

The Position of Iranian Nationalism in the Semantic Network of the "Modernist Nationalism" Discourse of the Pahlavi Era

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Abstract

In 19th century Iran, through the publication of travelogues, the expansion of capitalism, and familiarity with the governance methods of Western countries, a system of knowledge or grand discourse emerged that represented Iran's backwardness and illness. Within this system of knowledge (episteme), various discourses aimed at remedying this illness were formed, one of the vital being the discourse of modernist nationalism which served as a counter-discourse to the "Anti-autocratic Constitutionalist" discourse and sought to justify its propositions in response to it, was extensively exploited by the Pahlavi court and managed to become the dominant discourse of the court for a long time. The present study employs the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, focusing on the question of 'What the semantic network of modernist nationalism discourse was and what function it aimed to achieve?' The semantic coordinates of this discourse are examined. The results indicated that the most significant signifier of the modernist nationalism discourse was "Iranian nationalism," which, by outlining a semantic network composed of various elements such as superficial and top-down modernization, centralization (establishment of a dominant state), the necessity of reviving the monarchy and kingship, secularism and opposition to Islamism, and the strengthening of militarism, aimed to consolidate the power of the Pahlavi regime by providing a solution for Iran's backwardness.

Keywords: Pahlavi II, Modernist Nationalism Discourse, Discourse, Central Signifier, Elements.

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Introduction

In the 19th century, regarding the encounter of Iranians with the Western world, a system of knowledge or grand discourse emerged in Iran that represented "Backward and Ill Iran." Within this system of knowledge, various discourses formed, each seeking to provide a remedy for Iran's illness. One of the crucial ones was the discourse of "Modernist Nationalism." According to the representation of this discourse, which was widely welcomed and exploited by the overarching governmental power and was also considered a counter-discourse against the "Anti-autocratic Constitutionalist" discourse, the solution to Iran's backwardness was nationalism based on the revival of the values of ancient Iranian monarchy (ancient Iranian nationalism). This nationalism aimed to create unity and solidarity, enabling resistance against the chaos resulting from constitutionalism, opposing the seemingly stagnant forces of the time (in this discourse, Islam and Islamism were identified as the main representatives of stagnation), combating the famine and humiliation caused by the occupation of Iran during World War I, and implementing the top-down modernization project with the help of a powerful monarchy, thereby addressing Iran's backwardness and healing the ailing nation.

More precisely, in the specific political and social atmosphere following the Constitutional Revolution, developments occurred that historically and structurally provided the groundwork for pursuing the idea of unity and preserving the territorial integrity of the country. Historically, World War I and foreign intervention, the attempt to transform the country's independent status into a position of protectorate influenced by the 1919 treaty, the decline of the central government's dominance, the emergence of centrifugal forces, local and ethnic uprisings, tensions, and crises arising from the movements of Shaykh Khaz'al in Khuzestan, Shaykh Mohammad Khiyabani in Azerbaijan, Mirza Kuchak Khan Jangali in Gilan, Ismail Agha Semko in Kurdistan, Mohammad Taqi Khan Pesyan in Khorasan, and Amir Afshar in Kermanshah necessitated the establishment of a powerful central government. Structurally, with the decline of the old social system, the need for industrialization, economic development, the establishment of the foundations of a modern state, especially a new army and bureaucracy, financial and military reforms, and ensuring national unity were felt more than ever.

In addition to the chaotic internal situation, there were other facilitating factors that incited nationalist demands. Among these factors were variables such as the modernist aspirations of intellectuals, increasing awareness of the country's backwardness, the frustration of

the anti-autocracy front considering the reverse course of the Constitutional Revolution, factionalism, extreme political struggles, the ideological legitimacy of nationalist demands, and ultimately the demands aimed at eliminating the influence and dominance of foreign powers.

Therefore, the majority of intellectuals and political and intellectual elites of this period viewed the rise to power of a "Benevolent and reformist authoritarian ruler" and "A strong personality" as the only way to escape the internal political and social tensions and conflicts, as well as the invasion and encroachments by foreign forces, which had placed the political existence and national identity of Iran at risk of fragmentation and dissolution. They envisioned someone who, as the servant of the nation, would establish a centralized and powerful government that could simultaneously address increasing internal problems while protecting its unity and independence (Dilmaghani and Ghasemi Toraki, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 31-32).

Furthermore, many nationalist intellectuals of this era attributed the backwardness of Iranians to the Arabs and their influence. These nationalists included poets, journalists, and literati such as Dr. Mahmoud Afshar (editor of the magazine "Ayandeh"), Sayyid Hasan Taqizadeh (editor of the newspaper "Kaveh"), Hossein Kazemzadeh (editor of the newspaper "Iranshahr"), Zabih Behrouz, Ebrahim Pourdavood, Sadegh Hedayat, Adib al-Mamalek, Bozorg Alavi, and poets like Yaghma Jandaghi, Aref Mirzadeh Eshqi, Farrokhi Yazdi, and Forsat Shirazi, as well as historical novels such as "Love and Empire or the Conquests of Cyrus the Great" by Moosa Kaboudar Ahangi, "The Trappers or the Avengers of Mazdak," "Mani the Painter" by Sanati Zadeh Kermani, and "The Story of Cyrus" by Mirza Hasan Khan Badie. These figures were often infused with an extreme and emotional nationalist spirit directed towards ancient Iran and its glories, attempting to instill these idealistic thoughts and aspirations within the traditional and religious society of Iran at that time, although some of them became confused in this process (Kajbaf and Ahmadvand, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 144).

It is evident that in such an atmosphere, the discourse of "Modernist Nationalism" became the only discourse that represented the interests of the Pahlavi court in the best possible way. Therefore, this discourse, which had significant anti-Islamist supporters among intellectuals, became dominant during both the reign of Reza Shah and his son with the central signifier of "Iranianism (ancientism or patriotism)."

This article focuses on the discursive propositions of the second Pahlavi (using Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory) and aims to explore the semantic coordinates of the "Modernist Nationalism"

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discourse as the dominant discourse of the Pahlavi court, to achieve a precise understanding of what this discourse is and why it formed in the political and social atmosphere of that time.

1. Theoretical Framework: Discourse Analysis of Laclau and Mouffe

Laclau and Mouffe define discourse as the stabilization of meaning within a specific domain. According to this definition, discourses construct the meanings of the social world; they believe that all subjects and behaviors are discursive (Howarth, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 139). In clarifying their understanding of discourse, Laclau and Mouffe draw on Saussure's principle of the arbitrariness of signs. This principle states that a linguistic sign is a combination of signifier and signified, and the relationship between the signifier and signified in a linguistic sign is entirely arbitrary. An important consequence of this principle is that the linguistic system articulates reality (Smit, 1999: 85). However, by adopting a post-structuralist approach, they reject Saussure's structuralist view of the relationship between signifier and signified: Post-structuralism emphasizes the slippage between signifier and signified-between one sign and another, between one concept and another-and ultimately the notion that meaning is always substituted (Seiter, 1992: 61).

This approach seeks to discard any reference to a center, subject, superior reference, or foundation (Derrida, 1978: 286) explicitly. This is accomplished through the deconstruction of texts. From this perspective, nothing exists except writing; real life is also a text, and thus it can be deconstructed (Derrida, 1976: 158). Based on the explanations above, the victory of any discourse is a product of its ability to gain access, meaning its availability in a situation where no other discourse has presented itself as a real hegemonic alternative (Laclau, 1990: 66).

In fact, according to Laclau and Mouffe, politics involves organizing society in a specific way, such that different discourses compete over this organization. Politics is understood as a space for play, which is never a zero-sum game, as the players and rules are never clear. This play has a name, and that is hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 193).

From Laclau and Mouffe's perspective, the organization of society occurs through the act of articulation. Articulation refers to any action that establishes a relationship among various elements, such that their identities change as a result of this action (Tajik, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 7).

In other words, through the act of articulation, elements, as floating signifiers whose meanings have not yet been stabilized, transform into specific components around a central and meaning-giving signifier, thus acquiring a new identity.

Laclau and Mouffe define articulation in their book "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy" as follows: "We call articulation any action that establishes a relationship among a set of elements in such a way that their identities change as a result of the act of articulation. We consider the structured totality resulting from the act of articulation to be a discourse. Positions based on the logic of difference are referred to as moments, as long as they are articulated within a discourse and in contrast, any difference that is not articulated within a discourse is called an element." (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 105).

2. Discourse Central Signifier of the "Modernist Nationalism": Iranian Nationalism

Iranian nationalism, or more precisely, ancientism, in terms of belonging and loyalty to the values and norms of ancient Iran, can be considered the central signifier of the discourse of "Modernist Nationalism." This discourse shapes specific moments or discursive elements (such as modernism, the necessity of preserving and reviving monarchy, secularism, opposition to Islamism, a powerful monarchy, and centralized governance) through a particular process of articulation. It is important to note that this shaping should not be seen as one-sided; as mentioned in the conceptual framework section, the central signifier, or the meaning-giving sign, has the most significant influence within the semantic chain of the discourse and thus is considered the main meaning-giving signifier within the chain of signifiers.

In the chaos following the Constitutional Revolution and the resulting inefficacy, many intellectuals proposed nationalism, or more accurately, Iranian nationalism/ancientism, as an alternative to the anti-despotism discourse of the constitutionalists. The first and second Pahlavi regimes benefited the most from this discourse to legitimize their actions. The preceding lines referred to some functions of nationalism in the post-constitutional era, such as confronting the chaos caused by constitutionalism, opposing Islamism—considered a source of regression—providing a means for unity and collective action against the famine and humiliation resulting from World War I, and legitimizing a powerful monarchy to implement modernization from above and superficially. These functions were also somewhat reproduced during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, generating moments suitable for their time.

We will now examine the meaningful formation of the discourse of modernist nationalism during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi by referencing some documents and statements from the main figures of the second Pahlavi regime.

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3. Moments and Functions of "Iranian Nationalism" in the Discourse of Modernist Nationalism of the Second Pahlavi

Like his father, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was an Aryan nationalist, and throughout his reign, he sought to continually express his loyalty to the discourse of "Modernist Nationalism." In this regard, one of the vital concepts that represented this discourse in the public sphere was the attainment of what the Shah called the "Great Civilization":

"Bringing Iran to the "Great Civilization" is my greatest desire... The goal I have set for my nation is undoubtedly a very ambitious and lofty one. However, it is not a goal that is unattainable for the people of Iran, given the abundant material and spiritual resources and the rich moral capital of this nation. If such a goal exceeds conventional limits, it is because reaching anything less than that is fundamentally unworthy of our nation." (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 221)

Mohammad Reza Shah considers "Patriotism" not only a necessary condition for the realization of the "Great Civilization" but also identifies it as the main characteristic of Iranian national identity: "... This spirit [the spirit of individualism among Iranians] is easily set aside when an Iranian perceives a threat to his nationality and the fundamental values of his civilization and culture in his inner consciousness, allowing the invincible spirit of national patriotism to replace it. In such cases, the only thing that holds value for him is his deep love and attachment to the land of Iran and the defense of national identity and character." (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 235)

The Shah continues by stating that this spirit of Iranians is a prerequisite for establishing the Great Civilization, saying: "The realization of the "Great Civilization" requires great patriotism. The meaning of such patriotism is that every individual, in whatever position, not only performs his duties with conscience and enthusiasm but is also ready to work beyond his obligations. Great patriotism means that we give more to our homeland than what we receive from it." (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 256)

From the above statements, it can be concluded that Mohammad Reza Pahlavi sought to revive the civilization of ancient Iran; however, he actually utilized the meaning-giving capacity of Iranian nationalism (ancientism) and patriotism to intertwine it with superficial and top-down modernization, centralization (establishment of a dominant state), the necessity of reviving the monarchy, strengthening militarism, secularism, and opposing the spread of Islamism, thereby reproducing a specific semantic network (chain of signifiers).

Therefore, it can be argued that from the rise of Reza Khan until the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the most meaning-rich signifier of the Pahlavi regime's discourse was "Iranianism" in its ancient sense (which is also referred to as patriotism in some texts), to the extent that promoting Iranianism became one of the most important directives in historical books published by the court as well as in the Pahlavi education system.

As a result, the discourse of "Modernist Nationalism" during the time of Mohammad Reza Shah also performed functions similar to those of the first Pahlavi. If we were to articulate this through the discourse analysis of Laclau and Mouffe, various elements within the discourse of modernist nationalism of the second Pahlavi came together around the central signifier of Iranian nationalism and, through a succession in the chain of signifiers and a specific articulation, transformed into moments that represented meanings.

It is evident that each of these meanings produces and reproduces specific functions, and with the particular coherence that the central signifier (Iranian nationalism) imparts to these meanings and functions, we ultimately encounter a unified discourse that finds its order under its slogan. The following elaborates on some of the most significant moments of the mentioned discourse and their functions separately.

3.1. Element of "Institution of Monarchy and the Monarchical System"; Function: Legitimization of the Institution of Monarchy

One of the important elements that becomes stabilized around the signifier of Iranian nationalism in the discourse of modernist nationalism (transformed into element) is the "Institution of monarchy and the monarchical system."

The element of monarchy and the monarchical system, influenced by the central signifier of Iranian nationalism, functions to legitimize this institution; in this regard, the Shah's response to critics of the royal celebrations of 1971 (1350), which was based on this very legitimization, is worth noting. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi responded to his foreign critics by saying: "You Westerners do not easily grasp the philosophy behind my power. Iranians regard their ruler as a father. What you call "My Celebration" is, from their perspective, the celebration of the father of Iran. The monarchy is the cement that strengthens our unity. The work I was doing in holding the 2,500th anniversary celebration was honoring the anniversary of my country, of which I am the father. Well, if you think a father must inevitably be a dictator, that's your problem, not mine." (Zuvins, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 160)

There are also other examples where Mohammad Reza Shah sought to legitimize the monarchical system and his power-seeking actions by

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referring to the traditions of ancient Iran. For instance, Asadollah Alam in his book "My Conversations with the Shah" recounts how the Shah linked the specific kowtows and hand-kissing performed by Ardeshir Zandieh to the national traditions of the country:

"I accompanied her highness from the hospital. After lunch, I had an audience, and among the issues, I asked him, "Your majesty, may I officially reprimand the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister? Because in your majesty's presence they do not show the necessary decorum and respect." He replied, "What other expectation do you have from their American upbringing? Nevertheless, it is better to remind them of their responsibilities." I replied, "I wish I could put the blame on their upbringing, like your majesty. I have no doubt they want to prove how important they are to others." The Shah laughed and said, "No, I don't agree. Didn't you see how Ardeshir kneels before me when I shake his hand?"

I said, "This manner of showing respect is just as bad as excessive behavior in the opposite direction. The last time we were in Paris, Ardeshir did exactly what you mentioned, and one of the French journalists asked me, "If the Shah of Iran is known as a reformist and a democrat, how can he tolerate one of his ministers kneeling before him and falling to the ground in this manner?" The Shah did not like this comment at all and said, "You should have told him that Ardeshir is observing the national traditions of the country!" (Faqiha Haqqani, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 18-19)

We observe that the Shah directly associates the position of the Shah in Iran, and consequently the necessity of the institution of the monarchy, with the national traditions of Iranians. He even used this argument when faced with intellectuals and critics who spoke of the need to move towards a democratic Iran:

"Who says that the people of Iran demand the kind of democracy you have in England? It's not necessarily so, for our tradition as Iranians is entirely opposed to that. The people and the Shah of Iran are so close to each other that they feel like members of one family. I believe the people of Iran hold the same respect for their Shah as children in Iranian families do for their father." (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, n.d.: 8, 7095)

In general, Mohammad Reza Shah considers the monarchical system and the institution of monarchy to be one of the main pillars of Iranian national identity. In this regard, he writes in his book "Toward the Great Civilization":

"... Understanding the true meaning of the word "Monarchy" cannot merely be explained by the usual rules and definitions of history... It is often translated as "Empire," but the Western concept of empire is merely

a political and geographical concept, whereas from the Iranian perspective, the term "Monarchy" has more than just a material aspect; it carries a spiritual, philosophical, idealistic, and to a considerable extent, emotional connotation... In Iranian culture, the monarchy of Iran signifies the geographical and political unit of Iran in addition to a specific national identity and all those immutable values that have constituted national identity... No profound and deep-rooted transformation or change in this country is possible unless it conforms to the framework of this monarchical system and aligns with its fundamental principles." (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 237)

3.2. Element of the "Supreme and Centralized Government"; Function: Satisfying Centralizing Tendencies (Establishment of a Supreme State)

Like his father, Mohammad Reza Shah was not only a supporter of the supreme government but also considered Iran his personal property. It is evident that when a territory becomes the personal property of an individual, one cannot expect anything other than the establishment of a personal, centralized, and powerful government in that territory. Iranian nationalism, in its ancient sense, allowed for such a possessive outlook and the possibility of establishing a centralized and powerful government under the Pahlavi dynasty.

Regarding the importance of centralized policies for the Pahlavi regime (which had roots in the supreme governments of ancient Iran); it is worth mentioning part of Reza Khan's remarks among Iranian soldiers: "Gentlemen, Iran, my dear homeland, is greatly in need of your brave children. It is upon you to gird your loins for the service of the homeland and independence, and certainly wait that the principles of centralization and unity of word will bring you the greatest rewards of nobility: Beware, the land of Ardeshir is watching over you. Be cautious!" (Makki, 1984 AD/1363 SH: 556)

Homayoun Katouziyan comments on Mohammad Reza Shah's possessive outlook and the new dimensions that Iranian nationalism added to this perspective: In 1344, the Shah gave himself the title of Aryamehr, just as his father had been referred to as "His Imperial Majesty the Almighty" during his absolute and despotic rule. The Shah's deep Persian-centric sentiments, like his father's in the 1310s, were significantly influenced by his personal attachment to the land of Iran and its culture and history, as he understood these concepts. Both father and son regarded Iran as their personal property. Of course, before the Constitutional Revolution, the country was always seen as the personal property of the ruler. However, this signified ownership of the land and ultimately of its people, implying material ownership over them. Now,

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the new Iranian nationalism added a broader, abstract, and intangible dimension to this phenomenon, manifesting as a personal and emotional connection with the subject.

As a result, the Shah was not only extremely sensitive to his foreign image but also to how Iran and its significance were perceived by others. At one point, he exiled the editor of the English-language newspaper *Keyhan* to a remote province for writing a critical article about life in Tehran. Alam was reportedly affected once by the Shah's views on his relationship with Iran. The story goes that after the construction of a palace belonging to the Shah in Kish, Alam presented the title deed to the Shah. However, the Shah "... Threw the deed down before me. He said: Do you want even one inch of Iranian soil to belong to me? All of Iran belongs to me. I don't want anything else for myself. If my son becomes a powerful king, everything will belong to him, and if he doesn't, he won't even want this one inch of land." (Katouziyan, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 295)

In an interview with a French reporter and writer, the Shah reiterated that he is everything in Iran, referring to his centralizing policies with the statement that only he knows the way to save the country: "One day you must understand that a Shah in Iran, in the history of this country, represents the nation. Moreover, it is not just me; it is a Western academic who has said: The Shah in Iran is a master, a teacher, a father, and almost everything. Therefore, if the sovereign of the country is the father of the family or a thinker or a teacher, or whatever else you want to think he is, and if he sees that his country must be saved by a revolution, he will do it." (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, n.d.: 10, 9039)

Regarding the Shah's self-centered approach, the memory of Anthony Parsons (the British ambassador to Iran during the victory of the Islamic Revolution) about his conversation with Hoveyda in the final months of the Pahlavi reign is noteworthy. He states: "Our discussion turned to the domestic situation, and I expressed my concerns about the current state of affairs. I asked, 'Why does the Shah not respond positively to people trying to talk to him?' 'What does he hope to achieve by forcing people into silence and orchestrating a tragic event like the shooting in Qom?' 'How dire does the situation seem to him?' I will never forget Hoveyda's response: Well! Tony, you know His Majesty's definition of dialogue. [For him] dialogue means I speak, and you listen. He will not change." (Parsons, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 109)

Ali Amini also refers to another aspect of the Shah's self-centered approach in his memoirs, quoting the Shah: "When [the Shah] says he does not believe in consultation, what do you want to do about it? He says, 'I consult, then I do the opposite.' It's written in documents

everywhere. Well, when someone's perspective is that he doesn't believe in consultation at all, then what is the use of this private or non-private adviser? Later, the [Shah] expressed, I consult, and then I do the opposite. I hadn't really heard that before. When I heard this, I became completely disheartened. Well, what does it mean to be someone who doesn't believe in consultation?" (Amini, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 223-224)

The Shah's centralizing policies were such that he defined all the powers of the state under himself and spoke of the monopoly of the executive power for the Shah because he could not tolerate any parallel power to the Shah (even if small) and could not endure such a situation. In this context, in response to the question of "What does power mean for His Majesty the Shah?" he stated: "Power means the executive authority. In fact, the Shah in our country is the head of all three powers: Executive, legislative, and judicial, but according to the constitution, the executive power exclusively belongs to the Shah." (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, n.d.: 10, 9081-9082)

The Shah could not even bear political figures that had significant credibility and influence, either inside or outside the country. "Bagher Aghili" writes in the preface to Amini's memoirs about this: "Amini was well-respected among European dignitaries. During a trip to Europe to secure a loan, he met with several kings and presidents. These meetings not only intensified the Shah's jealousy, especially the reception of Dr. Amini at Buckingham Palace, but also terrified him.

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi never had a close relationship with Dr. Amini because Amini, unlike some dignitaries, expressed his views without feigning or flattery and avoided words that had obsequious or ingratiating overtones. Therefore, he was never able to gain the Shah's trust and Muhammad Reza always harbored animosity towards him.

The Shah fundamentally had no interest in politicians who had witnessed his period of weakness and decline; after Mordad 28, 1332, he gradually marginalized them from politics, even not including them in the political showcase of the Senate." (Aghili, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 27)

Bagheri also provides several important examples of the Shah's interactions with individuals who had seen his weakness, illustrating further aspects of his authoritarian, self-centered, and centralizing approach: "In 1336, Najm al-Malek was serving as the governor of Khuzestan. During his meeting with the Shah, he had offered him advice regarding governance. In response to his useful advice, the Shah told Najm al-Malek, you've become old; go rest at home, and Najm al-Malek returned home from the court and no longer accepted any position in the government...Additionally, General Abdollah Hedayat had provided recommendations regarding the army and the intervention of American

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advisers in all military affairs, which were not well-received. He was retired and delivered to military courts, where he was tried and convicted on charges of financial misconduct, spending several years in prison; everyone knows that a man of such integrity was never involved in financial affairs." (Aghili, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 28)

It was this intolerance for parallel powers (even if small) that drove the Shah toward establishing a compliant, state-controlled party, Rastakhiz. In justifying the existence of such a single-party system that further revealed his centralizing policies, he humorously spoke of the absence of major ideological disagreements within the royal government: "In a monarchy such as ours, where the Shah holds significance, ideological disagreements can never take on such dimensions. It is impossible to witness extreme polarities here." (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, n.d.: 10, 9114)

In fact, within the Shah's nationalism, which delineated between friends and enemies, a true patriot was defined only as someone who defended the process of social justice, or in other words, the rigid democracy envisioned by the Shah across various economic, social, and political domains, moving away from political or ideological disputes linked to the court's reformist policies (Asif, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 304).

3.3. Element of "Modernization or Superficial Renewal"; Function: Promoting Liberal Ideas, Top-Down Modernization, and Justifying Alliance with the Western Bloc

One of the significant phases in the discourse of nationalist modernization was the top-down approach to modernization. This element, drawing its primary force from the reconstruction of Iran's grandeur, sought to change the traditional culture of Iran through several developmental programs or, more precisely, to establish liberal thoughts within the fabric of Iranian society. The objective was to both attract the support of the Western Bloc and weaken religious culture to facilitate the institutionalization of secularism in Iran.

Mohammad Reza Shah frequently referred to a progressive and forward-looking Iran (where the material advancements of the Western world would be intertwined with the spiritual values of Iran's past) in his speeches, aiming to consolidate public acceptance of a top-down modernization project, primarily executed by an absolute and centralized government. For example, in a message he released for Nowruz 1351 (1972), he spoke both of a new, advanced, and progressive Iran and of the renewal of Iranians' commitment to the enduring and authentic values of their history, monarchy, and culture:

"In this year, declared the year of Cyrus the Great, Iran was able to magnificently celebrate the 2500th anniversary of the foundation of its

monarchy, renewing its commitment to its ancient glories and to the enduring and original values of its history, monarchy, and Iranian culture. People from every continent, ethnicity, creed, and governmental regime had the opportunity through widespread participation in this celebration to express their deep respect for the notable role of the Iranian people in the history and civilization of mankind, while also acknowledging today's progressive and advanced Iran." (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, n.d.: 7, 6375-6376)

Therefore, one of the manifestations and expressions of superficial and top-down modernization was the 2500th anniversary celebrations, which, according to the Shah, aimed to blend the material advancements of the era with the spiritual heritage of the Iranians; however, for the Shah and the organizers of this celebration, the material advancements were merely a superficial representation of modernizing Iran. In this context, the weekly newspaper A.B.C., published in Istanbul on Mehr 15, 1346, described the coronation celebrations as follows:

"The coronation of Queen Farah Diba in Tehran will resemble the tales of One Thousand and One Nights. At the coronation ceremony, which will take place in twenty days, the distance between the royal palace and the Golestan Palace, approximately 20 kilometers, will be covered with Persian carpets... Queen Farah Diba wishes that the dress she will wear during the coronation ceremony bears no resemblance to the dresses worn by queens at similar celebrations. Initially, she approached French fashion designers, and the "Rive Gauche" institute used ancient Iranian models to create this dress. The famous Iranian tailor Pouran Darvanji, along with 30 colleagues, has been working since Khordad (June) to sew pearls, rubies, emeralds, diamonds, and other precious stones onto the six-meter-long skirt of Queen Farah...!!" (The Coronation Celebration as Reported by SAVAK Documents, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 10)

It should be noted that the catering for these celebrations was also handled by French companies; according to Keyhan: "France is the country that has cooperated more than others in supplying the specific items for Iran's 2500-year celebrations." The real reason for choosing France was Queen Farah herself, who had a French cultural background. The Queen, who personally took on all responsibilities, had selected the special uniforms for the hostesses from France. These hostesses included three personal attendants for the Queen and fifty teams composed of three women who accompanied heads of states and foreign guests at all the ceremonies. The outfits for these hostesses were designed by Jean Patou." (Keyhan, 18/07/1350)

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In addition to the purely superficial aspects or the modern presentation of Iran for the West, the discourse of nationalist modernization believed that third-world societies, referred to as traditional societies, necessarily had to begin their movement towards modernization along the path that the West had taken. From this perspective, a modern society emerges with the decline of a traditional society, resulting in the disappearance of a subsistence-based, agriculture-centered economy, traditional culture, traditional social classes, and a political system based on oligarchy, giving way to an industrial economy, capitalism, and a modern culture (which supports the accumulation of capital and rationality).

The subjects of this discourse, much like the intellectuals of the Reza Khan era, considered a powerful and even authoritarian government as the most important factor for advancing this transition and creating cultural, economic, and social transformations from above. They generally adhered to ideologies of social engineering and organized modernization based on the legitimacy of nationalism or revivalism, and for this reason, they did not express sensitivity towards political despotism. Instead, they viewed it as a necessary condition, even at the initial stages, separating the political sphere from transformation. This line of thought was also supported by American politicians, who, except in limited instances, supported political despotism in Iran. Such organized modernization was presented and implemented through four development plans from the second to the fifth between the years 1335 and 1357, as well as through the principles of the White Revolution announced by the Shah in 1341 and promoted by state cultural centers and political party affiliates, especially the Rastakhiz Party (Jahangiri and Taheri, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 150-151).

3.4. Element of "Secularism and Opposition to Islamism"; Function: Countering Religious Views on Society and Government and Suggesting Independence from Them for Managing Civil Society Affairs

One of the most significant elements typically present in the semantic system of nationalist discourses is secular religion and opposition to Islamism. In these discourses, nationalist tendencies replace religion as a unifying and cohesive factor, gradually pushing it to the margins in political and social matters. In this regard, Gibernau states in his book "The Schools of Nationalism": "If we replace the term religion with nationalism and consider the essential role of religious rituals and symbols in nationalist discourse, then we can certainly attribute to nationalism the ability to create self-restraint and instill solidarity within any society as a means to achieve cooperation and establish communication." (Gibernau, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 44)

Mohammad Reza Shah also sought to indirectly eliminate Islam from political and social affairs by substituting Iranian identity for religion. More precisely, the Shah's fundamental problem lay in confronting Islamists. Islam was a significant doctrine that the Shah could not easily attack directly; therefore, he resorted to indirect methods to weaken it. By promoting Iranian identity prior to Islam, Zoroastrianism, Westernization, and supporting Baha'ism and Freemasonry, as well as endorsing moral leniency, the Shah aimed to undermine Islamic values and isolate them.

The Shah, by launching the 2500th anniversary of the Persian Empire and changing the Islamic calendar to that of Cyrus's reign, sought to diminish the significance of Islam while also achieving a royal ideology. The Shah's efforts were aimed at referring back to the pre-Islamic era. He wanted to downplay the Muslim identity of the Iranian people by associating himself with Cyrus, as expressed by Ehsan Naraghi (Naraghi, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 65).

In this context, an important point to note is the Shah's attempt to find an Iranian prophet to replace the Prophet of Islam. He initially tried to revive Zoroastrianism but was unsuccessful. Consequently, the regime's theorist, Shojaeddin Shafa, proposed the revival of Cyrus. Thus, the regime-affiliated newspapers introduced Cyrus "Not as a conqueror, but as a lawgiver," referring to the royal ideology as a kind of religion. They wrote that the royal celebration is a tribute to a rite that safeguards Iran's national sovereignty (Iranian Royal Celebrations Newspapers, 06/05/1350 and 08/06/1350).

By honoring and venerating Cyrus as an Iranian ideal, the Shah sought to consider himself the heir to that ideal. In a speech given on Aban 25, 1343, after the exile of Imam Khomeini, the Shah announced the upcoming royal celebrations, stating: "What I mean to say is that the 2500 years of the Persian Empire has lasted until it reached me. Therefore, attachment to the royal regime has become part of the character and nature of the people." (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, n.d.: 4, 3620)

The holding of the Shiraz Arts Festival was among the most significant actions taken by the Pahlavi regime, ostensibly to revive and promote Iranian identity and to safeguard ancient values, while intrinsically aimed at combating Islamic values and promoting a culture aligned with the West through a superficial and superficial modernization. It was therefore natural that the main reason for the opposition from the people, particularly the religious segments and especially the clergy, toward the Shiraz Arts Festival was due to the program's fight against the religion and beliefs of the people. The

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religious class, which constituted the majority of society, believed that conducting and continuing such celebrations would lead to the weakening and vulnerability of religious culture; thus, they did not remain silent and voiced their objections.

The first serious protest was made by the revolutionary clerics of Shiraz, including Ayatollah Dastgheib and Shaykh Bahaoddin Mahallati, who condemned the Shiraz Arts Festival in their speeches and strongly objected to the disrespect towards religious sanctities. As a consequence, SAVAK took the issue seriously and included its follow-up in its agenda.

According to a report by SAVAK during the tenth Shiraz Arts Festival held in 2535 [1355], programs included the film "One Thousand and One Nights" at Ariana Cinema, which depicted sexual relations between men and women in a wholly explicit manner; a wrestling show in the Moshir Courtyard where a completely naked woman appeared on stage, drawing the audience's attention away from other performances; and another program in the Jahan Nama Garden, which also seemingly revolved around sexual themes. In the eleventh Shiraz Arts Festival, which took place in 1356, the program "Pig - Child - Fire" was presented, which involved acts deemed contrary to decency. According to the SAVAK report, the general public perception was that the intention behind such programs presented by the foreign participant countries was a cultural invasion against our valuable spiritual possessions, disguised under the cover of art¹ (Hoseiniyan, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 424).

Anthony Parsons, the British Ambassador, wrote in his report about the performance "Pig - Child - Fire": "One scene performed on the sidewalk involved a violent sexual assault, completely carried out by a totally naked man-or without pants; I don't exactly remember-on a woman whose dress was being torn by the assailant, all in front of everyone. Another ridiculous scene at the end of the performance involved one of the main actors tearing off his pants on the sidewalk, placing a revolver behind his back, and thus pretending to commit suicide... I mentioned this to the Shah and told him that if such a

1. A SAVAK report states: "At the eleventh Shiraz Arts Festival - dated 5/6/2536 - a play titled " Pig - Child - Firè was performed in a shop located on Ferdowsi Street in Shiraz. The performance received criticism and protests from the clergymen and religious extremists of that city, who requested that the Shiraz Arts Festival be discontinued from the following year. They had planned to refrain from attending mosques and participating in congregational prayers starting this morning (5/6/2536); however, due to certain actions taken, they reconsidered their decision, and the situation returned to normal. Additionally, two clerics from Isfahan, named Rowzati and Rahbar, expressed their support for the Shiraz clergymen in a phone call with Sayyid Abdol Hossein Dastgheib." (Shiraz Arts Festival as Narrated by SAVAK Documents, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 386-387)

performance were held, for example, in the city of Winchester in England, the director and actors wouldn't come out alive. The Shah laughed for a while and didn't say anything." (Sullivan and Parsons, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 327)

3.5. Element of "Militarism"; Function: Strengthening Militarism to Become a Regional Military Power Aimed at Countering Aggression Against the Territorial Integrity of Iran, Preserving the Monarchy, and Establishing a Powerful Alliance with the United States

One of the key elements that draws significant strength from the meaningful signifier of "Iranian Nationalism" and, because of this force, shapes an important moment within the discourse of modernist nationalism is "Militarism," or more precisely, "Strengthening militarism" to protect Iran from foreign aggression (especially from neighboring countries) and consequently safeguard the throne of the monarchy. Mohammad Reza Shah's remarks to the "Graduates of the Command and General Staff College" in Mehr 1352 clearly demonstrate the necessity of strengthening militarism for the protection of Iran and its territorial integrity:

"On such a day, two contradictory hopes always come to mind: The desire that your additional knowledge will never be needed on a day we pray and hope will never come to pass. This aligns with our policy that we strive with all our might for lasting peace and the achievement of secure and controlled disarmament. However, to attain this noble goal, there is currently no alternative but to strengthen the country's defensive power, to such an extent that no malice towards Iran considers the ideas of confrontation, and that they are so terrified and afraid of such confrontation that they never dare to undertake it. I emphasize the importance of acquiring military knowledge and especially its translation into training from the lowest levels of our army to the highest strategic planning avenues and the establishment of the country's defensive strategy. For this purpose, we need institutions like this one and other military institutions in Iran.

We will strive to provide every necessary educational resource, and we should raise awareness of our country's geography even among those in higher command and staff positions.

We will prepare officers from these courses to be familiar with the countries whose knowledge is of primary importance to our country. I am confident that from the moment you return to your duties or get acquainted with your new roles, you will always be successful and effective in your military service, with your military spirit augmented by this useful and necessary knowledge." (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, 1973 AD/1352 SH: 305-306)

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Moreover, the conflicts between Iran and Iraq in the 1350s demonstrate that within the discourse of modernist nationalism, responding to foreign invasions such as those from Iraq, protecting Iran's borders, and playing the role of a superpower in the region (in contrast to the Arab superpower role) were considered vital. Regarding the latter point (the role of Iran as a superpower in the region), it is worth noting a statement from the Shah made during an interview with a representative of the Sunday Times: "When Britain was firmly established in the Gulf, no one ever mentioned the Ba'athists or the Cubans in South Yemen. Imagine if Oman, where Iranian military forces are participating alongside Sultan Qaboos' Omani forces in the battle against Dhofar, fell into the hands of undesirable actors who could control the Strait of Hormuz with their long-range artillery or those who could sink a 500,000-ton tanker and pollute the Gulf forever-what would happen? Furthermore, what difference is there between my defensive forces and those of the English, French, or Germans? My aim is to defend ourselves against threats that could arise from any direction." (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, n.d.: 7130-7131)

Therefore, the meaningful signifier of Iranianism articulates the strengthening of militarism as a deterrent against the excesses of neighboring countries and as a means of transforming Iran into a regional superpower within the discourse of modernist nationalism. Consequently, within this discourse, regarding the meaningful position of Iranian nationalism, any form of aggression against the territorial integrity of Iran is condemned under all circumstances, and Iran must be kept secure against the excesses of regional countries through extensive military preparedness.

For example, in a message on the occasion of the "Sixteenth Anniversary of the Establishment of the Civil Defense Organization of the Country," Mohammad Reza Shah emphasizes the necessity of preserving the country's independence and greatness, reaffirming the commitment to uphold independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity under any circumstances:

"Maintaining the independence and greatness of the country and ensuring the stability and advancement of the nation, along with the success of the extensive programs taking place in all material and spiritual aspects of Iranian society, requires complete national readiness in every dimension. Just as the Imperial Armed Forces have the duty to protect and defend the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the country and must always be prepared to fulfill this duty under any conditions, the Civil Defense Organization must also be ready at all times and under all circumstances, both in peace and at war, to

respond to unfortunate events and incidents." (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, n.d.: 7108-7109)

Furthermore, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi explicitly states elsewhere about defending the homeland under any circumstances that even if the country had no future, it would still be our duty to guard and defend our land, borders, and territory:

"Even if we had a country with no future, it was our duty, purely based on patriotic responsibility, to guard and defend our borders, our land. But in the Iran that has reached this stage today, an Iran that you can guess what stages it will reach in ten years, an Iran that you can clearly see what it will become in another generation or in twenty-five years, it is everyone's duty, in their own capacity, as individuals or as administrative bodies of the country, as those responsible for safeguarding the borders of this nation, to strive for this." (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, n.d.: 7471)

Conclusion

The starting point of discourse analysis is by no means ideas, mentalities, or epistemic frameworks. In this sense, a discursive approach cannot discuss the essence of phenomena and social events or depict their ideal states, as existence is considered a field of forces in which the individual is immanent, such that they cannot be separated from this existence and cannot speak of the essence of phenomena and events, and consequently, their ideal states.

Accordingly, discourse is one of the significant manifestations of power relations and has been formed for a specific function. Therefore, the main question in discourse research is "How Question?" and "For what function?" (Not "what question?"). In the question of "How," we encounter the history of "Problematizations" rather than the history of ideas; in fact, it is the various problematic situations that regulate power relations and make discourses possible for the production of a specific function.

Based on this, it should be noted that since the nineteenth century, Iran has become a subject of concern as a sick body and a backward country. Numerous events, such as the publication of travelogues, the emergence of nascent capitalism and the working class, and generally, the familiarity of Iranians with the Western world, played a role in the problematic situation of sick and backward Iran, gradually transforming this issue into an episteme (system of knowledge) or a grand discourse under which various discourses emerged with distinct chains of signifiers and different representations. In this context, we can discuss two

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dominant yet rival discourses: The "Anti-autocratic Constitutionalist" discourse and the "Modernist Nationalism" discourse, which managed to become the dominant discourse during the Pahlavi era, and in this article, we aimed to examine its semantic coordinates.

The discourse of modernist nationalism, with its central and meaning-giving signifier of "Iranian nationalism," played a significant role in the speech and actions of the main actors of the Pahlavi regime prior to the victory of the Islamic Revolution. Various elements coalesced around the central signifier of "Iranian nationalism" in a specific manner, establishing a unique semantic system. In other words, through Iranian nationalism, several fundamental goals and functions of the Pahlavi court were achieved:

- 1) The revival of ancient Iranian values could serve as a unifying reaction to the problematic notion of sick and backward Iran.
- 2) Iranian nationalism provided the necessary theoretical justifications for the superficial and top-down implementation of modernization.
- 3) The presence of a dominant, centralized government in opposition to the demand for constitutionalism constituted another meaning that could be justified through Iranian nationalism.
- 4) Iranian nationalism also provided a solid foundation for the ideology of monarchy and the royal system.
- 5) Additionally, Iranian nationalism could neutralize the threat of clerics gaining power and provided an ideological basis in opposition to Islamism—an ideological framework that steered Iran toward secularism.
- 6) Ultimately, Iranian nationalism led to the strengthening of militarism. In this sense, Iranian nationalism could optimally function to bolster military forces and transform Iran into a regional superpower while safeguarding the nation from foreign invasions.

Consequently, the crucial functional aspects of the modernist nationalist discourse that derived their meaning from the central signifier of "Iranian nationalism," collectively forming the semantic network of the second Pahlavi discourse, included:

- 1) Monarchy (the necessity of reviving the royal system),
- 2) Secularism (opposition to Islamism),
- 3) Modernization (top-down modernization),
- 4) Centralization (the establishment of a dominant government), and
- 5) Strengthening militarism (to play a military role in the region and counter foreign aggression).

It is essential to note that, based on a discursive approach, the central signifier of Iranian nationalism and the above-mentioned functions should be understood within the problematic notion of "Sick and Backward Iran" and the arrangement and rearrangement of power

dynamics or, more precisely, the function that they perform within the field of forces. This implies that, primarily, subjects such as monarchy or the establishment of a dominant government must be considered within strategic logic and the field of forces, thus eliminating their logical and intrinsic connections to issues like development. In other words, the aforementioned subjects have become possible within the discourse of modernist nationalism for a specific function and should not be epistemologically evaluated for their correctness or incorrectness; rather, it is necessary to reveal their functions and unveil them. Secondly, the success of matters like constitutionalism and the necessity of the rule of law (as discursive subjects) in Iran hinges on the expansion of the domain of governmentality of the anti-autocratic constitutionalist discourse. Therefore, the success of this discourse should be analyzed concerning discussions on power dynamics and governance technologies, rather than concerning the correctness or incorrectness of Iranian intellectuals' ideas.

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