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Author(s): Alphan Telek

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# On the Origins of Authoritarian Islamic Regime Foundations in the Middle East: The Case of Iran

Alphan Telek\*

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## Abstract

This article examines the way in which the Islamic regime in Iran was founded, what were the political and social conditions that convinced people for a regime change and, finally, what were the social consequences of and reactions to an authoritarian regime foundation in this country heavily populated by Muslims. This article argues that the experience of Iran provides a model framework to understand potential authoritarian Islamic regime foundations elsewhere. The article studies Iran's contemporary political history in three phases: firstly, the socio-political atmosphere of the pre-revolutionary period, which could be deemed as preliminary years triggering the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Secondly, the period of the constitutive attempts towards an Islamic regime foundation through the 1980s is examined. Thirdly, the confrontation phase is probed where the social reactions against the Islamic regime foundation have taken place and increasingly intensified since the 1990s until now.

**Keywords:** Iran; Islamic Republic; 1979 Revolution; Authoritarianism; Nativism; Anti-Westernism; Crony Solidarity; Velayet-e Faqih; State-Society Relations

## 1. Introduction

Do authoritarian political regime foundation processes resemble each other? More specifically, do authoritarian Islamic regime foundations share any common characteristics across the Middle East? Can a theoretical study of the Islamic regime foundation in Iran realized in the past tell us more about political regime changes happening right now in Middle East or elsewhere in the future? What can be the common themes, ideas and events in authoritarian and Islamic regime foundations? Can we learn from and deduce anything from these questions in light of Iran's historical political transformations?

This article tries to answer the above questions by studying the case of Iran in detail. The socio-political atmosphere before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the constitutive attempts of the Islamic regime after 1979 and the social consequences of the regime foundation carry a significance to understand possible regime changes elsewhere in the world. However, I limit the geographical scale to the Middle East region due to the strong role of Islam in the regime foundations seen in this region. However, other elements, which will be analyzed in this article, may have common attributes with authoritarian regime foundations taking place across different geographies all around the world.

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\* Alphan Telek; PhD Candidate, Centre de Recherche Internationale (CERI), Sciences Po, Paris, France. Email: [alphan.telek@gmail.com](mailto:alphan.telek@gmail.com)

This article examines Iran's contemporary political history in three periods: The period that prepared the regime change in Iran between 1953 and 1979, the stage that made the regime change possible between 1979 and 1990 and the period in which social reactions to the regime change have risen since the 1990s. I suggest a model (periodization) to better understand authoritarian regime foundations. There are three periods that an authoritarian and Islamic regime experience. It can be summarized as *preliminary*, *constitutive* and *confrontation* phases.

In this scheme of periodization, I argue that the *preliminary* phase is the one where social discontent with the *ancien régime* increase, accompanied by a strong nativist sentiment and discourse heavily nurtured from anti-Imperialism, anti-Westernism and anti-establishment feelings. There is also the existence of anti-democratic practices of *ancien régime*. The *preliminary* phase ends with a regime change.

In the *constitutive* period, the regime change is institutionalized both in political and social spheres. In Iran case, the institutionalization of Islamic regime manifested itself as the fusion of "one-man rule" and religious-nationalist doctrines at the state level according to which every cell of social and political structure was re-designed. In this period, the social life is molded by discriminatory constitutional articles and laws around one religious nationalist doctrine, which is political Islam for Iran case. Moreover, I claim that the *constitutive* phase is usually initiated and strengthened by wars, civil strife, social polarization, briefly by socially shocking events and the cult of "martyrdom". It can be deduced from this that for an authoritarian Islamic regime to be established, one-man rule and the injection of a religious nationalist doctrine is necessary but not sufficient. Socially shocking events, the culture of "martyrdom" and pumping social polarization deepen and fortify the new regime.

All these transformations in the *constitutive* period produce a great resentment and discontent among the members of a society. This is the third phase of authoritarian regime foundations, the *confrontation* phase. In a *confrontation* phase, large segments of the society, especially the ones who are oppressed and excluded from political decision-making processes, start to react to the authoritarian and Islamic regime. The reasons are apparently the measures and actions of the new regime in the *constitutive* phase, which irretrievably damage the social equality and freedoms, leading to loss of social solidarity. Furthermore, I will try to show that this loss is replaced by the new regime establishing "crony solidarity" among the regime supporters. The social tensions and political pressures go on in this period and they breed each other. This becomes the motor of social progress or regress in authoritarian regimes.

In a nutshell, it is asserted in this article that authoritarian regimes – especially Islamic ones – in the Middle East share certain political and social inclinations through these periodic divisions. This periodization of authoritarian regime foundations can make us better understand the current political and social affairs in Middle East and elsewhere, establishing an authoritarian regime. Iran case is a benchmark in this model, from which we deduce much. As a matter of fact, different countries display different contexts, meaning that they are not same at all. However, nativist feelings in preliminary stages, authoritarian tendencies and the use of an Islamic discourse in constitutive phases and finally social reactions against these regimes make different countries common before history.

The article consists of three parts: preliminary phase in Iran, constitutive period after revolution and confrontation period where social reactions to Islamic regime foundation took place. I will address certain political and social events through these parts by referring to the model put forward above. In the conclusion, I will summarize the findings of the article and point to common characteristics of new regime attempts.

## **2. Preliminary Phase: The Rise of Political and Philosophical Nativism after 1953**

The history between 1953 and 1979 in Iran proceeded under the dominance of “nativism” manifesting itself as an overemphasis of the “authenticity” of Iran and Islamic culture against Western values, as preponderance of anti-Westernism and anti-Imperialism through the different segments of the society and as emergence of a revolutionary political ideology around Islamic values to topple down both Shah’s ruling and superiority of the West. It should be underlined that nativism is one of the most important elements that prepare the ground for authoritarian regime foundations in Middle East. Though at the beginning nativism was a rejection of superiority claims of West and it was an attempt of self-protection by non-Western political and social cultures, it has in time been used negatively by authoritarian non-Western regimes for anti-democratic practices. In other words, nativist claims were used as a socio-political justification to oppress and exclude opponents in authoritarian regimes of Middle East. These regimes nurtured from certain political justifications such as “democracy and secularism are Western values and they are alien to their native cultures”, which we will come and examine deeply later in this part. As one of the strong examples, the Islamic regime in Iran was founded on the basis of this nativism, requiring a closer examination.

Nativism is not a political ideology or a legal rule. It is a philosophical mindset and a political manifest emerging as a reaction against the centuries-long claims of Western superiority and Western hegemony on modernity. It seems that unequal and hierarchical relations among nation-states since the 19<sup>th</sup> century were based on these superiority claims and the reality of Western hegemony. Therefore we can accept nativism as an early and orchestrated form for rejection of Western dominance. Mehrzad Boroujerdi argues that nativism is basically a doctrine that aims to revive and maintain native and local cultures, beliefs and values (2001: 40). He also adds that nativism emerged after the Second World War during which colonialism was about to collapse. In this manner, he asserts that nativism became an indicative doctrine for anti-colonial and nationalist movements in the Third World countries that wanted to challenge the idea of Western superiority and uniqueness (Boroujerdi 2001: 40).

### ***The Philosophical Roots of Nativism***

Nativism can be examined either as a philosophical rejection of Western superiority claims or as a political manifest against the reality of Western hegemony. Therefore, we will trace the origins of nativism in Iran both in philosophical and political fields. Philosophical roots of nativism in non-Western societies mostly nurtured from the writings and ideas of Martin Heidegger and Frantz Fanon. Especially Heidegger was an influential figure in the

philosophical query of Iranian intellectuals and revolutionary activists for his strong critique of modernity. Ali Mirsepassi (2011: 90) says that Heidegger's ideas and discourses represent a counter-enlightenment approach within Western modernity, meaning that he saw secular and democratic values of enlightenment as troubled and unsettled for humanity and modern individual. Mirsepassi alleges that Heidegger's views represent a long tradition of counter-enlightenment, started as a reaction to the ideas of the French Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Heidegger's ideas are mainly based on a serious critique of secular values and institutions (Mirsepassi 2011: 90). According to Heidegger, modernity, in other words, secular values and institutions brought about a spiritual crisis, emanating from forgetting the roots and authentic cultural values.

Therefore, Heidegger criticizes modernity and secular values for causing inauthentic and rootless cultures, disparaging modern individuals with aloofness, isolation, and a strong psychological depression. Against this, he does not suggest to go back to pre-modern traditional social institutions or structures. Instead, he puts forward an alternative modernity based on an authentic community rooted in a new being. His being depends upon traditional heroic values such as *will, power, struggle and etc.* Therefore, he suggests going back to root values and authenticity to solve modern issues that modern individual faced with. In other words, Heidegger's critique was based on traditional, local and national values rather than cosmopolitan values like democracy, which made him an important inspiration for Third World nationalisms after Second World War.

Mirsepassi claims (2011) what Heidegger put forward by a new "being" is new social relations in a "rooted" framework since Heidegger believes secular and cosmopolitan values are demonstrations of the spiritual decline of West. It is not the focus of this article but it should be remembered that this philosophical approach lies at the very origin of the rising fascism throughout Europe in the 1930s. Nazism in Germany nurtured from these philosophical views: the disgust of democratic and universal values, emphasis of root values, authenticity of Aryan race, will, power, struggle, etc. It seems that a similar philosophical position about modernity passed to non-Western societies to be used against the claims of Western hegemony in the aftermath of Second World War. How did it happen? How come it was possible that Heideggerian critiques witnessed a revival in Iran? In order to answer these questions, we should first examine nativism as a political manifest.

### ***The Political Origins of Nativism***

It should be underlined that nativism in political terms is one of the doctrinal consequences of Third Worldism and anti-colonialism at that time. The prevalence of socialist and Marxist thought in Cold War era made the rise of nativism in Third World countries more likely by increasing the anti-establishment and anti-imperialist feelings. As Andrew Heywood puts it, politics is exciting since people disagree (2007: 3), meaning that politics starts with rejection. Thus, after three hundred years of submission to Western hegemony, non-Western societies started to search for ways that reject political, social and economic submission to West. In that sense, one of the first responses of non-Western societies to the hegemonic politics of West and superiority claims was nativism, a mix of national feelings and existential search for being in Heideggerian meaning. In this manner, all Third Worldist movements in one way

or another had a piece of nativism, manifesting as anti-Westernism, anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, depending on the political and historical context of the country.

The ideologue of the nativism doctrine is Frantz Fanon, a Martinique thinker and revolutionary activist (Boroujerdi 2001: 40). Many people trace the origins of nativism to his writings. In his opus magnum *Wretched of the Earth*, he strongly criticized not only the colonizer but also the colonized for acceptance of Western superiority claims and hegemony (Boroujerdi 2001: 42). According to Fanon, one of the most important moments of colonization is to root out intellectual and traditional values with the help of colonized elites of the colonized nation. Fanon thinks that this is an evidence of alienated consciousness, seeing Western values superior and hegemonic. Fanon argues that political freedom and independence from Western colonizers cannot be gained unless this alienation is abandoned. Against this, he asserts that the natives should be get rid of from this humiliation feeling by first creating a new narrative and consciousness against Eurocentrism and colonialism, then a political struggle for that end. In this manner, Fanon can be deemed as one of the founding fathers of nativism in political sense. Heideggerian thought and Fanonist doctrine combined to form the basis of nativism among Third World countries. How did all these echo in Iran?

### ***The Fallouts of Nativism in Iran: Gharbzedegi (Westoxication)***

As it is argued above, nativism emerged in Iran between 1953 and 1979. Heideggerian and Fanonist thoughts dominated the intellectual and political language of Islamists, nationalists and Marxists in Iran at that period of time. All these groups were marked by a strong sense of nativism and a revolutionary ideology that wanted to overthrow both the Shah's oppressive regime and its main collaborators, namely Western powers such as the US. But why was anti-Westernism and anti-imperialism in collaboration with nativism so powerful in Iran at that time? Though there are many reasons to explain, the coup d'état in 1953 was a turning point to breed nativism in Iran.

It may be stressed that the way leading to the 1979 Revolution in Iran was triggered by the 1953 coup d'état. It was a coup planned by the United States and British governments against the hitherto Iranian nationalist leader and Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) formally accepted its role in this coup d'état in 2013 (Dehghan and Norton-Taylor 2013). Stephen Kinzer, in his well-documented book, shows how the coup d'état took place in details (2018). The main reasons were apparently to sustain the control of Iranian petroleum and to protect the geopolitical interests of Western camp against Soviet Union in the Middle East region during the Cold War. That is why USA and British backed the coup d'état against nationalist leader Mosaddeq. After Mosaddeq, Reza Shah's son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was enthroned, launching a monarchical dictatorship that lasted for 26 years until the 1979 Revolution. As Khosrokhavar puts it, the overthrow of Mosaddeq created a deep suspicion against Western powers (2007: 4). What is more, Mirsepassi highlights that the coup d'état fuelled anti-Western hatred and mistrust among Iranians (2006: 417). Henceforth, anti-Western and anti-Imperialism feelings peaked after this event. Iranian people started to think that dictatorship and imperialism (apparently emanating from the Western intervention) are two sides of the same coin. This event should have forced the Iranian intellectuals and opponents to abandon universal values and to find

native and nationalist responses to the social problems that Iran faced. There were two figurative intellectuals of this nativist rise: Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati. Without recognizing their impacts on Iranian society and the 1979 Revolution, it is impossible to see the main motives of preparatory phase of our model.

### *The Builders of Nativism in Iran: Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati*

Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati are the materialized intellectual forms of rising nativism in Iran. Mehran Kamrava calls them revolutionary and anti-modernist (2008: 52), and also acknowledging them as the ideologues of the 1979 Revolution. Consequently, examining them may help us understand the philosophical and political seeds of the authoritarian Islamic regime foundation in Iran. Whereas Al-e Ahmad is well known for his outstanding concept “*Gharbzedegi*” (Westoxication, sickness of the West), Shariati is accepted as the political ideologue of the 1979 Revolution, putting forward a revolutionary political doctrine of Shi’i Islam (Mirsepassi, 2000: 124). Both intellectuals strongly criticized the Western influence on Iranian Islamic culture and they argued that this is not authentic, away from the root values of the society just like Heidegger argued for societies in the West. That is why they defended a return to root values of Iranian Islamic culture and fight with the claims of Western superiority or actual Western hegemony in Iran. It should be remembered that in the eyes of these intellectuals, the Pahlavi dictatorship was seen as a collaborator of Western hegemony, so fighting against one of them meant fighting with the other as well.

Jalal Al-e Ahmad was under the impact of German reactionary modernism (Mirsepassi 2000: 121), which was discussed above as a counter-enlightenment movement. Ali Mirsepassi furthers his arguments to such an extent that he says Ahmad and radical Iranian intellectuals at that time may be defined as Martin Heidegger’s “children” (2000: 121). The reason for that are his arguments criticizing modernity and secular values because of their devastating effects on Iran-Islamic culture. Ahmad believed that a return to Iran-Islamic roots, in other words, authenticity is mandatory if Iranian society wants to escape from the disparaging influences of modernity (Mirsepassi 2000: 96). What we see in his thoughts is an amalgam of the counter-enlightenment approach of Heidegger and Third Worldist solutions of Fanon. Moreover, Ahmad does not totally reject modern societies. Like Heidegger, he imagines a modern Iranian community with an injection of root, authentic values of Iran-Islam history. Thereupon, he formulated his distinguished concept of *Gharbzedegi* (Westoxication) (Mirsepassi 2000: 96) The notion aims to explain the detrimental outcomes of Western values on Iran-Islamic culture. He defines this repercussion on the culture as a sickness, a kind of toxication that deeply influences Iranian society – especially Iranian intellectuals. He warned that Westoxication could lead to the collapse of Iran’s cultural authenticity, political sovereignty and economic well-being (Boroujerdi 2001: 104).

For Ahmad and many Iranian intellectuals at the time, the claims of Western superiority and Western hegemony on non-Western societies could be overcome only with struggling against these influences and returning to root values. Accordingly, this would bring back the authentic Iranian-Islamic community. Thus, *Gharbzedegi* became one of the most leading concepts both before and after the 1979 Revolution to be used as a justification for political action. As a result, it was influential not only among the Islamist and conservative Iranians

but also among leftists and nationalists. In that case, *Gharbzedeği* became the materialized key concept of rising nativism in Iran, an attempt of self-protection against Western hegemony. The mistrust and disgust of anti-imperialism and anti-Westernism due to the coup d'état in 1953 and the US collaboration with Reza Mohammad Pahlavi's dictatorship deepened and accelerated the preponderance of nativist claims among Iranian people. Though it was a crucial concept that prepares philosophical ground of nativism in Iran, one other known Iranian intellectual Ali Shariati developed this idea and garnished it with revolutionary and Shi'i Islamic values, leading to a revival of a revolutionary Shi'i Islamic doctrine that brought about the 1979 Revolution and then an authoritarian Islamic regime.

### *Nativism as Political Ideology*

Ali Shariati constructed a political ideology around the concepts of *Gharbzedeği*, Shi'i Islamic values and Marxist ideas. He was an undeniably significant thinker and a political activist that enhanced nativist claims by adding political enthusiasm and revolutionary tone in Iran. While Jalal Al-e Ahmad criticized Western hegemony and its national fallouts in Iran, he never formulated the means and ways to overcome these issues (Boroujerdi 2001: 146). This role was left to Ali Shariati. He drew a political ideology on the basis of strong criticisms done by Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Shi'i Islamic values (Mirsepassi 2000). Thereupon, he was known as the ideologue and "Voltaire" of the 1979 Revolution (Mirsepassi 2000). Mirsepassi proclaims that Shariati was the most outstanding Shi'i intellectual in the 1970s (2000: 115), by reminding that the People's Mojahedin of Iran, one of the most important oppositional forces in Iran during the 1970s, officially accepted Shariati as their ideologue.

The specialty of Shariati's ideological views lie in his efforts to mix Shi'i Islamic values with Marxist concepts as a political ideology, leading Iranians to the 1979 Revolution (Mirsepassi 2000: 108). According to Shariati, the most important task of a Muslim is to struggle and topple down the unjust order (Mirsepassi 2000: 108). Shariati also argues that the revolutionary energy for political struggle emanates from the root and authentic values of Iran-Islamic culture (Mirsepassi 2000: 118). Therefore, what we see in Shariati's views is a potent combination of the revolutionary and ideological power of Marxism and Shi'i Islamic values. His emphasis on political struggle was to such an extent that he upheld that a person's practices, not beliefs, make him/her a Muslim (Mirsepassi 2000: 127). In that sense, Shariati re-evaluated Shiism according to the revolutionary spirit of the day. He provided the modern versions of traditional Shi'i perception of justice saying that the Muslims can reach salvation if only they fight against injustice (Boroujerdi 2001: 151).

Moreover, the mistrust and hatred against the West during these years combined with the global impact of marxism, socialism and Third Worldism. As Farhad Khosrokhavar contends (2007), what we witnessed in this period of time in Iran is a synthesis of the third worldist arguments with Shi'a thought (a native response against Western hegemony), which was especially furthered by Ali Shariati at that time. Reza Sheikholeslami upholds that Marxism was so prominent in the 1960s that all the key political concepts of the time were borrowed from Marxism (2000: 108). Iranian intellectuals and revolutionary activists, including Shariati, started to sound certain notions like classless society (*jame'e bi-tabaqe tohidi*) (Khosrokhavar 2007: 5), or definitive words such as oppressed and oppressor



(*mostazafin and mostakharin*) (Khosrokhavar 2007: 5). Even the Shah was using Marxist terms in his speeches. He was supposedly showing his revolutionary spirit by saying that he was the guide of the revolution in his country (he had promised a series land and social reforms) (Khosrokhavar 2007: 5). Besides, certain third worldist concepts against colonialist powers strengthened this political language. For example, researcher Eric Hooglund proclaims that Ali Shariati borrowed the term *mostazafin* (oppressed) from Frantz Fanon, the founding father of nativism (2009: 34).

In a nutshell, nativism manifested itself first in philosophical and then political forms in Iran between 1953 and 1979, fuelled by mistrust and hatred against Western values, combining anti-Westernism, anti-Imperialism and the third worldist arguments with Marxism and Shi'ism (Göksel 2019: 24-37). This was the preliminary phase of the foundation of an authoritarian Islamic regime. All these values had a great impact on the minds of ordinary people in the streets. Under the Pahlavi dynasty's oppressive and anti-democratic rule, all these feelings peaked in 1979 and the Iranian society overthrew the Shah's regime and Ruhollah Khomeini along with other Shi'i clerics took the leadership of the Revolution. The Shah was seemingly overthrown by Iranian society in the name of political freedom, social equality and justice. However, the mullahs (Shi'i clerics) grasped the political power with the help of the charismatic leadership of Khomeini and instead founded an authoritarian Islamic regime. How was it possible? How did the constitutive phase of the Iranian Islamic Republic start and evolve?

### **3. Constitutive Phase: Socio-Political Configuration of Authoritarian Regime after 1979**

The moment of revolution or details of how it was realized does not concern this article. Here, this article will examine the post-revolutionary period where the political and social configurations of the authoritarian Islamic regime were realized. How was it possible for Islamic clerics to obtain the leadership of the revolution? More importantly, how was it possible for them to found an authoritarian Islamic regime? What were their mechanisms and justifications? Was there any social or political event that helped them establish the Islamic Republic? Last but not least, what was the ideal political and philosophical configuration for the new regime? This part of the article will be concerned with these questions by referring to the post-revolutionary era.

Before going into details of the post-revolutionary era, it should be remembered that our model envisages that authoritarian and Islamic regime foundations in Middle East depend on a strong nativism (I call this period the preliminary phase). Besides, that process usually is triggered and eased by socially shocking events such as wars, civil strives, coup d'états or attempts of coup d'états. The newly founded authoritarian regimes usually benefit from these socially shocking events. Since the martyrdom in Middle East is treated as a "cult", these new regimes put forward the martyrdom and martyrs, people who lose their lives in these socially shocking events, as adjuvants of a nationalistic atmosphere. It helps to curb the social and political opposition to new regimes and creating a suitable atmosphere for establishing an authoritarian regime foundation. Moreover, nativist claims against Western values, democracy and secularism also help the new regimes to justify and deepen their rule in the

society. Last but not least, these new regimes are step by step established around one-man rule, designing social life and political structure around a religious-nationalist doctrine.

Thus we come to the second phase of authoritarian regime foundations: The constitutive phase. Authoritarian regimes need constitutive narratives and socially shocking events in order to be able to get support from people. It should be underlined that the need for these kinds of narratives and events does not necessarily mean that they are fictive phenomenon fabricated by these new regimes. Though the government conspiracy is a strong possibility, these constitutive narratives generally happen under the radical circumstances of socio-political transformation. Basically, such events may simply be natural phenomenon under those atmospheres. But the revolutionary zeal can produce unordinary meanings out of them to consolidate its power and be established.

There are two basic constitutive events for authoritarian regime formation in Iran: the 1979 Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War between 1980-1988. Within this context, bomb attack to the center of the Islamic Republic Party (Khosrokhavar and Roy 2013: 27) and the raid to the American Embassy were also socially shocking events that kept revolutionary zeal high. All these events triggered and simplified the work of authoritarian regime foundation since they terrorized the minds of ordinary people by convincing them the best option to tackle those issues is an authoritarian rule around a pyramidal power structure (*Velayet-e Faqih*) and one religious nationalist doctrine (Shi'i Islam) that can save the society.

The first constitutive event in post-revolutionary Iran was the 1979 Revolution itself. After 26 years-long dictatorship, the Shah, who was seen as a collaborator of Western powers, was overthrown. As it is discussed in the first part, a nativist atmosphere dominated the political and intellectual language, directing people to perceive democracy and secularism as alien to Iran-Islamic culture and that they should be abandoned as soon as possible and instead an authentic community and state should be established. This was the core idea of the pre-revolutionary era that had huge impacts in post-revolutionary Iran. The Revolution was the socio-political means to make these nativist claims real. That is why the 1979 Revolution was a radical, transformative and a constitutive narrative for the new regime in the following years.

As Mehrzad Boroujerdi puts it, Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers took advantage of nativism, authenticity, Heideggerian ideas, Third Worldism and Marxism of the pre-revolutionary period (Boroujerdi 2014: 6). Under this revolutionary zeal, the American Embassy raid happened in November 1979, seven months after the Revolution. Iranian radical young revolutionaries took hostage 52 Americans. This hostage crisis continued for 444 days and it was seen as a revenge for the US-backed coup d'état in 1953. Anti-Westernist and anti-imperialist feelings were fuelled under the revolutionary zeal and this event metamorphosed into a socially shocking event, resulting in more revolutionary delirium. The hostage crisis was a crucial turning point for shaping the fate of post-revolutionary Iran as it triggered a change in the moral leadership of the 1979 Revolution, getting rid of the "left", the Marxists, and giving the direction of the revolution to the Islamists and the clergy since radical clerics managed this event (Sheikholeslami 2000: 111). Anti-imperialist and anti-American claims usually belonged to Marxists in the pre-revolutionary period but the raid on the American embassy changed the course of the events and moral leadership. It gave clerics

a superior moral power to use in the authoritarian regime foundation and legitimize the process.

As it is discussed above, Shi'i Islamism had an undeniably significant role in the revolution. However, the revolutionary reading of Shi'i values gave way to nationalist and statist approaches in the post-revolutionary process. It also strengthened the positions of clerics. As Olivier Roy and Farhad Khosrokhavar argue, the revolution associated Shi'ism with nationalism and it expanded the space of the Iranian nation-state (2013: 15). The revolution carried pre-revolutionary nativist claims to another level. The defenders of the nativist claims came to the power and there were no counter-powers that could potentially balance them. When Ayatollah Khomeini and Shi'i clerics understood that, it seems that they decided to use the vacuum of power to establish a clerical rule in Iran. That is why the post-revolutionary era is often called the era of "statisation" and "Iranization" of Shi'ism (Roy 1999: 208).

To sum-up, it can be claimed that Shi'i Islamism was transformed into Islamo-nationalism that expanded the space of nation-state. All the nativist claims had paved the way for ultra-nationalism. It can be speculated that there would have been a wave of nationalism in the post-revolutionary Iran in one way or another, but when the Islamists took the leadership of the revolution, nationalism fused with Islamism – which had already been used by some pre-revolutionary intellectuals like Ali Shariati. Hence, the revolutionary zeal was strengthened with strong Islamo-nationalism and the aforementioned constitutive events contributed to that.

### ***War and the Cult of Martyrdom***

Apart from the revolution, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) was a socially shocking event and it also became one of the most important justifications and a constitutive event for the newly established Islamic regime. This war provided clerics with a chance to oppress all opponents of the newly established regime under a state of emergency (Khosrokhavar and Roy 2013: 28). Under the war circumstances, nationalism peaked and the clerics used that nationalism to eliminate all opponents by accusing them of treason and counter-revolutionary activities. What is more, the revolutionary zeal fused with nationalistic feelings and a cult of "martyrdom" emerged in this period.

The martyrdom belief was already powerful in traditional Shi'ism (Khosrokhavar 2007: 7), but war with Iraq added new elements to that. In traditional Shi'ism, martyrdom was about being an oppressed and victim. However, when Islamists took power, an impasse emerged (Yarbaksh 2013: 79). How was it possible for clerics to continue their role of oppressed while they had accumulated all the power in their hands? The war with Iraq provided them the possibility of becoming both the oppressed and the powerful. The cult of martyrdom was being utilized for this dual purpose. As Khosrokhavar puts it, the cult of martyrdom gripped to the large masses with this war (Khosrokhavar 2007: 8). The feeling of defending both the revolution and the motherland enchanted Iranians – especially the youth. The Islamic regime used the cult of martyrdom and martyrs as a protective shield against criticisms directed to it, and it was also used as a weapon to silence opponents in the country.

Therefore, we can argue that war and the cult of martyrdom play a huge role in Islamic regime foundation in Iran.

### ***Velayet-e Faqih* and Shi'i Islamism**

The fusion of revolutionary zeal and nationalist euphoria along with constitutive events and socially shocking events simplified the works of Islamic clerics in the foundation of the authoritarian regime in Iran. All these events paved the way for a pyramidal power structure at the top of which one Shi'i cleric rules in the name of all Iranians. An authoritarian Islamic regime needs one-man rule and a religious nationalist doctrine around which all aspects of social, political and economic frames are re-designed. Islamist clerics found what they searched for in the Shi'i political doctrine of *Velayet-e faqih* (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist).

*Velayet-e Faqih* was a doctrine that was founded in Islamic sources and revived by Ayatollah Khomeini. It is a doctrine of divine sovereignty (Ghobodzadeh and Rahimi 2011: 336). Khomeini developed this idea according to the needs of contemporary Islamism in the 1960s (Saleh and Worrall 2014). For Khomeini, divine and popular will cannot possibly be separated from each other (Saleh and Worrall 2014). Thereupon, any demand for popular will against the Shah's regime should be complemented by an emphasis of divine will. According to the "The Twelve Imams" belief, the sole authority and legitimacy in the world belongs to God. As the shadow of God, this authority is believed to have passed to Prophet Mohammad and then to Prophet Ali. After the passing of the prophets, authority in the world belongs to the Twelve Imams but it is believed that the twelfth Imam is lost (Kamrava 2008: 102). Khomeini based his Islamic clerical rule on the Twelve Imams belief by further developing this idea and argued that sole authority on the earth, in the absence of the twelfth Imam (till he comes again one day), belongs to Islamic jurists – namely, the Shi'i clerics (Kamrava 2008: 198). Thus, Khomeini put forward a modern political reading of the traditional Shi'i doctrine, which became the philosophical basis of the Islamic theocratic regime in Iran.

Nevertheless, the Islamic political doctrine of the clerics did not take place in the first constitution after the revolution. The socially shocking series of events mentioned above and revolutionary delirium along with constitutive events made the injection of this doctrine into the post-revolutionary constitution possible. Article 5 of the new constitution says that *Velayet-e Faqih* rules in the absence of the Hidden Imam (Roy 1999: 204). Moreover, Article 4 says that all law must be based on Islamic standards (Arjomand 2009: 30). On the basis of this article, every cell of social, political and economic domains are re-designed according to Islamic standards.

In the constitution of the Islamic Republic, *Velayet-e Faqih* is bestowed with large authorizations such as determining the policies and direction of the Islamic Republic; appointing senior state officials including the heads of the armed forces, judiciary, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting; appointing and dismissing the clerical jurists; determining the contents of Friday-prayer sermons; appointing the directors of *Bonyads* (associations) etc. Thus, all the state apparatuses were designed around the Shi'i political doctrine of *Velayet-e Faqih* in an extreme way. It can be said that this political doctrine in a way reminds us the absolute monarchs who recognized no check and balance while they had the power.

Eventually, the constitutive phase of the authoritarian Islamic regime foundation in Iran shows that one-man rule along with a religious-nationalist doctrine in politics are two sides of the same coin. Without one, the other one cannot survive. That is why they deeply need and reinforce each other.

As such, nativist claims, constitutive narratives and socially shocking events simplified the constitutive phase of the authoritarian Islamic regime foundation in Iran. Moreover, it ended with a pyramidal power structure, *Velayet-e Faqih* and a religious nationalist doctrine: the fusion of Shi'i Islam and nationalism. What did all these mean for the Iranian society? How did they react? What is the next phase?

#### **4. Confrontation Phase: Tensions between Society and the New Regime**

Based on the Iranian case, it can be argued that in the third phase of authoritarian Islamic regime foundations, the society starts to react to the socio-political impositions held on it. The fusion of one-man rule and religious-nationalist doctrine as the basis of authoritarian regime foundations undermines the principles of social equality and political freedoms, resulting in the collapse of social solidarity that keeps the various individuals of the society together. Instead of social solidarity, the authoritarian new regimes create “crony solidarity” among its supporters. The regime distributes political posts and economic resources to the ones who are in the circles of crony solidarity. Crony solidarity is a key concept to understand these new regimes since it indicates to the relations and networks of new authoritarian regime. Without crony solidarity, the new regimes cannot survive. That is why they should build a clientele network. However, the final phase of authoritarian Islamic regime foundation witnesses a serious confrontation between the adherents of organic social solidarity and crony solidarity. This tension between them becomes the motor of social progress or regress in these regimes.

The confrontational third phase in Iran has started after the 1979 Revolution and it is still an ongoing process. This phase in Iran manifests itself as the loss of political freedoms and social equality. These are materialized in the form of discriminatory laws against women, the exclusion of opponents from any kind of decision-making processes in the regime, violent interventions by the regime to mold Iranian society according to Shi'i Islamic standards. Likewise, the regime has established circles of “crony solidarity”, namely clientele relations to secure itself. This has also impaired the social solidarity understanding by forcing unaffiliated ordinary people to think that there is no future for them in Iran – unless they accept the rules and values set by the regime. This sense has produced reactions among different dynamics of the society especially among youth, women and intellectuals. These groups have searched for ways to democratize the regime. The tension between the adherents of crony solidarity and the demanders of social solidarity has become the motor of social progress and/or regress in Iran history.

#### ***Political Oppression and the Iranian Society***

The Islamic regime, by creating a crony solidarity among its own supporters and excluding others in the public sphere, has deepened and expanded the fault lines between the rich – poor, devout – secular, Tehran dwellers – provincial dwellers, Persians – non-Persians,

Shi'ites – non-Shi'ites (Dabashi 2011: 13), male – female and conservative – progressives/democrats. The identity combination that formed and dominated the nucleus of the regime was Shi'i, Persian, male and conservative. This identity combination excluded all others in the society. Besides, As Said Amir Arjomand claims, the Islamic regime in Iran has produced its own group solidarity among the Revolutionary Guards and *Basij* (Militias) (2009: 14). He adds that the war with Iraq produced fidelity ties between the regime and regime supporters (Arjomand 2009: 14). From that time on, the main fault line has been between *khodi* (meaning one of us, a regime supporter) and *gheyri khodi* (meaning the others, the regime opponents) (Arjomand 2009: 14). This can also be seen as the tension between crony solidarity and social solidarity.

The crony solidarity demonstrates itself as the clientele relations between the Islamic regime and its supporters. Kazem Alemdari defines clientelism as mafia-style networks that organize the society (2007:1288). He also says that these clientele networks undermine laws (Alemdari 2007: 1289) and the value of rule of law, leading directly to a loss of social equality perspective. If a person thinks s/he is not equal before laws, s/he can lose her/his faith in the society, state and justice. This would lead to a total collapse of bonds of social solidarity in a country. Paradoxically, it seems that authoritarian Islamic regimes as we observed in post-revolutionary Iran needs a collapse of social solidarity in order to establish and consolidate its own power. But this means the large-scale fragmentation of society and social values. In other words, society loses its ability to stay as a coherent society under authoritarian regimes. In this case, we can argue that any authoritarian attempt towards one-man rule and the demands for designing society according to one comprehensive doctrine leads in the fragmentation of society and social solidarity bonds. The case in Iran example proves this framework in practice.

Nevertheless, Iranian society has reacted to the losses of social equality, political freedoms and social solidarity. Hence, though there are many claims saying that social dynamics under authoritarian regimes vanish over time, the situation is quite the opposite. Under authoritarian regimes, social dynamics are abundant though they are marginalized and they are not provided any platforms where they can voice their demands, they can debate or organize. These social dynamics instinctively know that they should protect social solidarity to survive. Against crony solidarity, they put forward social solidarity by arguing and fighting for social equality and political freedoms. Thus the tension between crony and social solidarity metamorphoses into a survival problem for both sides. Whereas one side tries to survive by destroying freedoms and equality, the other one struggles to survive by re-establishing freedoms and equality as cornerstones of socio-political order. This tension between them becomes the motor of history under authoritarian Islamic regimes.

The reaction of Iranian society has manifested itself as four new social movements: women, intellectual, youth and non-Persian ethnicities in Iran (Khosrokhavar 2004: 70). All these groups struggled to survive by demanding social and political rights. Here, we will focus on the intellectual reaction that emerged in post-revolutionary Iran. Against oppressive and authoritarian impositions, one group of intellectuals, also known as *rowshenfekran-e dini* (religious intellectuals), gathered together in the 1990s in *Kiyan* newspaper (Telek 2016). They were popular and their arguments were effective at that time. Contrary to the ideological, revolutionary and nativist claims of Ali Shariati and Jalal Al-e Ahmad, their

arguments are post-ideological. They strongly argue against the ideological use of religion. Whereas the freedom from foreign domination was the crucial aim for Shariati and Jalal Al-e Ahmad, for religious intellectuals, freedom meant political freedoms as those existing in liberal democracies. Hence, they strongly put forward reform, democracy, human rights, peaceful co-existence and even secularism in their writings. Through time, their emphasis on secularism increased in their discourses. The reason was that they started to see secularism as a socio-political principle that can guarantee social equality and political freedoms, leading to social solidarity.

Thus, it is clearly seen that a fundamental change realized in the ideological discourses of intellectuals in Iran. Whereas in pre-revolutionary period they were voicing nativist claims, religious intellectuals in the post-revolutionary Iran started to demand political freedoms and social equality. The intellectual change and inclination towards Western values such as human rights, secularism and democracy proves it. The authoritarian regime foundation and the social experiences through years have totally changed the intellectual landscape in Iran.

## **5. Conclusion**

The conceptual model that is used in this article provides us a theoretical perspective to better understand authoritarian Islamic regime foundations in the Middle East. In this article, it is argued that an authoritarian Islamic regime foundation is based on strong nativist claims such as the authenticity of culture and a strong sense of disgust against Western values especially democracy and secularism. This is the preliminary phase of an authoritarian regime foundation. When this social mood peaked, if the socio-political context is suitable, a rupture is experienced. The second period is the one where constitutive attempts are realized. However, these constitutive attempts need a constitutive narrative and socially shocking events that convince people to support the new regime as best solution. In this period, ruling elites present the combination of one-man rule and a religious-nationalist political doctrine as a life saving option – but a compulsory one. This totally paves the way for an authoritarian Islamic regime foundation as we observed in Iran.

Lastly in the third, confrontation phase, the social dynamics reacts to the newly established regime and its crony solidarity understanding. It is asserted that the confrontation between regime forces and social dynamics becomes the motor of social progress or regress in these countries. This article deduces the three-phase model from the historical practices of the Islamic regime in Iran. That is why the foundation of Islamic regime in Iran was examined deeply around this model. I believe that this model can be applied to other possible authoritarian regime changes or foundations in the Middle East. I specifically limit the scale to the Middle East region due to role of Islam, but politically this model may be applied to any example that displays the features of this three-phase model.

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### About the Author

Alphan Telek is a PhD candidate and researcher in Centre de Recherche Internationale (CERI) at Sciences Po, Paris, France. He is one of the co-founders and the current Academy Director of Istanbul Political Research Institute (IstanPol). He is also a producer and moderator at Medyascope TV. His works basically focuses on precarity, precariat, social classes and social inequalities, Turkey and the Middle East. His academic and op-ed style articles were published by Palgrave Macmillan, Open Democracy, and Yale Global Online. He is the author of the book entitled *Artık Hepimiz Prekaryayız: Tehlikeli ve Umutlu Gelecek* [We Are All Precariat Now: Dangerous and Hopeful Future] (NotaBene Publishing, March 2020).