonstrated in the discussion of Haeri’s un-interrupted link between speculative philosophy (knowledge) and practical philosophy (ethics), between sovereignty and subjectivity, or between the *is* and the *ought to be.*[[72]](#footnote-72)

Likewise, in a recent monograph on domesticity and consumer culture in Iran, Pamela Karimi, by focusing on material culture and objects used in everyday life, examines how family structure and man-woman relationships changed as a result of the introduction of modern architecture in housing. Indeed, this work provides insights into how family life and structure and social relationships were transformed as a result of the introduction of modern/Western institutions and technology, and as the subtitles indicates, it talks about the “internal revolutions of the modern era”. The object of study, namely family and household instead of government and socio-political institutions, tells us much about an approach that can be promising in the way modernity is seen through little objects used in everyday life, rather than through political or ideological transformations.[[73]](#footnote-73) Nonetheless, elements of classical vision persists in this work, when, alongside modernisation in the form of a combination of Iranian and Western models,[[74]](#footnote-74) it also refers to the transformation as being a result of the replacement of traditional housing with Western models.[[75]](#footnote-75)

A reference to C. Gluck’s definition of “blended modernity” might better illustrate the perception of modernity, with its two major characteristic features, namely the transformation and evolution of the local and the traditional within the context of their functional relations to the existing context, which I try to expose in this essay. Gluck believes that we cannot avoid modernity because it is a commonality and there is no set model, for example, Western. Modernity is a co-production in the sense that each society has its own recipe and its own ingredients for modernity, which he terms: “blended modernity”. The process of blending is also a historical process, informed by factors of different natures or by a combination of them: economic, technological, political, and so forth. Blended modernity is thus improvised and created.[[76]](#footnote-76) What, however, is missing in this definition is the element of the evolution and transformation of the local components of the “blended modernity”. Gluck even uses the term juxtaposition, which does not necessarily confer the idea of “transformation”.[[77]](#footnote-77) Last, but not least, the concept of Empire, as analysed and described by Hardt and Negri, that involved the three processes of decolonization, decentering and disciplinarity, can provide both a theoretical framework and a historical reference through which we can see how local and traditional resources are absorbed by the network of transnational flow of capital. In such a concept of Empire, “positing a regime that effectively encompasses the spatial totality”, where power is no longer concentrated by one imperialist “nation-state” but decentered and distributed in networks; traditional and modern, Iranian and Western are free to communicate, form and reform, construct and reconstruct.[[78]](#footnote-78) Inspired by this model, Hamid Dabashi provides a new reading of the Arab Spring revolution, seeing it as part of the translational movements that also included the Green Movement in Iran; revolutions that are open-ended rather than conclusive but require a new “moral map” that discards the colonial concoction and in which the ‘Islam and the West’ binary has no place. They also reject the existing regime of knowledge production “conducive to domination, namely ‘the West over the East’”, illustrated in the revolutionary catchword, *Sha’b Yurid Isqat al-Nizam* (People Demand the Overthrow of the Regime).[[79]](#footnote-79)

The following pages will attempt to provide an account of modernity in which the historical process of transformation operates through constructive relations between internal and external factors. This is an approach, which, instead of creating a causal relation between Western influence and local transformation, sees them “increasingly intermeshed,” using the terms of A. Najmabadi, as it is “difficult to make any separation between internal and external developments”.[[80]](#footnote-80)

**Dialogue of the Modern Western and the Traditional Persian**

The argument is based on the following premise: that although the purpose of the transplantation of Western science and technology was, in the first place, their plain application, this would eventually lead to them “negotiating” the conditions of their application in order to be accommodated, both conceptually and materially, into the local context. In other words, Western science and technology needed to “make themselves at home” in the local context, to be naturalised or indigenised.[[81]](#footnote-81) In both the application stage and the conceptual development stage, modern science, institutions and technology undergo change in order to be able to fit local contexts. Accordingly, we need to examine the role played by local resources, institutional setting, language, and culture in the introduction and development of “modern” ideas.

In the second part of the nineteenth century, as Western influence increased through the expansion of different forms of contact with Europe, it was not only the enlightened elites who proposed their reform plans, but also the Shah himself, who, following his first tour in Europe in 1873, advised his ministers to undertake reform and create a code of law (*qânun*).[[82]](#footnote-82) These reform projects were mostly based on the idea of adoption rather than adaptation; replacement rather than transformation; such projects stemmed from an inability to transform the existing system. Furthermore, the introduction of a code of law was, for the Shah, one of his “trophies” from Europe, such as a Swiss watch, a printing machine, photography, or even modern medicine and hospitals, something he fancied and therefore wanted to have at home provided that none of this affected his authority. Likewise, vested interests within the state opposed any kind of change that threatened their existence and interests. Nonetheless, these oppositions could not prevent the natural process of negotiation and interaction. The missing factor was that there was no sufficient political force coming from the elites or stemming from society that could buttress this process by providing it with a functional institutional framework.

On the other hand, the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-09, which involved the participation of traditional forces within society, left a long-lasting impact in Iran.[[83]](#footnote-83) A combination of various social factors, political forces, cultural and legal contexts, prompted the idea of adopting a constitution for Iran in the late nineteenth century. This, however, required theoretical, linguistic, and legal justification provided by both secular elite, such as Malkam-Khan and Mostashâr al-Dowleh, and clerics such as Na’ini.[[84]](#footnote-84) These intellectuals endeavoured to introduce concepts such as constitution, equality of right and freedom of speech, by finding their equivalent in the Koranic verses or other religious texts. Whether they were aware that the principle of “council”, *showrâ*, in the Koran originated in tribal society under the Prophet and the fact that the institution of parliament resulted from a long historical development of French society and politics and did not correlate with this, the important thing is that they tried to establish negotiation between the old and the new. It is doubtful that the idea of constitution as perceived in its European birthplace could have been implemented unaltered in the Iran of the early 20th century that remained medieval. There is therefore no surprise if Article 2 of the supplementary fundamental law stipulating that a committee of ulama can veto all enactments of parliament that do not conform with the sacred principles of Islam,[[85]](#footnote-85) is devoid of any principle of representing people. Nonetheless, the Constitutional Revolution helped the idea of conditioning (*mashrut*) the power of the Shah to be imbedded in political discourse.

The term *mashruteh* for constitution demonstrates how the idea of constitution was altered for adaptation to the local context. The original meaning of constitution, namely the establishment of a Fundamental Law, was translated as ‘*mashruteh’*, literal meaning, “conditioning” [the power of the Shah]. The term ‘*mashruteh’* conveyed a more practical or functional implication for Iranian society and its elite in the early twentieth century than the term “constitution,” as perceived in the West. As Scott Montgomery observed, “single terms are nearly always the result of some conscious choice, and this choice must often, of necessity, bear the marks of larger influence, above all the era-bound prolictivities of the men and women who discovered the need for such choice. (…) It leaks history at every pore.”[[86]](#footnote-86) Under the constitutional movement, the term *mosâvât* (literal meaning: “equality”) meant “moderation” rather than equality in the sense we perceive today or as it was understood in the French Constitution. *Mosâvât*, although rendered literally as “equality” meant something else under the Constitutional period. In other words, using Montgomery’s terms, it was “ideologically reconstituted”.[[87]](#footnote-87) This concept was available in classical literature (in the texts of Sa‘di, and Khwâjeh Nassir Tussi, amongst others).[[88]](#footnote-88) It meant: “to reduce the power of the monarch so to allow people to have their say”, until, as Khwâjeh Nassir Tussi stated the middle ground is reached and justice is met. It is significant that an essay by Abdul-Rassul Kâshi, a cleric who promoted the idea of constitution, is called ‘*ensâfiyyeh’*. That again implies the idea of middle ground, even though the argument provided to develop this idea goes beyond this concept and advocates more power for parliament than for the Shah or his government.[[89]](#footnote-89)

The constitutionalists, therefore, tried to bridge the gap between the old and new regimes. On the other hand, those who objected the idea of constitution argued that it interfered with sharia and Islamic values and aimed to replace them. In other words, nothing but contrast was seen between the constitution and the sharia. Constitutional discourse, on the other hand, whether developed by those from secular elites like Malkam Khan or by clerics like Na’ini and Kashi, was seen as (re)constructing a plot in which the sharia and constitution were in harmony. Whilst scholars like this sought concepts in the cultural and political history to understand the idea of constitution for themselves, they also endeavoured to reconstruct a didactic and instructive discourse. By doing so, they demonstrated that this idea was not entirely taken from outside but had affinity with religion and culture. In order to convey the idea of the importance of law, the respect it was due was compared to the respect due to the Quran.[[90]](#footnote-90) Of course constitutional law was forged by humans whilst the Quran was considered to be the word of God, but such a comparison sought to provide an effective way to put across the idea to a society imbued with religion.

On the other hand, emphasising the contrast between the spirit of human law and the spirit of Quranic text, either by anti-constitutionalists or by some secular constitutionalists who believed that religion and constitution were irreconcilable, did not leave any negotiation zone, where constitution could be re-imagined in the light of local context. Adamiyat in examining the work of Na’ini, the famous constitutionalist cleric who tried to bridge between the sharia and the constitution through jurisprudence that at the same time could evolve and modernise the religious and Quranic concepts, such as those of *showrâ* (council) and authority, states that discrepancies in Na’ini’s analysis are due to the fact that the sharia and constitution are essentially contradictory and cannot be reconciled.[[91]](#footnote-91) He rejects Na’ini’s argument that not only in Islam but also amongst non-Muslim sages “limiting the authority” is one of the principles of government,[[92]](#footnote-92) maintaining that Na’ini’s idea of limiting the power of the state is taken from secular thinkers and not from the Quran or other religious texts. This perception of history ignores the fact that the discourse of transformation is built up by bricks made of local education, knowledge and culture. It is not paradoxical that the opponents of Adamiyat, a “modernist” historian, also believe that religion and constitution are not reconcilable, because they harbour a similar approach.[[93]](#footnote-93)

**The problem of modernisation in a fragmented/regionalised society**

The social, political and administrative structure of Iran in the nineteenth century remained decentralised, if not fragmented, with a patrimonial state power and tenuous political, economic and social integrity. Collecting taxes and recruiting troops was problematic, necessitating military deployment. The central state’s treasury was often empty, given that resources were mostly spent by local governors. There was no single national currency; each province had its own coins that were often of different values, a fact that hindered the development of commerce and the merchant class. There was no paper money and often a document of exchange (*barât*) was used for payment or for salaries, making business or any transactions uncertain and uninsured. As a result, administration was loose and central-local relations occasional. Tribal and local identities, with different customs, ethnicities and languages, and the absence of a countrywide transport network, left different sections of the country and populations disconnected. Even in the few large cities, guilds, quarters, and divisions between the nobility and commoners caused deep social segregation. This situation became particularly acute during periods of weak central power or its collapse. Conflicts between different local magnates who competed for the crown of Persia after the fall of the Safavid Empire in 1722, had weakened these magnates paving the way for the Qajars to take power at the end of the eighteenth century. The unification of the country by the Qâjârs was more the consequence of the extenuation of local powers than something rooted in the social and political unity of the empire. That is why, after the advent of Fath‘Ali Shah to power in 1798, the Qâjâr state had to fight rebellious tribes and local powers for several decades.

In the nineteenth century, subsequent to the wars with Russia over Transcaucasia, as well as the growing presence of Western powers in the region, diplomatic and commercial relationships with the West increased, affecting the local market by directing local production to meet the needs of the Western economy. Whilst this in turn created a new class of merchants, it also worked against the existing social fabric by causing many farmers or tribespeople to flee to the cities for work, as their products could not compete with imported items from Europe.[[94]](#footnote-94) Social mobility triggered change in the first part of the nineteenth century, and there were some state-run reforms, particularly from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Overall, however, the country remained medieval, without a strong central state or a solid administrative network.

In a politically and administratively decentralised country, where the population is disconnected by tribal organisation, geographic barriers and ethnic-linguistic or religious differences, transfer of knowledge and culture is hindered. The first attempt at centralisation was made in Iran by Amir Kabir, the first Prime Minister of Nasser al Din Shah (r. 1848-96). Centralisation required modernisation of the army to reduce the power of the local magnates, including those belonging to the Qâjâr tribe, such as the family of Asef al Dowleh in Khorassan. The creation of the polytechnic school of Dâr al Fonun was in principle to introduce modern science and technology, needed for military modernisation, but at the same time, it was the first step towards bringing education controlled by the clerics, under the state administration as the Dâr al Fonun’s curriculum also included traditional science. Modernisation at this stage meant to strengthen the central administration via regulating the financial system and reducing the local magnates’ autonomy. It was not to create a parliamentary regime or constitution that had no relation whatsoever with the existing conditions in mid-nineteenth century Iran or to replace traditional science with modern Western science. However, he faced stiff resistance from traditional forces and Amir-Kabir paid for his plan with his life.

Significantly, these reforms, focused on centralisation, undertaken in the mid-nineteenth century in Iran could create a system akin to what was at work in the West: relationship between the tradition and the modern was perceived as real, and even necessary, just as the different sections of society were related thanks to a network of elaborated central administration and bureaucracy. In nineteenth-century Britain, social change in the so-called Victorian or Edwardian periods was sometime expressed through religious language or even religious revival. In the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution and with the development of secular bodies, some “religious organisations performed functions and supplied services that a hundred years later would emanate from the market, the mass media or the welfare state. Though many of these functions had changed in character by 1914, it is by no means self-evident that the process of change in this period was a simple unilinear movement from the sacred to the secular – or that the two were necessarily at opposite poles from each other.”[[95]](#footnote-95) In the West, flow between traditional and modern, religious and secular was thus at work even though this in some cases resulted in a break with past theory and practice.

Amir-Kabir’s reforms, however, did not continue after his death and in the second part of the century Western influence and supremacy increased, with the result that, particularly from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, modern ideas, science and institutions introduced from the West were deemed to constitute a sharp break with the local and the traditional. Such a perception did not allow dialogue between the old and the new to bear fruit by conceptual transformation of the former. It did not matter if the modern medicine introduced in the nineteenth century contained elements of humoral medicine shared by local physicians; it was still considered modern and quintessentially different from local medicine. As a result, no pedagogical effort was made to relate the two medicines and no conceptual link was seen between the two. When in 1881, a book on modern medicine was published by Mirzâ Mohammad-e Doktor-e Kermanshahi, who was also head of the state hospital, the journal *Iran* advised that the book could be used even by laypersons and certainly by physicians who were not [modern] doctors (*atebbây-e gheyr-e doktor*).[[96]](#footnote-96) However, there is no evidence that a practical or conceptual relation between the two was acknowledged. Likewise, in the early twentieth century, when traditional physicians studied modern medicine, they stitched together elements of modern and traditional medicine and at times juxtaposed them in their practice. To fight against different infectious diseases caused by cupping, Doktor Mehdi Boqrat al Hokama, a graduate of the Dar al Fonun, advised cleaning the cupping instruments because he believed both that infectious diseases were caused by the filthy instruments and that loss of blood was necessary because it contained putrid humors that should be eliminated from the body by cupping.[[97]](#footnote-97)

This break with the past or unbridgeable gap between tradition and modernity became omnipresent in the political, literary and scientific literature with consequences to the practice of modernisation. The “modernist” elite believed that only modern science could mend the gap between Iran and Western countries. Zakâ’ol-Molk-e Forughi in a preface to the inaugural issue of Journal *Tarbiyat* (Education) in 1896, stated that: “mankind is one with different individuals and not a specie with different kinds, having different essences or capacities.” Individuals are different only according to their educations. Knowledge and science belongs to humanity and can be transferred through education.[[98]](#footnote-98) Forughi’s project heralded an era of transition from a society fragmented in tribes and ethnic or linguistic groups, to a socio-political entity integrating all members of society regardless of their ethnic origins, language, religions or economic standing. However, given the existing boundaries in a society with a medieval structure, this project was more in line with the idea of replacing traditional knowledge with the modern and not bridging the gap between the two to accommodate existing socio-political contexts. This was a period when the adoption of modern science and technology was associated with nation building and the socio-political integration of the Iranian peoples. Later in the twentieth century, Ahmad Kasravi, too, advocated the need for social and political integration by eliminating tribal, class, religious and ethnic-language differences. This project of modernisation overlooked the constructive potentials that the old system had for a modern Iran. As E. Abrahamian noted: “the old tolerant attitude towards cultural heterogeneity was gradually supplanted by an intolerant crusade for national hegemony; tribal nomadism [that could benefit agricultural productivity in a pre-industrial society such as Iran] became associated with rural gangesterism, regional autonomy with administrative anarchy, cultural variety with political incompatibility.”[[99]](#footnote-99)

This vision of modernisation based on a break with existing material or intellectual resources went a long way to acknowledge Western superiority and to discredit local potential and resources in particular after the abrupt termination of Amir Kabir reforms in mid-nineteenth century. This naturally affected the reform movement so the new generation of reformists, such as Mirzâ Hossein Khân Sepahsâlâr, had recourse to concessions for economic development and modernisation. By giving concessions, the Qajar reformers in the second part of the century recognised their inability to transform the existing system, whilst bowing to Western superiority. Amir Kabir, on the other hand, tried to promote local industry and protect local production by discouraging the import of western products.[[100]](#footnote-100) Likewise, although modernisation was a top-down project under Amir Kabir, it did not eliminate local resources. Modern establishments such as the Dâr al Fonun, the hospital, the Sanitary Councils, and the court system provided institutional networks where tradition and modernity met. In the case of the judicial system, for instance, where the *shar‘* courts dominated and the state courts (*divan-e edâlat*) dealt with crimes but with a far limited scope than the *shar‘* courts, Amir Kabir did not replace shar’ with secular state court. He rather endeavoured to put an order in the system and somehow to centralise it to prevent irregularities but his reference remain the *shar‘* law.[[101]](#footnote-101) This was mainly because in the absence of a constitution, shari’a law represented an institutional framework to protect civil society.[[102]](#footnote-102)

**Modernity (*Tajaddod*), as “ideology”**

The major characteristic of modernisation in the first part of the nineteenth century, which culminated under Amir Kabir, was power centralisation. However, these reforms were short lived and did not allow the emergence and development of a strong elite and an effective central state. Likewise, it did not lead the modern-traditional negotiation to its full development, because the project of state centralisation and administrative reforms were not seriously pursued. Le Cte De Croizier, writing on the occasion of the first European tour of Nâser al-Din Shah in 1873, observed: “The Asian sovereigns have never left their kingdoms other than for conquest. Reform never preoccupied them for why should they desire to change considering that they possess wealth, prestige, and supreme power and any reform in their government would therefore be detrimental to them?”[[103]](#footnote-103) He went on to say, however, that Nâser al-Din Shah differed from his predecessors, in that his travels abroad were not for conquest. True; Nâser al-Din Shah did not leave his country to conquer Europe but contrary to Croizier’s statement, his goal was not to introduce progress in all branches of administration[[104]](#footnote-104) either. He travelled to Europe more for tourism than for exploring the Western system, although it was for the purpose of exploring the Western system that his minister had organised the trip.[[105]](#footnote-105) On his return, not only did Nâser al Din Shah not wish to reduce his own power in the guise of administrative reform, but he also forbad his entourage who visited Europe to promulgate their observations on it inside Iran lest his subjects became aware of the causes of their backward conditions. On the other hand, the trappings of modernity, such as Western style building, dress, chair,[[106]](#footnote-106) and military hardware, were introduced and talked about without any hesitation, as they were not deemed capable of upsetting the existing order, even though the use of these products in times gave rise to some change in social relationships.

Socio-political movements of the last decade of the nineteenth century took root in economic crisis and among the emergent commercial bourgeoisie and eventually led to the Constitutional Revolution of 1907-1909.[[107]](#footnote-107) The Revolution’s tremendous political and social repercussions gave an ideological and political dimension to modern science and “modernity” advocated by the revolutionaries. Modern science began to be considered as the prerequisite for leaving the past behind, going forward, and making progress (*taraqqi*). Under the ideological influence of the Constitutional Revolution, the old terms for “progress” took on new connotations. Traditionally, *taraqqi* (a word meaning moving up the social ladder) was achieved by those who succeeded in their work, became dominant over others and strengthened their power. From the late nineteenth century through to the Constitutional movement, another term “*pish-raft*”, which was possibly the literal translation for the French term “*aller en avant*,” or progress,was increasingly used as a synonym of *taraqqi*. The synonymous terms of *taraqqi* and *pish-raft* were used for rhetorical purpose to sharpen the concept of progress. It was, in fact, a way to tweak and readjust the meaning of *taraqqi* to convey the idea of social and economic progress rather than individual achievements. The term *pish-raft* became the byword of the constitutionalists. Thereafter, whatever was *moteraqqi* and/or *pishrafteh* (advanced) meant ‘modern’ and useful, as opposed to whatever was old, which was deemed outdated and a nuisance. These developments, in the context of the Constitutional Revolution, reinforced and increased the social value of modernity to the detriment of “tradition”, and widened the gap between the two. With a social and political revolution on the scale of the Constitutional Movement, which constitutes a watershed in the history of Iran, modern science and in particular modern medicine, represented constitutionalism, much in the same way as, in Russia after the October Revolution of 1917, modern medicine was the medicine of socialism, and traditional medicine represented the ancient regime.[[108]](#footnote-108)

The political and ideological dimensions of modern science were not exclusive to non-Western countries; in fact, it originated in the West. Faith in “the law of Progress” that according to Gustave Flaubert characterised the modern age[[109]](#footnote-109) was behind the spread of knowledge and culture within the framework of imperialist projects. Before the start of WWI, the creation of a French university had been on the agenda but could not be completed.[[110]](#footnote-110) In May 1918, the Ministry of Education in Paris examined a proposal for the creation of a French University in Tehran alongside the diffusion of French language and the expansion of French missionary activities.[[111]](#footnote-111) Moreover, if in the pre-war period, France had been cautious in its cultural influence for political reasons (i.e. the presence of Russia and Britain); after WWI, this political consideration was no longer relevant.[[112]](#footnote-112) The French government sought to use its cultural activities to promote relationships that could serve its commercial expansion and political influence.[[113]](#footnote-113)

In such a political context, the “ideology” of Constitutional Revolution in Iran assimilated the discourse of “progress” and this in turn informed the intellectual engagement of the elite with the concept of modernity. The narrative of Progress in newspapers, political treatises, or scientific texts was to be reinforced and completed by putting emphasis on the acquisition of modern science, as opposed to traditional knowledge that represented, from then on, the old society, and the “*ancien régime*”.

Western technology and science could be imported and used immediately, but Western institutions, such as, a representative government, or a judicial system, although adopted as models, could not be implemented or accommodated in local contexts other than through a long historical process. Biomedicine, introduced in Iran through the creation of the Pasteur Institute in 1921, was a modern item, as was the modern army introduced earlier in the nineteenth century. The Iranian/Western or tradition/modernity dichotomy in political and educational discourses resulted from the fact that biomedicine of the Pasteur Institute of Tehran did not develop out of local knowledge, and the modern military corps did not stem from an in depth social change, even though they were proposed as solutions to local problems. There was therefore, in the political context of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century-Iran, a gap between the fact and the idea of “progress”, or in Flaubert’s terms, between “practice of progression” or “historical progression” on the one hand, and “ideology of progress”, on the other.[[114]](#footnote-114) This divorce between idea and reality, observed in the case of Iranian modernity, in particular from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, reinforced an approach in modernisation that was more authoritative and top-down order than a bottom-up process.

Arguably, the Pasteur Institute, alongside its practical and technological aspects and use, functioned, for the Iranian elite, as a symbol of modernity, to vindicate what we may call “ideology of progress & modernity”[[115]](#footnote-115) as the foundation of a modern state power. Modernisation by Reza Shah was the continuation of this trend: the creation of the University of Tehran in 1934 and the construction of cross-country railways were based more on “ideology of modernity” than they were responses to scientific or economic requirements. A lack of “constructive” continuity between the local and the Western or the old and the new is illustrated in the Francophonie of the Qâjâr elite or educated people. When discussions were underway in Parliament (around 1923), regarding the budget of the Pasteur Institute, one of the MPs asked the reporter to translate the following terms: “Laboratoire”, “Institut” and “Pasteur” into Persian. The whole parliament laughed! Speaking French was a mark of the emerging class that associated itself with modernity. “ [French] c’est la langue de la bonne société,” indicates the document reporting this incident. Similarly, the association of *Iran-e Javân* (Young Iran) gave its conference in French even though all its members were Persian. The records of the Sanitary Councils were written in French. Whilst the elite claimed to be knowledgeable about modern science and its languages (French, English, German), there was no laboratories and no trained bacteriologists to fight against contagious diseases. The inconsistency or hiatus between form and content reflected the missing link in the chain of development. This divorce between the Western and local models in every corner of life has persisted to today.[[116]](#footnote-116) In contrast, in the early modern period in Europe, from Copernicus to Newton, relationships between myth and logos, scientific rationalities and religion was not forbidden but even necessary; their scientific findings were often perceived as inspired by religion.[[117]](#footnote-117)

In relationships between tradition and modernity, we find, simultaneously, breaks and continuity. It is through a reference to the past and inspiration from cultural heritage that criticism of the present is made. For example, reference to Hippocratic medicine in the late eighteenth century revived the lost interest in observation and bedside medicine that had occurred over the previous centuries; and biblical exegesis during the Enlightenment was used to justify the “religion of reason.”[[118]](#footnote-118) The other form of this relationship between the new and the old is genealogical and functional, which corresponds to the very concept of evolution. We can trace the functional or genealogical link through the process of conceptual as well as social constructions. Transfer of ideas does not take place wirelessly but through the network of actors, human and non-human; social and economic organisations and institutions. Such a network encompasses old and new, traditional and modern. The parts of the network interact and contribute to the making of new knowledge, new ideas, new systems, and so forth. Such a network of subjects and objects prompts debates and negotiation, conflicts and compromises and there is no hierarchy between the actors and components.[[119]](#footnote-119) For example, it is not “feminism” as an ideology per se that awakens consciousness on women’s rights, but the new social conditions created by a social and political development that brings about reflection on women’s rights and necessitates the improvement, or change, of women’s status within society (in the family, at work and in politics). This is because “feminism” as an ideology reflects, and to some extent represents, a social movement that constantly transforms and creates new conditions and which could even antagonise any initial ideology that gave rise to it.[[120]](#footnote-120) As a social movement, therefore, feminism can take different forms or develop in an environment that might appear hostile to the initial feminist ideology. For instance, unlike the received idea,[[121]](#footnote-121) we find cases where a return to an “Islamist” identity potentially allows women with traditional culture to socialise and gain consciousness about their social or political rights that they could not have acquired under the secular regime, where they were secluded for fear of becoming morally fouled by modern or Western culture. In Iran, the veil gives confidence and security to traditionally-oriented families (who make up the majority of the population), which enables them, of course with some exceptions, to allow their daughters to leave their hometowns and study or work outside family control. This situation has created new social relationships for women in general (and not only the Islamist women), or a “public sphere” or a “space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs”[[122]](#footnote-122) that have effectively contributed to their social and intellectual emancipation, in spite of the clerical regime’s agenda and ideology that advocates gender segregation and encourages women to stay at home.[[123]](#footnote-123)

It is only within the process of social and cultural construction that dialogue and conceptual/intellectual engagement occur between tradition and modernity and things transform; or, in other words, modernisation takes place. Some scholars attribute the gap between tradition (or religion in this case) and modernity in Islamic countries to the fundamental difference in the teaching of the Quran compared to that of the bible and the fact that modernisation in Islam did not need the phase of disenchantment that, as Max Weber argued, underwent the Christian world.[[124]](#footnote-124) Such views represent another form of “essentialism”, very different from social constructionism.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, I have argued that the gap that is often construed between tradition and modernity, in particular in non-Western countries, is the consequence of the intellectual discourse of modernity forged during the colonial and post-colonial periods. During that period, “colonial” or “authoritarian” modernisation took place, and disrupted the natural course of development. If a “break with the past” in the West is the result of the development of modern science, in Iran it is the consequence of colonial domination incorporated into the “modern” nation-state as well as in the projects, ideas and writings of the intellectuals. Colonial domination was not only economic and politic but also intellectual. As Jalal Al-e Ahmad stated, these intellectuals wanted to copy Western intellectuals accustomed to democracy in a social environment where there was no democracy.[[125]](#footnote-125) This discontinuity between the elite and society at large created political antagonism between “western” and “local” or “modern” and “tradition”. It comes therefore as no surprise that the evolutionist vision dominant in the works of Karl Marx, Durkheim, Max Weber, Herbert Spencer and others, who “assume that social change consists of a process that is internal to the society changing”,[[126]](#footnote-126) is not employed to write a non-Western history, in which one could see how things developed out of the existing context, and instead, as Al-e Ahmad noted, there is a break with the immediate past.[[127]](#footnote-127) Shall we attribute this to the fact that Western scholars did not produce a model of study in which “development” and “change” in countries like Iran were examined in the same manner that Western societies and politics were studied?[[128]](#footnote-128)

Whatever the truth of the matter, the modernisation by the “moderns” or the study of modernity by contemporary scholars cut off from the past, separated objects and cultures by perceiving the local as an entity that could do no more than receive but was unable to transform and adapt itself. The “moderns” did not believe in the “Parliament of Things”, but in “contradictions,” “oppositions” between Western and Iranian, between modern and traditional. This would necessarily lead to the elimination of one for the benefit of other, or to what Bruno Latour calls: “purification”.[[129]](#footnote-129) Under the Pahlavi dynasty, this “link” between tradition and modernity was broken due to ‘westernisation” projects. After the 1979 Revolution and under the clerical regime, this link broke again because of the “Islamisation” project of the ayatollahs. It is due to this essentialist antagonism between the traditional and the modern that both Westernisation and Islamisation projects operate coercively.

The problem to address in the history of modernisation is both methodological and historical or phenomenological. I have tried to expose the methodological and discursive problem that can misrepresent reality and potentially affect the relationship between the traditional and the modern, as we have seen under the Pahlavi and clerical regimes. This can slow down what Hardt and Negri term ‘informational accumulation’ that requires the socialisation of production with its effect of reducing social space and temporality. Tensions between both the Shah’s regime and the USA, and the bitter chronic conflicts between the clerical regime and the West, are symptoms of this opposition to Empire as described by Hardt, that “does away with the cruel regimes of modern power and also increases the potential for liberation.”[[130]](#footnote-130)

In this essay, I have tried to raise a methodological problem in the history of modernisation that is imbued with binary vision. I have proposed a different approach that I have illustrated through a selection of case studies. My full history of modernisation in Iran from this perspective is yet to come.

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1. *A Persian at the Court of King George* *1809-10* (The Journal of Mirza Abul Hassan Khan*,* translated and edited by Margaret Morris Cloake), Barrie & Jenkins, London, 1988,p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Indoor and outdoor gender segregation in pre-modern Iran was practised more in urban society and amongst the nobility (*a‘yân va ashrâf*) than amongst rural and tribal societies where women worked alongside men both at home and in the field. Mrs Perceval’s opinion about this was rather based on a picture provided by many travel accounts. See for example, how Uzbek, one of the characters of Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters,* recommends his chief eunuch to look after his harem: “(…) you guard the keys to those fateful doors which open solely for me (…). If they desire to go into the country, you may take them there; but show no mercy to any man who dares appear in their sight (…)” Montesquieu, *Persian Letters,* A new translation by Margaret Mauldon and edited by Andrew Khan, Oxford World’s Classics, 2008,p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beard: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity,* University of California Press, 2005, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Significantly, Reza Shah marked his project of modernisation in 1936 by unveiling women and encouraging mixed society. Conversely, in 1979, the clerical regime established by Khomeini shortly after he returned to Iran would enforce veiling and seclusion of women in public space. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *A Persian at the court of King George,* p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid, p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *A Persian at the court of King George*, p. 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. He mentioned to his English counterparts that he feared his life would be taken by the Shah had he not implemented exactly what he had been asked to execute during his mission. *The Persians Amongst the English,* p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Denis Write, *The Persians Amongst the English,* p. 67 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa,* Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 36, cited in M. Khalid Masud & A. Salvatore, “Western Scholars of Islam on the Issue of Modernity”, in *Islam and Modernity,* op. cit., p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Khalid Masud & Salvatore, idem, pp. 41-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. D. Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for “Indian” Pasts?” *Representations* 37 (1992): 1-23, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. A quarrel that was different under the Renaissance and Enlightenment but did exist. See Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity: An Unfinished Project,” in: M. Passerin d’Entrèves, S. Benhabib (eds), *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity,* Polity Press, 1996, pp. 38-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Latour, *Idem,* p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Wagner, op. cit. p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See for example, Reinhard Bendix, ‘Tradition and modernity reconsidered’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* vol. 9, 1967; Wagner, *A Sociology of Modernity;* Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air. The Experience of Modernity,* New York, Simon & Schuster, 1982; Alain Touraine, *Critique de la Modernité,* Paris, Fayard, 1992. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* translated by Frederick Lawrence, Polity Press, 1990; Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion,* London, Routledge, 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Abbas Amanat, *Iran, A Modern History,* Yale University Press, 2017, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For an insight into the economic development under the Safavid, see: Najaf Haider, “Global Networks of Exchange, the India Trade and the Mercantile Economy of Safavid Iran”, in: Irfan Habib (ed), *India and Iran,* Tulika, 2002,pp. 1-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See for example, Robbie Shilliam, “Modernity and Modernism”, in Robert A. Denemark (ed), *The International Studies Encyclopaedia,* Vol. VIII, Matei Calinescu, *Five faces of modernity: modernism, avangarde, decadence, kitsch, postmodernism,* Duke University Press, Durham, 1987. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. R. Bendix, op. cit., p. 314. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Robbie Shilliam, *op. cit.,* p. 5215. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Samuel Noah Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities”, *Daedalus,* Winter 2000; 129, 1; pp. 1-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. “Multiple Modernities”, p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. ibid, pp. 14, 19, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Sami Zubaida, “Political Modernity”, in *Islam and Modernity* (edited by Khalid Masud, Salvatore, Bruinessen), Edinburg University Press, 2009, pp. 68, 76-77. Hassan Hanafi (“Tradition and Modernism between Continuity and Discontinuity: Possible Models and Historical Options”, *AJSS,* 33 (384-393)), proposes that Islam provides a model of modernisation, or change, through continuity of tradition, contrary to the Western model that posits a break between the modern and the traditional. The third model according to this author is the Asian model of “juxtaposition” of the old and the new, found in Japan, Korea and Thailand. He claims that this categorisation is based on the historical experiences of people and cultures. He attributes these different historical and cultural experiences to the development of religious thought from Judaism to Christianity and to Islam, with the latter embodying the most perfect model for change! [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Gyan Prakash, “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism”, *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 99, 5 (1994): 1475-1490, pp. 1477-9. I have analysed the “lived experience” of traditional local medicine in terms of its internal transformation within an institutional setting where modernity and tradition could genuinely dialogue. See *Medicine in Iran,* Palgrave, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. For Hegel, the principle of the modern world is freedom of subjectivity, which he elucidates by means of ‘freedom’ and ‘reflection’. According to Hegel, “subjectivity primarily carries four connotations: *individualism*, the *right to criticism*; *autonomy of action*; and *idealistic philosophy*”. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* translated by Frederick Lawrence, Polity Press, 1990, pp. 16-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See Stephanie Cronin “Importing Modernity: European Military Missions to Qâjâr Iran,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* vol. 50, No. 1 (Jan. 2008): 197-226. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Alexis de Tocqueville, *L’ancien régime et la Révolution,* edited by J.-P. Meyer, Gallimard, 1967, pp. 87-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Amin Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941,* Stanford University Press, 1961, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. On this issue see: Mehrzad Boroujerdi, “Subduing Globalization: The Challenge of the Indigenization Movement”, in: Birgit Schaebler & Leif Stenberg (eds), *Globalization and the Muslim World. Culture, Religion and Modernity,* 2004, pp. 30-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid, pp. 34-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Karen Armstrong, “Christian: Brave New World (1492-1870)”, in K. Artmstrong (ed), *The battle for God: fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam,* London, Harper Collins (2000): 61-97, p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* in Marilyn Butler, *Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy,* CUP, 1984, p. 39. For Burke, revolutions were to conserve and correct rather than to destroy. See: Jennifer M. Welsh, *Edmund Burke and International Relations, The Commonwealth of Europe and the Crusade against the French Revolution,* London, Macmillan Press, 1995, p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. The case studies discussed here counter the claim made by Hasan Hanafi “Tradition and Modernism”, op. cit., pp. 387-389), that the Western model of relationship between tradition and modernity is characterised by «discontinuity», “contradiction” and “contrast”. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See for example, Susan Stephenson, “Narrative, Identity, and Modernity”, Discussion paper for ECPR workshop, Mannheim, March 1999). In his description of Paris as capital of modernity, David Harvey demonstrates how Louis Bonaparte, bearing marks of the traditional politics plays a role in the modernisation of Paris by giving Haussmann free rein to transform the city; or how, aristocracy becomes “modern” and “a modern aristocracy needs money power [as opposed to landed wealth] to rule.” In other words, Harvey’s study indicates that any “break with the past” is the outcome of a process of transformation that entailed the active involvement of traditional forces. D. Harvey, *Capital of Modernity,* Routledge, New York & London, 2003, pp. 28ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Micheal Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire,* Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 93-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid, p. 73. The same approach is used to examine the Reformation, Counter Reformation, and other events in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, pp. 74ff. Ernest Gellner approaches this method in his anthropological study of Islam when he argues that secularisation of the literate and the newly urbanised was a process from the audio-visual Islam of villages and tribes to the scriptural and legalist Islam of the city. However, this analysis concludes that Islamic modernity is “essentially” of religious character and nature. See: E. Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion,* op. cit., pp. 5-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. H. Katouzian, *Iranian history and politics: The dialectics of state and society,* Routledge, 2003*,* pp. 10-11, 25-26, et passim. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. H. Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Medieval and Modern Iran,* Yale University Press, 2009, pp. 31, 37-38, 158, et passim; idem, *Iranian History and Politics,* p. 29 et passim. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. A critic of this vision of modernity is Jalal Al-e Ahmad, who gives an accurate picture of divorce between the secular elite and the context of society, while also pointing to the religious elite (clerics) who are connected with society but remains in the past and disconnected with modern ideas. See: J. Al-e Ahmad, *dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran,* 2 vols, Khwârazmi, Tehran, 1357/1978. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Most academic publications about history, literature and society of Modern Iran discuss aspects of modernity and modernisation and a full list of these works and their examination go far beyond the limits of this article. A selection of these works are the following: Kamran Matin, *Recasting Iranian Modernity: International relations and social change,* Routledge, London & New York, 2013; Farhang Rajaee, *Islamism and Modernism;* Stephanie Cronin, “Importing Modernity: European Military Mission to Qâjâr Iran”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* vol. 50, No. 1 (Jan. 2008), pp. 197-226; Kamran Arjomand, “The emergence of scientific modernity in Iran: controversies surrounding astrology and modern astronomy in the mid-nineteenth century”, *Iranian Studies,* Vol. 30, nos 1-2, Winter-Spring 1997: 5-24; Michael E. Bonine and Nikki R. Keddie (eds), *Modern Iran. The Dialectics of Continuity and Change,* State University of New York Press, 1981; Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20th Century,* University of Texas Press, Austin, 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. F. Rajaee maintains that in the late nineteenth century “all segments of Iranian society took part in the process of reform. However, this author does not give any account of the role of society in modernisation. Farhang Rajaee, *Islamism and Modernism,* p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Kamran Arjomand, “The emergence of scientific modernity in Iran”, op. cit., pp. 12-16. Interestingly enough, Mirzâ Mohammad Vali appears to have also authored various medical treatises, including an anonymous one on modern state hospitals, where he tried to bridge old and modern medicine. See: Hormoz Ebrahimnejad, *Medicine, Public Health and the Qâjâr State* (Brill, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Asghar Fathi, “Role of the Traditional Leader in Modernisation of Iran, 1890-1910,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* Vol. 11, No. 1 (Feb. 1980): 87-98. We have seen a similar case in Egypt, highlighted by Sami Zubaida. See above, footnote 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. A. Fathi, *op. cit*., p. 95. According to Jalal Al-e Ahmad, however, Sardâr As‘ad’s military movement at the head of his tribesmen to Tehran was motivated by his personal gain as he was a shareholder of the British Petroleum Company that was in the process of exploiting oil from the southwest slopes of the Bakhtiyâri mountains. This necessitated that this region was cleared of the Bakhtiyâri tribespeople who normally wintered there. See: J. Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis: A Plague From the West* (translated by R. Campbell), Mizan Press Berkeley, 1984, p. 60. One should take Al-e Ahmad’s comments with a pinch of salt given his negative opinion about the constitutionalists. However, if this interpretation of Sardâr As’ad’s involvement in the Constitution is founded, defending the Constitution and holding shares in a company are not necessarily contradictory. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ali Mirsepassi, *Democracy in Modern Iran. Islam, Culture, and Political Change,* New York University Press, London, Ney York, 2010, pp. 14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran,* CUP, 2000, pp. 2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. *Cultural Discourse,* p. 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. K. Matin, op. cit., pp. 1-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. K. Matin, op. cit., p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. K. Matin, op. cit., p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. T. Kuran, *The Long Divergence,* see Ch. 14, in particular, pp. 293-294298-299. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. T. Kuran, “Institutional Roots of Authoritarian Rule in the Middle East: Civic Legacies of the Islamic Waqf,” ERID Working Paper No. 171, June 12, 2014, p. 5; idem, *The Long Divergence:* p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Alexis de Tocqueville, “Second Letter on Algeria”, in: M. J. Thompson (ed), *Islam and the West: Critical Perspectives on Modernity,* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, New York, Oxford, … 2003: 139-151, pp. 141, 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ibid, p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. On this see for example, anonymous online article, “Habermas on Normative Intersubjectivity: The Sociological Ambivalence of ‘Public Communication’”. <http://www.portalcomunicacion.com/bcn2002/n_eng/programme/prog_ind/papers/l/pdf/l007_liu.pdf> accessed 20/01/2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Such as the case of Helenus Scott and his receptivity to the indigenous doctors in India in the early eighteenth century. See: Mark Harrison, Medical experimentation in British India, The case of Dr Helenus Scott,” in H. Ebrahimnejad, *The Development of Modern Medicine in Non-Western Countries,* Routledge, 2009, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. The case of Helenus Scott who found nitric acid a more efficacious therapy in surgery than mercury, based on local experience, is one example. See Mark Harrison, idem, pp. 23-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Aditya Mukherjee, “Empire: How Colonial India Made Modern Britain,” *Economic and Political Weekly,* vol. 45, No. 50 (December 11-17, 2010): 73-82. On the role of Indian resources exported to England in the development of colonialism (and to the detriment of economic and industrial development in India), also see: Raj Kumar, *Colonialism and Modernisation of India,* Anmol Publication, New Delhi, pp. 34, 165, et passim. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. According to Tavakoli-Tarqi, unlike the claim of Eduard Said, orientalism as a corpus of knowledge should be seen not as a “one way exchange” but as “dialogic relations” between Europeans and Oriental scholars. See his *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography,* Palgrave, 2001, pp. 19-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Byron J. Good, “The Transformation of Health Care in Modern Iranian History”, in Michael E. Bonine & Nikki R. Keddie (eds), op. cit., pp. 59-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Mangol Bayat-Philipp, “Tradition and Change in Iranian Socio-Religious Thought”, in Michael E. Bonine & Nikki Keddie (eds), *The Dialectics of Continuity and Change,* State University of New York Press, Albany, 1981, pp. 47-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Mangol Bayat-Philipp, “Tradition and Change”, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Ibid, p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Mangol Bayat-Philipp, “The Concept of Historical Continuity in Modern Iranian Thought”, *Asian and African Studies,* vol. 12 (1978): 203-220, pp. 204-205, 212-214, and 220. Magol Bayat’s argument becomes clearer when he quotes Clifford Geertz: “one is holding religious views rather than being held by them” *Islam Observed,* 1968, pp. 17-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Jacques Derrida, on the other hand, talked about the “secularised theological concepts of politics” or the “religious origins of the idea of sovereignty”; his argument seems to follow the idea of conceptual development from the religious to the secular. See: M. Chérif, *Islam and the West. A Conversation with Jacques Derrida,* Translated from French, The University of Chicago Press, 2014, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Armando Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity,* Ithaca, Reading, 1997, pp. 21, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Farzin Vahdat, “Critical Theory and the Islamic Encounter with Modernity”, in In, Michael J. Thompson (ed), *Islam and the West: Critical Perspectives on Modernity.* Rowan and

Littlefield, 2003, pp. 123-138; idem, “Metaphysical foundations of Islamic revolutionary discourse in Iran; Vacillations on human subjectivity”, *Critique: Journal of Critical Studies of the Middle East,* 1999, vol. 8, No. 14: 49-73; idem, “Post-Revolutionary Islamic Discourse on Modernity in Iran: Expansion and Contraction of Human Subjectivity”, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 35 (2003): 599-631. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. F. Vahdat, “Mehdi Haeri Yazdi and the Discourse of Modernity”, in Ramin Jahanbegloo (ed), *Iran Between Tradition and Modernity,* Lexington Books, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Oxford, 2004: 51-70, pp. 59-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Pamela Karimi, *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran: Interior Revolution of the Modern Era,* Routledge, 2013, P. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Ibid, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ibid, pp. 40-41, 49, 59, 93, et passim. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Carol Gluck, “The End of Elsewhere: Writing Modernity Now”, *AHR Roundtable,* pp. 677-8 and 686. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. C. Cluck, idem, p. 686. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Micheal Hardt and Antonio Negri, *op. cit*. Preface and chapters 1.3 & 3.2 in particular. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism,* Zed Books, 2012. Dabashi, however, criticises Hardt & Negri for universalising the West and believes that the mode of resistance to global domination must remain national and regional”. (ibid, pp. 26-32). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. A. Najmabadi, *op. cit.,* p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Borrowing the term used by Marshal Berman, but in the reverse direction. Berman’s broad definition of modernism is “any attempts by modern men and women to become subjects as well as objects of modernisation, to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it.” See *All that is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity,* Penguin Books, first published 1982, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. E’temâd al Saltaneh, *Ruznameh*, p. 669; Adamiyyat, *Ideology-e nehzat-e mashrutiyyat,* p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. For a clear analysis of this engagement, see Asghar Fathi, op. cit. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. See Malkam Khan: *Majmu ‘e-ye âsâr-e Mirzâ Malkam Khân* “collected writings of Mirzâ Malkam Khan” (edited by Mohammad Mohit Tabatabâyee), Tehran, 1327, pp. 40, 141; Mostashâr al-Dowleh, *Yek-kalameh.* On the work of Abdul Hossein Na’ini and his followers in favour of the Constitution and its establishment in Iran, see: Abdul Hadi Hairi, *Shiism and Constitutionalism in Iran: A study of the role played by the Persian residents of Iraq in Iranian politics*,Leiden, 1977; Vanessa Martin, *Islam and Modernism: The Iranian Revolution of 1906,* London, I.B. Tauris, 1989, pp. 180-185. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. See The Supplementary Fundamental Laws of October 7, 1907, in Eduard G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1907,* Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1966, pp. 372-373. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Scott Mongomery, *Science in Translation,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 2000), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. *Science in Translation,* p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. *Montakhab-e akhlâq-e nâsseri* (anthology of akhlâq-e nâsseri), edited by Jalâl Homayee, Tehran, 1320/1941, pp. 39-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. F. Adamiyat, *Ideology-e nehzat-e mashrutiyat-e Iran,* pp. 252-253. A quite similar link between the old and the new can be found in Western ideas. R. Bendix argues how the old models are sometimes used to express modern ideas. Referring to Adam Fergusson’s discussion of modern society where he attributes the progress of a people to the subdivision of tasks, which at the same time improves the skills of the artisans, the profits of the manufacturer, etc…, Bendix states that “The old division of society into a leisured, ruling minority and the bulk of working population is reflected in Fergusson’s view that social rank depends on the work men do. See: “Tradition and Modernity Reconsidered”, *Op. cit.,* p. 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Adamiyat, *Ideology,* p. 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Adamiyat, *Ideology,* pp. 227, 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Ibid, p. 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. One of the hardliner clerics in Iran today stated that Malkam Khan was using religion as an instrument to introduce Western ideas. See the TV debate between Zibâkalâm and Khosropanah, YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzZo8aehoHM&spfreload=10> minutes 39-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Many people, who could not find work, were left unprotected and sometimes died of hunger. In the 1860s, it was reported that come spring, the poor from other cities or villages flooded to Tehran for work while many of them were homeless and slept outside, often falling ill in the shadow of broken walls. See H. Ebrahimnejad, *Medicine, Public Health and the Qajar State,* Brill, 2004, p. 160. On the Iranian economy in the nineteenth century, cf. Willem Floor, *Guilds, Merchants, & Ulama in Nineteenth-Century Iran,* Mage Publishers, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914,* OUP, 1993, p. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. *Iran,* No. 450, 18 Rabi’ al-sâni 1298/19 March 1881, Published version, vol. 3, p. 1810. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Copy of manuscript of Dr Boqrât al Hokamâ, in possession of the author. On the medical transformation in Iran, see my two books, *Medicine, Public Health and the Qajar State* (2004) for institutional modernisation, and *Medicine in Iran (2014)* for theoretical transformation. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Tarbiyat, no. 1, 11 Rajab 1314 (17 December 1896), and no. 2, 24 December 1896; pp. 1-2, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Ervand Abrahamian, “Kasravi, the Integrative Nationalist of Iran”, *Middle East Studies,* 1973: 271-295, p. 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. F. Adamiyyat, *Amir Kabir va Iran,* Tehran, Khwârazmi, 1385/2006, pp. 402ff. This is not to say that underdevelopment of the Middle Eastern countries was due to the colonial domination only but had roots, according to Timur Kuran, in the medieval Islamic law, which did not allow private sector and corporate companies to develop. That is why in the nineteenth century, they succumbed to foreign domination. T. Kuran, *The long Divergence: How Islamic Law held back the Middle East,* Princeton University Press, 2001,pp. 5, et passim. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Fereydun Adamiyyat, *Amir Kabir va Iran,* pp. 307-312. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. I am inspired here by Said A. Arjomand’s analysis on law and civil society in the medieval Islamic society. See: “Law, Agency, and Policy in Medieval Islamic Society: Development of the Institutions of Learning from the Tenth to the Fifteenth Century”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* Vol. 41, no. 2 (April 1999): 263-293. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Le Cte De Croizier, *La Perse et les Persans. Naser-Eddin-Schah. Le nouvel Iran et l’équilibre Asiatique,* Paris, E. Dentu, Libraire-Editeur, 1873, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Ibid, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Mirzâ Hossein Khan Moshir al Dowleh, Nâser al Din Shah’s Prime Minister had reportedly advised Queen Victoria and Lord Granville to lecture the Shah on the virtues of good government during his second visit to England in 1889. Denis Wright, *The Persian Amongst the English,* p. 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. On the use of chair as an item introduced from the West and increasingly used under the Qajars, see: Samuel R. Peterson, “Chairs and Change in Qajar Times”, in M. E. Bonine & N. R. Keddie (eds), *Modern Iran,* op. cit., pp. 383-390. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. On these developments see *inter alia*: Nikki Keddie, Modern Iran, Ch. 3, pp. 52ff and Ch. 4. This is not to say, however, that the constitutionalists represented the emerging bourgeoisie only. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. See for example, F. L. Bernstein, C. Burton, D. Healey (eds), *Soviet medicine: culture, practice, and science,* Northern Illinois University Press, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. “La foi à la loi du progrès est la vraie foi de notre âge.” Kate Rees, *Romanticism and after in France/Le Romantisme et après en France*, Volume 21, Flaubert: Transportation, Progression, Progress, Peter Lang (Publishers), 2010, p. 2. In his last and unfinished book, *Bouvard et Pécouchet,* published posthumously, Flaubert expressed his scepticism towards modern science and modernity and criticised the notion of having faith in the law of progress. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Ministère des affaires étrangères, “the letter of Ministère de l’Instruction Publique et des Beaux-Arts” to the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères”, 25 May 1918. (La Courneuve, Perse 65-66). [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Ibid, the letter of M. Vadala, Chargé du Vice-Consulat de France à Bender –Bouchir, to the Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, 16 June 1918, folio 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Idem, Bassora, fin février 1919, (Direction politique et commerciale, 11 Mars 1919), folio 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. France played an important role in the establishment of higher education under Reza Shah. The military school (*dâneshkadeh-ye afsari*) of Tehran, where the heir apparent Prince Mohammad-Reza spent two years to get his degree, was established on the model of the École militaire de Saint-Cyr in France and staffed with French military advisers. See H. I. M. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, *Ma’muriyat barâye vatanam* (A mission for my country), undated publication, p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Kate Rees, *Flaubert: Transportation, Progression, Progress,* Peter Lang AG, European Academic Publishers, Bern, 2010, P. 16 [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. This is what Fereidun Adamyyat calls *andisheh-ye taraqqi* (idea or ideology of progress) that according to him was introduced from the West and marked the modernisation era in the second part of the nineteenth century and was, in particular, associated with the reforms of Mirza Hossein Khan Sepahsâlâr. Cf. : *Andisheh-ye taraqqi va hokumat-e qânun: asr-e sepahsâlâr* (The idea of progress and rule of law under Sepahsâlâr), Khwârazmi Publishers, Tehran, 1351/1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Commenting on the testimonies of Ayatollah Montazeri, one of the theoreticians of *velâyat-e faqih*, and heir to Khomeini who lost his position and eventually died under house arrest because he opposed the mass killing of the imprisoned opposition members in 1987, Mehdi Aslani, who is one of the surviving prisoners, maintains that Montazeri can by no means represent a human rights advocate because of his position and ideas. This essentialist perception of “human rights” suggests that the idea or principle of “human rights” does not find any parallel in real life under the clerical regime in Iran. A human rights concern expressed from a non-Western perspective is not “human rights”. Montazeri’s defence of the rights of opposition groups in the clerical regime does not conform to “human rights” as perceived in the West because his way of defending the human lives is based on Shiite jurisprudence. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Karen Armstrong, “Christian: Brave New World (1492-1870)”, in K. Artmstrong (ed), *The battle for God: fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam,* London, Harper Collins (2000), pp. 61-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse,* p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. In this, I am inspired by the ANT (Actor-Network Theory) of Michel Callon and Bruno Latour. See: B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social – An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory,* Oxford University Press, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. On social movement theory see analysis by Asef Bayat on Islamism as a social movement: “Islamism and Social Movement Theory,” *Third World Quarterly,* 2005; 26 (6): 891-908. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. See for example, Homa Afshar, “‘Disempowerment’ and the Politics of Civil Liberties for Iranian Women,” in: H. Afshar (ed), *Women and Empowerment; Illustrations from the Third World,* Palgrave McMillan, Basingstoke, 1998, pp. 117-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. using the terms of Ziba Mir-Hosseini, “Debating Women: Gender and the Public Sphere in Post-Revolutionary Iran”, in: Amyn B. Sajoo, *Civil Society in the Muslim world: contemporary perspectives,* I.B. Tauris Publishers in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, New York, 2002: pp. 95-122. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. See: Guiti Nashat, “Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *Iranian Suties,* Volume XIII, Nos. 1-4, 1980, pp/ 165-194; Nadia Aghtaie, “Iranian Women’s Perspectives on Violence against Women in Iran and the UK,” *Iranian Studies,* Vol. 49, No. 4, 2016, pp. 593-611. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. See for example, Mark R. Woodward, “Modernity and the Disenchantment of Life,” in John Meulman (ed), *Islam in the Era of Globalization: Muslim attitudes towards modernity and identity,* Routledge, London and New York, 2002, pp. 111-142. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Perhaps to confront such intellectual colonialism, alongside an aggressive military pressure in North Africa and Central Asia by British, Russian and French powers, that Seyed Jamâl al-Din Afghani wrote his “*nicheriya*” or “Refutation of the Materialists”. Nikkie Keddie, Sayyid Jamâl ad-Din “alAfghânî” A Political Biography, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1972, pp. 129-130. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. R. Bendix, p. 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. J. Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyânat,* pp. 158-159. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Homa Katouzian suggests, “Marx himself did not think that his theory of social development had universal application. This was a theory pertaining only to European developments.” “[for him] the Asiatic society was just Asiatic and apparently would remain ‘Asiatic’”. See: *Iranian History and Politics: The Dialectics of State and Society,* Routledge, 2003, p. 8. It is, however, questionable to suggest that because he did not study non-Western countries, Marx excluded Asiatic societies from the law of development! [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. B. Latour, *We have never been modern.* [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Michael Hardt & A. Negri, ibid, pp. 43-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)