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In dieser Ausgabe:

**The body politic under the knife: A critical evaluation of medical-political metaphors in Iranian political discourse**

Mohasen Karami

**Reinterpreting spirituality in Iranian architecture through Mulla Sadra's transcendent philosophy and the fourfold model of cognition**

Khosro Sahaf, Navid Jalaeian Ghane, Alireza Jalaeian Ghane

**The geopolitics of modern architecture in Iran: the role of Swedish engineering firms during the first Pahlavi era**

Mahdi Motamedmanesh, Sadaf Vahidi

**Transformation of cultural rituals in contemporary Iran: The role of Instagram in reshaping the celebration of traditional occasions**

Javad Madahi Mashizi

**Semantic sovereignty in large language models: Auditing the representation of persiana-te and Shi'i meanings across languages**

Hamed Zarabi, Aysheh Mohammadzadeh

**Human dignity and humanitarian law in Islam**

Ali Akbar Alikhani, Mahnaz Shahalizade

**Intense cultural assimilation in the Iranian diaspora: A sociological explanation**

Reza Gholami

**On the influence of the Persian philosopher Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) on Meister Eckhart's Meta-physics**

Roland Pietsch

**Algorithmic reconstruction of Iranian identity: A futures study of artificial intelligence in Iran's communication culture**

Tahereh Jahanparvar, Mohammad Mehdi Jahanparvar

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**Algorithm and text: Challenges of artificial intelligence in the humanities with an emphasis on german law and imami jurisprudence**

Seyyed Mohammad Heidary Khormizi

**39. Jahrgang, Nr. 1, Winter and Frühjahr 2026**

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رایزنی فرهنگی جمهوری اسلامی ایران در آلمان

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| ا        |                      | Hamzaträger ('), ā | Vokal-,<br>Hamzaträger, ā |
| ب        |                      | b                  | b                         |
| پ        | (nur pers.)          | -                  | p                         |
| ت        |                      | t                  | t                         |
| ث        |                      | ṭ                  | ṭ                         |
| ج        |                      | ġ                  | ġ                         |
| چ        | (nur pers.)          | -                  | č                         |
| ح        |                      | ḥ                  | ḥ                         |
| خ        |                      | ḫ                  | ḫ                         |
| د        |                      | d                  | d                         |
| ذ        |                      | ḏ                  | ḏ                         |
| ر        |                      | r                  | r                         |
| ز        |                      | z                  | z                         |
| ژ        | (nur pers.)          | -                  | μ                         |
| س        |                      | s                  | s                         |
| ش        |                      | š                  | š                         |
| ص        |                      | ṣ                  | ṣ                         |
| ض        |                      | ḍ                  | ḍ                         |
| ط        |                      | ṭ                  | ṭ                         |
| ظ        |                      | ẓ                  | ẓ                         |
| ع        |                      | -ʿ-                | -ʿ-                       |
| غ        |                      | ġ                  | ġ                         |
| ف        |                      | f                  | f                         |
| ق        |                      | q                  | q                         |
| ک        |                      | k                  | k                         |
| گ        | (nur pers.)          | -                  | g                         |
| ل        |                      | l                  | l                         |
| م        |                      | m                  | m                         |
| ن        |                      | n                  | n                         |
| ه        |                      | h                  | h                         |
| و        |                      | w, ū               | w, ū                      |
| ی        |                      | y, ī               | y, ī                      |
| -(Fatha) |                      | a                  | a                         |
| -(Kasra) |                      | i                  | e oder i                  |
| -(Damma) |                      | u                  | o oder u                  |
| -(Hamza) |                      | -ʿ-                | -ʿ-                       |
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**Inhalt**

**The body politic under the knife: A critical evaluation of medical-political metaphors in Iranian political discourse** ..... 9  
Mohasen Karami

**Reinterpreting spirituality in Iranian architecture through Mulla Sadra’s transcendent philosophy and the fourfold model of cognition** ..... 43  
Khosro Sahaf, Navid Jalaeian Ghane, Alireza Jalaeian Ghane

**The geopolitics of modern architecture in Iran: the role of Swedish engineering firms during the first Pahlavi era** ..... 85  
Mahdi Motamedmanesh, Sadaf Vahidi

**Transformation of cultural rituals in contemporary Iran: The role of Instagram in reshaping the celebration of traditional occasions** ..... 121  
Javad Madahi Mashizi

**Semantic sovereignty in large language models: Auditing the representation of persianate and Shi’i meanings across languages** ..... 159  
Hamed Zarabi, Aysheh Mohammadzadeh

**Human dignity and humanitarian law in Islam** ..... 191  
Ali Akbar Alikhani, Mahnaz Shahalizade

**Intense cultural assimilation in the Iranian diaspora: A sociological explanation** ..... 225  
Reza Gholami

**On the influence of the Persian philosopher Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) on Meister Eckhart’s Metaphysics** ..... 253  
Roland Pietsch

|                                                                                                                                                 |            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Algorithmic reconstruction of Iranian identity; A futures study of artificial intelligence in Iran's communication culture .....</b>         | <b>269</b> |
| Tahereh Jahanparvar, Mohammad Mehdi Jahanparvar                                                                                                 |            |
| <b>Path dependency theory and Iran's 1962 land reforms: How initial goals shaped the current situation .....</b>                                | <b>303</b> |
| Hamid Shamsodin, Jahangir Karami, Mehdi Ahouie                                                                                                  |            |
| <b>Postsocial genealogies: Persian medical cultures as early epistemic formations .....</b>                                                     | <b>331</b> |
| Masoud Salmani Bidgoli , Ameneh Sedighian Bidgoli                                                                                               |            |
| <b>Algorithm and text: Challenges of artificial intelligence in the humanities with an emphasis on german law and imami jurisprudence .....</b> | <b>363</b> |
| Seyyed Mohammad Heidary Khormizi                                                                                                                |            |



## Original Research Paper

# The body politic under the knife: A critical evaluation of medical-political metaphors in Iranian political discourse

Mohasen Karami <sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Political metaphors are not merely rhetorical embellishments but cognitive instruments that shape perception, structure judgment, and guide collective action. This article offers a philosophical examination of the epistemic, ethical, and socio-political implications of medical-political metaphors in political discourse. Drawing upon Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, discourse ethics, and theories of epistemic injustice, the study argues that medicalized political language functions not simply as a descriptive device but as a mechanism that reorganizes political understanding through biologically derived schemas. The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, it reconstructs the conceptual architecture of five recurrent medical-political metaphors, demonstrating how political actors, institutions, and conflicts are mapped onto medical categories such as pathology, infection, surgery, and cancer. Second, it examines the epistemic consequences of these mappings, arguing that they simplify complex political phenomena, generate category mistakes, obscure agency and structural causality, narrow interpretive possibilities, encourage affective shortcuts in reasoning, and transfer the authority of scientific discourse into domains characterized by normative disagreement and political contingency. Third, it investigates their ethical and political consequences, showing how such metaphors can facilitate dehumanization, undermine mutual recognition, contribute to epistemic injustice, legitimize exclusionary practices, and normalize antagonistic identities and exceptional forms of governance. The article concludes that medical-political metaphors are not neutral instruments of political communication. By transforming political disagreement into pathology, they alter the epistemic and moral conditions underlying democratic judgment, public deliberation, and political pluralism. A critical examination of these metaphors is therefore indispensable for understanding the relationship between language, power, and democratic life.

**Keywords:** medical-political metaphors, conceptual metaphor theory, epistemic injustice, discourse ethics, political language, critical discourse analysis

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## مقاله پژوهشی

# کالبد سیاسی روی میز جراحی: ارزیابی نقادانه استعاره‌های پزشکی - سیاسی در گفتمان سیاسی ایران

محسن کرمی<sup>✉</sup>

دریافت: ۱۴۰۴/۰۷/۱۵ | پذیرش: ۱۴۰۴/۰۹/۲۹

## چکیده:

استعاره‌های سیاسی صرفاً آرایه‌های بلاغی نیستند، بلکه ابزارهایی شناختی‌اند که ادراک را شکل می‌دهند، داوری را سامان می‌بخشند و کنش جمعی را هدایت می‌کنند. استعاره‌های پزشکی-سیاسی به دلیل تکیه بر مفاهیمی چون سلامت، بیماری، تشخیص و درمان، جایگاهی ویژه در تفسیر واقعیت‌های سیاسی دارند. این مقاله با رویکردی فلسفی، پیامدهای معرفتی، اخلاقی و اجتماعی-سیاسی این استعاره‌ها را با بهره‌گیری از نظریه استعاره مفهومی، تحلیل گفتمان انتقادی، اخلاق گفتمان و نظریه‌های بی‌عدالتی معرفتی بررسی می‌کند. پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که زبان پزشکی‌شده سیاست صرفاً ابزار توصیف نیست، بلکه فهم سیاسی را بر اساس الگوهای برخاسته از زیست‌شناسی بازسازمان‌دهی می‌کند. تحلیل در سه گام انجام می‌شود: نخست، معماری مفهومی پنج استعاره رایج پزشکی - سیاسی بازسازی شده و نحوه نگاشت کنشگران، نهادها و منازعات سیاسی بر مقولاتی مانند آسیب‌شناسی، عفونت، جراحی و سرطان بررسی می‌شود. سپس، پیامدهای معرفتی این نگاشت‌ها بررسی می‌گردد؛ از جمله ساده‌سازی پدیده‌های پیچیده سیاسی، ایجاد خلط مقوله‌ای، پنهان‌سازی عاملیت و علل ساختاری، محدودکردن افق‌های تفسیری، تشویق به میان‌برهای عاطفی در استدلال و انتقال ناموجه اقتدار گفتمان علمی به حوزه‌های مبتنی بر اختلاف هنجاری و اقتضائات سیاسی. در گام سوم، پیامدهای اخلاقی و سیاسی استعاره‌ها بررسی می‌شود که می‌توانند به انسانیت‌زدایی، تضعیف شناسایی متقابل، بی‌عدالتی معرفتی، مشروعیت‌بخشی به طرد و عادی‌سازی هویت‌های ستیزه‌جویانه و شیوه‌های استثنایی حکمرانی منجر شوند. مقاله نتیجه می‌گیرد که این استعاره‌ها ابزارهایی خنثی نیستند و با تبدیل اختلاف سیاسی به آسیب‌شناسی، شرایط معرفتی و اخلاقی داوری دموکراتیک، گفت‌وگوی عمومی و تکرارگری سیاسی را دگرگون می‌کنند. از این‌رو، واکاوی انتقادی آن‌ها برای فهم نسبت میان زبان، قدرت و حیات دموکراتیک ضروری است.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** استعاره‌های پزشکی-سیاسی، نظریه استعاره مفهومی، بی‌عدالتی معرفتی، اخلاق گفتمان، زبان سیاسی، تحلیل گفتمان انتقادی



## Original-Forschungsarbeit

# Der politische Körper unter dem Skalpell: Eine kritische Bewertung medizinisch-politischer Metaphern im politischen Diskurs Irans

Mohsen Karami<sup>1\*</sup>

Eingegangen: 7. Oct. 2025

Angenommen: 19. Dez. 2025

### Zusammenfassung:

Politische Metaphern sind kognitive Instrumente, die Wahrnehmung, Urteilsbildung und kollektives Handeln strukturieren. Besonders medizinisch-politische Metaphern greifen auf kulturell etablierte Vorstellungen von Gesundheit, Krankheit, Diagnose und Therapie zurück, um politische Wirklichkeiten zu interpretieren. Der Beitrag untersucht aus philosophischer Perspektive ihre erkenntnistheoretischen, ethischen und gesellschaftlich-politischen Implikationen. Auf Grundlage der Theorie der konzeptuellen Metapher, der Kritischen Diskursanalyse, der Diskursethik und der Theorien epistemischer Ungerechtigkeit werden fünf wiederkehrende medizinisch-politische Metaphern analysiert. Dabei zeigt sich, dass politische Akteure, Institutionen und Konflikte durch Kategorien wie Pathologie, Infektion, chirurgischer Eingriff und Krebs gedeutet werden. Diese Übertragungen können komplexe politische Zusammenhänge vereinfachen, strukturelle Ursachen und Handlungsmacht verschleiern sowie den Interpretationshorizont verengen. Zugleich können sie die Autorität wissenschaftlichen Wissens auf normative und politische Kontroversen übertragen, Entmenschlichung und epistemische Ungerechtigkeit fördern und exkludierende sowie außergewöhnliche Regierungspraktiken legitimieren. Der Beitrag zeigt, dass medizinisch-politische Metaphern keineswegs neutral sind. Indem sie politische Differenzen als pathologische Zustände darstellen, beeinflussen sie die epistemischen und moralischen Voraussetzungen demokratischer Urteilsbildung, öffentlicher Deliberation und politischen Pluralismus. Eine kritische Analyse dieser Metaphern ist daher zentral für das Verständnis des Verhältnisses von Sprache, Macht und demokratischem Leben.

**Schlüsselwörter:** medizinisch-politische Metaphern, Theorie der konzeptuellen Metapher, epistemische Ungerechtigkeit, Diskursethik, politische Sprache, Kritische Diskursanalyse

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## 1. Introduction

Metaphor is not merely a rhetorical device but a cognitive and epistemic tool through which political actors frame, shape, and direct public reasoning. Far from being ornamental, metaphors perform critical work in structuring how political realities are understood, discussed, and acted upon. As Lakoff and Johnson (2003) have convincingly argued, metaphors are foundational to human thought – they provide conceptual scaffolding for making sense of complex and abstract domains such as governance, opposition, and social change. Metaphors can illuminate and clarify complex concepts, and they can articulate experiences or phenomena that resist straightforward, literal description. Yet, however valuable in these respects, metaphors can never serve as a substitute for argument. An epistemically illegitimate use of metaphor arises when it functions in place of reasoning – misleading audiences by fostering beliefs or eliciting emotions that incline them toward a particular stance or course of action without genuine deliberative engagement. This study is concerned specifically with such epistemically and ethically problematic deployments of medical-political metaphors.

Within this problematic category – metaphors that induce or reinforce belief through fallacious means, or that evoke emotions which compel unreflective alignment or action – our analysis narrows further to those with a negative orientation: metaphors intended to cultivate adverse beliefs or hostile emotions toward political opponents, rather than to inspire positive attitudes toward allies. It is true that metaphor can also be mobilized in the service of in-group affirmation – portraying one's own leaders as *Amir-e Kabir-e Irān* (*Amir Kabir*, the Grand Vizier of Iran), or *nāji-ye mellat* (The Nation's Redeemer), or *sotun-e kheime-ye enqelāb* (The Central Pillar Holding Up the Revolution); a political group as *shajare-ye tayyeb* (The Pure and Blessed Tree); or a military organization as *bāzū-ye qodratmand-e mellat va nezām* (The Strong Arm of the Nation and the State). Such framings generate positive affect and belief toward one's own side. However, the present inquiry focuses on the second, more corrosive use – metaphors that delegitimize or demonize adversaries – because, in the contemporary political landscape, and particularly in semi-authoritarian contexts such as that of Iran, these have proven especially effective in legitimating exclusionary, coercive, and repressive political measures.

In political discourse, metaphorical framings serve not only to make political phenomena intelligible but also to encode affective and moral evaluations within ostensibly neutral language. Through metaphor, dissent can be rendered pathological, reform can be recast as surgical amputation, and negotiation can be dismissed as appeasement. In this way, metaphors operate as what Charteris-Black (2005) calls rhetorical mechanisms of legitimation—they make certain interpretations appear natural while marginalizing others. Crucially, such framings are not ideologically innocent; they channel cognitive and emotional responses in ways that privilege some courses of action over others, often without overtly engaging in argumentation (Musolff, 2016).

Over recent decades, Iranian political discourse—especially as shaped by state-affiliated and partisan media—has employed a wide array of metaphorical systems to frame political actors, movements, and events. Among the most influential of these metaphorical domains are the following:

1. **Religious-Political Metaphors:** Political adversaries are depicted as *kuffār* (infidels), *munāfiqīn* (hypocrites), or agents of *fitna* (sedition). This metaphorical system pits *Hezbollah* (the Party of God) against *Hezb al-Shayṭān* (the Party of Satan), constructing politics as a cosmic struggle between good and evil.

2. **Medical-Political Metaphors:** Opposition figures are likened to diseased organs that must be amputated, rotten teeth to be pulled, or infections threatening the body politic. Economic crises are cast as cancers or cancerous glands requiring painful surgical remedies.

3. **Architectural-Political Metaphors:** The political system is portrayed as a crumbling house that cannot be repaired and must be demolished entirely, thereby delegitimizing reformist approaches and reinforcing revolutionary narratives.

4. **Value-Laden-Political Metaphors:** Opponents are referred to using dehumanizing terms such as *bozghāle* (kid goat), *gūsāle* (calf), *khas-o-khāshāk* (chaff), or *tofāle* (dregs), stripping them of political legitimacy and moral worth.

5. **Artistic-Political Metaphors:** Political decisions are described as scripts, scenarios, or performances, implying artificiality and manipulation, while politicians are seen as actors in a theatrical production.

**6. Familial-Political Metaphors:** The leader state described as the compassionate father of the nation, and citizens as ungrateful disobedient children, framing political loyalty in moral and emotional terms rooted in familial duty and honor.

**7. Historical-Political Metaphors:** Political actors are likened to Hitler or Genghis Khan; treaties are framed as *Turkmenchay*-style capitulations, evoking historical trauma and national humiliation.

Each of these metaphorical categories deserves close scholarly scrutiny, as they shape not only public perception but also institutional responses and policy directions. However, in this article, we focus on a single, especially pervasive and consequential metaphorical system: medical-political metaphors.

Medical-political metaphors wield immense rhetorical power because they evoke urgency, legitimacy, and scientific authority. By conceptualizing political dissent as a disease or contamination, such metaphors obscure the normative and deliberative dimensions of politics. They reframe complex, plural, and value-laden political disagreements as pathological deviations that must be corrected, suppressed, or surgically removed. In doing so, they depoliticize political conflict and legitimate repressive interventions as acts of social hygiene or curative care. This mechanism aligns with Entman's (1993) framing theory: the selection of certain aspects of reality and their elevation to "problem" status through metaphoric coding not only diagnoses the issue but also prescribes and morally justifies the remedy.

This article advances a threefold philosophical argument. First, we contend that medical-political metaphors, while rhetorically compelling, are epistemically flawed: they reduce political complexity to biological simplifications and misclassify normative contestation as clinical dysfunction. Second, we argue that these metaphors are ethically problematic: they instrumentalize public fear, dehumanize dissent, and violate principles of democratic inclusion and respect (Fricker, 2007). Third, we show that such metaphors carry significant sociopolitical risks, including the erosion of civic trust, the legitimization of coercive governance, and the marginalization of alternative voices.

The present study situates these concerns within a broader philosophical inquiry into the role of metaphor in political reasoning.

While the analysis draws illustrative examples from Persian-language political and media discourse—where medical metaphors have been particularly salient—it does not claim to offer an exhaustive empirical survey of any specific national corpus between fixed dates. Rather, the Iranian context serves as a rich and instructive case through which to explore more general philosophical questions about the epistemic and ethical status of medicalized political language. By examining how metaphor operates at the intersection of language, cognition, emotion, and power, this study aims to contribute to ongoing conversations in political philosophy, discourse ethics, and the philosophy of language.

To guide the inquiry, this article addresses the following central philosophical questions:

1. How do medical-political metaphors function as cognitive mappings that distort the understanding of political phenomena and substitute for genuine argumentation?
2. In what ways do these metaphors generate epistemic injustices and violations of communicative rationality in political discourse?
3. What are the ethical implications of such metaphors for democratic norms, political pluralism, and the moral recognition of the other?

By pursuing these questions through a sustained critical-interpretive analysis, the paper seeks not merely to catalog metaphorical patterns but to illuminate the deeper philosophical stakes of how politics is imagined, narrated, and enacted through medical imagery—and to assess the risks that medicalized political rhetoric poses to the conditions of possibility for democratic deliberation and epistemic trust.

## **2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework**

### **2.1. Literature Review**

Internationally, foundational works such as Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) *Metaphors We Live By* established metaphors as conceptual mappings that structure abstract domains like politics through concrete source domains, including medicine. In this vein, Charteris-Black (2005) elucidates how medical metaphors legitimize radical interventions by framing opposition as pathological threats, evoking urgency and scientific authority to naturalize coercive actions. Musolff (2016) extends this by examining historical

precedents, such as the Nazi regime's use of "cancer" analogies, demonstrating how such framings reduce political plurality to biological binaries, thereby eroding deliberative space. Semino (2008) and Flusberg, Matlock, and Thibodeau (2018) further highlight the cognitive simplifications induced by these metaphors, where complex socio-political phenomena are recast as diseases, prompting punitive rather than dialogic responses. Hauser and Schwarz (2015) empirically show that exposure to "cancer" framings in media increases public support for authoritarian measures, illustrating the affective potency of metaphors in manipulating moral intuitions (Haidt, 2001). These studies collectively warn of the epistemic pitfalls: metaphors that masquerade as neutral descriptors while imposing rigid frames that obscure agency, causality, and normative contestation.

In media and political discourse, van Dijk (1998) and Wodak and Meyer (2016) emphasize the role of such metaphors in normalizing ideological assumptions, particularly in semi-authoritarian contexts where they serve to depoliticize conflict and justify repression. Nerlich (2010) notes the perceived neutrality of medical language, which masks its ideological load, while Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) demonstrate through experiments how metaphorical framing alters problem-solving preferences, with illness metaphors favoring elimination over negotiation.

Turning to Persian-language studies, which provide a crucial regional lens, research has increasingly interrogated metaphors in Iranian political and media discourse. For instance, Sharifian, Firouzian, and Firouzian (2012) analyze the metaphorical role of body parts in political texts from Persian newspapers in Iran, revealing how somatic metaphors construct ideological narratives that delegitimize adversaries. Similarly, Behzan Ayinevand (2014) conducts a cognitive-critical analysis of metaphors in newspaper headlines, arguing that they function as tools for ideological manipulation in Iran's political landscape. More recent contributions include Imani's (2021) analysis of the "Corona War" metaphor in Iranian political speeches and media during the pandemic, which underscores metaphors' dual role in legitimation and perception-shaping. Khosravi Nik (2015) examines self-other representations in Iranian political discourse since 1979, incorporating metaphorical systems that pathologize opposition. Additionally, Rabiee Kahandani (2023) explores how metaphors of health and disease in party rhetoric reinforce hegemonic ideologies, and Ansarian and Davari Ardakani (2022) integrate conceptual metaphor theory with critical discourse analysis to evaluate blended metaphors in political cartoons.

These Persian-language studies, while insightful, often remain predominantly descriptive, with limited integration of deeper epistemic critique (Fricker, 2007) or normative discourse ethics (Habermas, 1984). The present research addresses this gap by offering a sustained philosophical-interpretive critique of medical-political metaphors, emphasizing their epistemic distortions and ethical violations. It situates these metaphors within a broader philosophical conversation rather than limiting itself to a regionally bounded empirical description.

## 2.2. Analytical Framework

This study integrates three interlocking philosophical perspectives to dissect medical-political metaphors as mechanisms of cognitive structuring, affective mobilization, and normative exclusion. First, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) posits metaphors as cognitive mappings from a source domain (e.g., medicine) to a target domain (e.g., politics), revealing how they impose narrative logics – such as diagnosis leading inexorably to excision – that simplify political realities and foreclose alternatives (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Kövecses, 2010). Philosophically, this underscores metaphors' ontological force: they do not merely describe but constitute the political world, echoing Wittgenstein's insight that language games delimit what can be thought.

Second, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), augmented by framing theory, examines how metaphors encode power relations, selecting and elevating certain interpretations while marginalizing others (Entman, 1993; van Dijk, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). In semi-authoritarian contexts, these framings can depoliticize dissent, transforming normative debates into technical imperatives – a process akin to Heidegger's notion of enframing (*Gestell*) where phenomena are reduced to calculable resources for intervention.

Third, an epistemic-ethical critique draws on Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice, Habermas's (1984) discourse ethics, and Haidt's (2001) moral psychology to evaluate the harms of such metaphors. They may perpetrate testimonial injustice by dismissing dissenters as irrational “patients,” violate communicative rationality by substituting emotional coercion for deliberation, and exploit moral emotions like disgust to justify exclusion. This tripartite lens philosophically interrogates metaphors as ethical practices, demanding accountability for their role in eroding democratic intersubjectivity and the conditions of possibility for genuine political dialogue.

### **2.3. Methodology**

This study employs a philosophical-interpretive methodology grounded in the integration of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, critical discourse analysis, and normative philosophical inquiry. Rather than pursuing exhaustive empirical sampling or quantitative content analysis, the approach is qualitative and paradigmatic: it selects five prominent medical-political metaphors that recur with conceptual clarity and rhetorical potency in contemporary political discourse. These metaphors serve as illustrative cases chosen for their capacity to reveal deeper epistemic and ethical structures, rather than as a representative statistical sample of any particular media corpus.

The analysis proceeds through close philosophical reading of each metaphorical schema, examining its cognitive mappings (per CMT), its framing effects and power implications (per CDA and framing theory), and its normative consequences for epistemic justice, moral recognition, and democratic deliberation. This interpretive method allows for a sustained critical engagement with the philosophical implications of medicalized political language, drawing on illustrative examples from Persian-language political discourse where such metaphors have been especially salient, while maintaining a broader theoretical scope. The goal is not methodological reproducibility in the empirical sense, but philosophical rigor and depth of insight into the ways language shapes political thought and action.

### **3. Conceptual Reconstruction of Medical-Political Metaphors**

Before evaluating the epistemic, ethical, and political consequences of medical-political metaphors, it is necessary to clarify the conceptual structures that make these metaphors intelligible and rhetorically powerful in the first place. Following Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Kövecses, 2010), metaphors are understood not merely as linguistic ornaments but as cognitive mappings through which one domain of experience is interpreted in terms of another. In the case of medical-political metaphors, concepts and scenarios drawn from medicine, anatomy, surgery, pathology, and disease are projected onto political realities. Through this process, political actors, institutions, conflicts, and crises become understandable within frameworks originally developed for interpreting bodily health and illness.

The significance of these metaphors lies not only in isolated linguistic expressions but also in the broader conceptual scenarios they activate. As Musolff (2016) argues, political metaphors often function through recurring narrative structures that provide ready-made patterns of interpretation. Once a political phenomenon is situated within a medical scenario, a series of associated expectations, assumptions, and inferential pathways are activated. Diagnosis implies treatment; infection implies containment; disease implies cure; degeneration implies intervention. In this way, medical metaphors do not merely describe political realities but organize them into coherent cognitive narratives.

The purpose of the present section is therefore descriptive and reconstructive rather than evaluative. Rather than assessing whether these metaphors are epistemically justified or ethically legitimate, the analysis seeks to identify the conceptual mappings and inferential structures that underlie their operation. Five recurrent medical-political metaphors are examined as paradigmatic examples. Together they illustrate how political realities can be reimagined through the conceptual vocabulary of bodily disorder, therapeutic intervention, contamination, and pathology.

### **3.1. "The Loose Tooth Must Be Extracted and Discarded"**

This metaphor draws upon the familiar experience of dental deterioration and translates it into a framework for understanding political instability. Within the source domain of dentistry, a loose tooth is perceived as an element that has become detached from its proper place within the body. It no longer performs its intended function effectively and often produces discomfort or irritation. The ordinary response to such a condition is extraction. Removal appears not as an extraordinary act but as the natural culmination of a process already underway. Once the problematic tooth is removed, the expectation is that discomfort will disappear and normal functioning will be restored.

When this scenario is projected onto the political domain, political actors, institutions, or social groups may be conceptualized as the equivalent of a loose tooth within the body politic. The metaphor establishes a correspondence between bodily instability and political disturbance. Just as the loose tooth appears detached from the healthy functioning of the mouth, the political actor represented through this metaphor appears detached from the proper functioning of the political order. The resulting disturbance is interpreted not as a manifestation of broader structural tensions but as the consequence of a localized anomaly.

The conceptual structure of the metaphor follows a recognizable narrative sequence: instability produces discomfort; discomfort necessitates intervention; intervention culminates in removal; removal restores equilibrium. Because this sequence is already deeply familiar from everyday bodily experience, it provides a ready-made interpretive framework for understanding political events. Political disorder is thus organized according to a model of maintenance and repair rather than one of negotiation, transformation, or systemic adaptation.

At a deeper conceptual level, the metaphor presupposes an image of the political community as an integrated organism composed of functionally coordinated parts. Stability is associated with proper integration, while instability is associated with detachment or dysfunction. The metaphor therefore translates political complexity into a scenario derived from bodily maintenance, allowing political problems to be interpreted through the logic of correction and restoration.

### **3.2. "The Corrupt Organ Must Be Cut Off"**

The metaphor of the corrupt organ derives from the source domain of anatomy and surgery. Within medical understanding, organs are functional components of a larger biological system. Each organ contributes to the overall well-being of the organism, and the failure of one organ can threaten the health of the whole. In certain medical situations, severe damage or disease may lead physicians to recommend surgical removal in order to preserve the remaining body.

When transferred to the political sphere, this medical scenario establishes an analogy between the body and the political system. Political institutions, organizations, or individuals become conceptualized as organs within a larger social organism. Corruption is represented as a form of pathological deterioration that compromises the functioning of the broader political body. The central image is therefore not one of external attack but of internal malfunction.

The metaphor introduces a clear inferential structure. First, a problematic element is identified. Second, the source of dysfunction is localized within a specific part of the system. Third, intervention is directed toward that particular component. Finally, the removal of the problematic element is expected to restore the integrity of the whole. This sequence closely mirrors the logic of surgical intervention, in which diagnosis is followed by excision and ultimately by recovery.

The conceptual significance of this metaphor lies in its emphasis on bounded dysfunction. Rather than portraying corruption as a diffuse or systemic condition, it organizes political understanding around the image of a specific diseased component. The political system itself remains conceptually distinguishable from the source of corruption. Consequently, attention is directed toward identifying and isolating particular loci of dysfunction within the larger structure.

The metaphor therefore provides a framework through which political disorder can be understood as a problem of internal pathology requiring corrective intervention. By drawing upon the familiar logic of anatomy and surgery, it offers a coherent model for interpreting relationships between parts and wholes within political systems.

### **3.3. "The Economy Needs Surgery, and Surgery Naturally Involves Bleeding and Pain"**

Unlike the previous metaphors, which focus on political actors or institutions, this metaphor applies medical reasoning to economic processes. Its source domain is surgery, a form of therapeutic intervention that seeks to restore health through invasive treatment. Surgical procedures are commonly associated with discomfort, risk, temporary suffering, and prolonged recovery. Nevertheless, these negative experiences are generally understood as integral parts of a broader healing process.

When projected onto the target domain of economic policy, the metaphor conceptualizes economic crises, inefficiencies, or structural imbalances as conditions analogous to bodily illness. Policymakers assume the role of surgeons, while economic reforms correspond to surgical procedures. Economic hardships, such as inflation, unemployment, austerity measures, or market disruptions, become equivalent to the pain and bleeding associated with medical intervention.

The conceptual scenario activated by the metaphor unfolds according to a familiar sequence. A condition is diagnosed; intervention becomes necessary; intervention produces discomfort; recovery follows successful treatment. The expectation of eventual improvement is embedded within the structure of the scenario itself. Temporary suffering is interpreted not as evidence of failure but as a predictable stage within a larger process of restoration.

From a cognitive perspective, the metaphor enables complex economic phenomena to be understood through bodily experience. Economic systems, which are often abstract and difficult to visualize, become comprehensible through a concrete narrative of illness and healing. The metaphor thereby provides a structured framework for interpreting periods of economic change and uncertainty.

More broadly, the metaphor contributes to a long-standing conceptual tradition in which societies, states, and economies are understood through analogies with living organisms. Economic disruption is translated into bodily dysfunction, while policy intervention becomes analogous to therapeutic treatment. In this way, economic transformation is situated within a familiar medical narrative of diagnosis, intervention, and recovery.

#### **3.4. "The Infected Cell Must Be Removed from the Body and Even Eradicated"**

This metaphor draws upon concepts from microbiology, immunology, and cellular pathology. Within the source domain, infected cells represent localized sites of contamination that possess the potential to spread damage throughout the organism. Because infection may expand beyond its original location, medical responses often focus not only on treating existing damage but also on preventing future transmission.

When applied to politics, the metaphor conceptualizes political opposition, dissenting movements, or disruptive actors through the image of cellular infection. The political community is represented as a living organism whose integrity depends upon protection from contamination. Opposition is understood not simply as an isolated occurrence but as a potentially expanding phenomenon capable of influencing other parts of the social body.

The inferential structure of the metaphor is shaped by a containment model. First, contamination is detected. Second, its location is identified. Third, measures are undertaken to contain its spread. Finally, the infected element is removed or eliminated in order to preserve the integrity of the larger organism. These steps closely resemble standard medical responses to infectious disease.

Unlike the loose-tooth metaphor, which emphasizes localized instability, the infected-cell metaphor foregrounds the possibility of

transmission and expansion. The significance of the problematic element lies not only in its present condition but also in its anticipated future effects. Consequently, attention shifts from immediate dysfunction to potential proliferation.

At a conceptual level, the metaphor organizes political understanding through biological models of contagion and immunity. Political relations are interpreted through categories originally developed for understanding bodily defense mechanisms. The resulting cognitive framework emphasizes boundaries, protection, detection, and containment as central dimensions of political order.

### **3.5. "Corruption Is the Cancer That Has Infected the Entire Political System and Cannot Be Cured"**

Among medical-political metaphors, cancer metaphors possess a particularly elaborate conceptual structure. The source domain is oncology, where cancer is understood as a condition characterized by uncontrolled growth, progressive expansion, and systemic penetration. Unlike localized infections or isolated injuries, cancer often signifies a process that gradually extends throughout the organism and becomes increasingly difficult to reverse.

When mapped onto political realities, the metaphor conceptualizes corruption as a pervasive and expanding condition affecting the entire political system. The political order is represented as a living body whose internal structures have become compromised by malignant growth. Corruption is no longer confined to a specific institution or actor; instead, it is understood as a phenomenon capable of spreading across multiple dimensions of political life.

The scenario activated by the metaphor differs significantly from those discussed previously. Rather than focusing primarily on intervention and recovery, it emphasizes progression and deterioration. The conceptual sequence begins with emergence, continues through expansion and systemic penetration, and culminates in the image of terminal decline. The central concern is not localized dysfunction but comprehensive degeneration.

The metaphor thereby provides a framework for understanding political corruption in terms of scale, depth, and persistence. Through the cancer analogy, corruption becomes intelligible as a phenomenon that

penetrates institutions, reproduces itself across interconnected structures, and gradually undermines the functioning of the whole system.

From the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, this metaphor illustrates how complex political realities can be organized through highly developed medical schemas. The language of oncology provides a narrative structure that links growth, spread, deterioration, and systemic transformation into a coherent conceptual model. Political corruption is thus interpreted not merely as misconduct or administrative failure but as a condition affecting the entire organism of political life.

The foregoing reconstruction has clarified the conceptual mappings that underlie medical-political metaphors. By projecting medical schemas onto political realities, these metaphors generate coherent interpretive scenarios through which political phenomena become intelligible. The next section examines the epistemic consequences of these metaphorical constructions.

#### **4. Epistemic Pitfalls of Medical-Political Metaphors**

The previous section reconstructed the conceptual architecture of medical-political metaphors and identified the cognitive mappings through which political realities are interpreted in medical terms. The present section moves from description to epistemic evaluation and examines how those metaphorical mappings may distort political understanding. While metaphors are indispensable cognitive tools that enable individuals to comprehend abstract and complex phenomena, they are not epistemically neutral. Every metaphor highlights certain aspects of reality while obscuring others. Consequently, metaphorical reasoning can facilitate understanding, but it can also introduce distortions, oversimplifications, and inferential errors.

Medical-political metaphors are particularly significant in this regard because they import highly structured medical schemas into domains characterized by complexity, normativity, contingency, and human agency. Political phenomena are fundamentally different from biological processes. Yet when politics is interpreted through medical frameworks, concepts originally designed for understanding bodily illness become organizing principles for understanding social and political realities. The result is not merely a change in language but a transformation in the way political phenomena are cognitively represented and evaluated.

This chapter argues that medical-political metaphors generate a series of epistemic distortions. These include the simplification of complex realities, category mistakes, the obscuring of agency and causality, the narrowing of interpretive possibilities, the activation of affective shortcuts in reasoning, and the illegitimate transfer of scientific authority into domains where scientific certainty is unavailable. Each of these distortions weakens the quality of political understanding and reduces the capacity for critical reflection.

#### **4.1. Simplification of Complex Phenomena**

One of the most significant epistemic limitations of medical-political metaphors is their tendency to simplify highly complex realities. Political phenomena are characterized by multiple interacting variables, competing interpretations, historical contingencies, institutional arrangements, and normative disagreements. In contrast, medical models often operate through comparatively linear causal structures involving diagnosis, pathology, treatment, and recovery.

When political problems are represented through medical metaphors, this complexity is frequently compressed into a simplified narrative structure. Economic crises become diseases, corruption becomes cancer, and political conflict becomes infection. Such metaphorical transformations provide cognitive accessibility, but they do so at the cost of explanatory depth. Multiple causal factors are reduced to a single pathological condition, and diverse political responses become subsumed under a single therapeutic framework.

From an epistemological perspective, simplification is not inherently problematic. All models simplify reality to some extent. However, simplification becomes epistemically problematic when it obscures dimensions of reality that are essential for adequate understanding. Medical-political metaphors often encourage precisely this form of reduction. By organizing political reality around a pathology-treatment schema, they compress complex networks of causes, interests, institutions, and historical developments into a single explanatory image.

As Lakoff and Johnson (2003) emphasize, metaphors simultaneously reveal and conceal. The explanatory power of medical metaphors therefore derives partly from their ability to foreground certain aspects of political reality while backgrounding others. The epistemic concern is that

the hidden elements may be precisely those required for a fuller and more accurate understanding of political phenomena.

#### **4.2. Category Mistakes and Conceptual Misclassification**

A second epistemic problem arises from the transfer of concepts across fundamentally different ontological domains. Political phenomena belong to the realm of social interaction, normative judgment, institutional organization, and collective agency. Medical phenomena belong to the realm of biological processes, physiological mechanisms, and bodily dysfunction.

Medical-political metaphors establish conceptual bridges between these domains. Such mappings can be illuminating when used heuristically. However, they also risk generating category mistakes by encouraging the treatment of political realities as though they possessed the essential properties of biological phenomena.

Political disagreement, for example, differs fundamentally from biological infection. Corruption differs from cancer. Economic policy differs from surgical intervention. Yet metaphorical mappings often encourage inferences that blur these distinctions. Characteristics belonging to one conceptual domain are implicitly projected onto another domain without sufficient justification.

Kövecses (2010) notes that metaphorical mappings generate entailments that extend beyond the original comparison itself. Once a political phenomenon has been categorized through a medical framework, further assumptions associated with that framework become available for inference. Consequently, conceptual distinctions that ought to remain clear may become blurred.

The epistemic issue is not that metaphorical comparison is impossible or illegitimate. Rather, the problem emerges when metaphorical correspondence is mistaken for conceptual identity. At that point, the metaphor ceases to function as a heuristic device and begins to shape understanding in ways that obscure the fundamental differences between biological and political realities.

#### **4.3. Obscuring Agency and Structural Causality**

Medical-political metaphors frequently alter the way causality is understood. In medical discourse, diseases often appear as conditions that

emerge, spread, and develop according to biological mechanisms. Although human actions may influence such processes, the primary explanatory framework remains physiological.

When these explanatory models are transferred to political phenomena, they can obscure the role of human agency and institutional causation. Political developments frequently result from decisions, policies, strategic actions, social structures, historical trajectories, and collective choices. Yet medical metaphors often recast such developments as quasi-natural processes analogous to the progression of illness.

This shift has important epistemic consequences. Explanatory attention moves away from intentional actors and institutional mechanisms and toward abstract pathological conditions. Political outcomes become associated with symptoms rather than with the complex interactions that produced them.

Moreover, medical metaphors tend to foreground visible manifestations while backgrounding underlying structural dynamics. The immediate phenomenon becomes the primary object of attention, while broader causal networks receive comparatively little scrutiny. As a result, explanation risks becoming symptom-centered rather than causally comprehensive.

From the standpoint of epistemology, adequate understanding requires attention not merely to observable outcomes but also to the processes, structures, and agents responsible for producing them. To the extent that medical metaphors redirect attention away from such factors, they may weaken causal understanding and encourage incomplete explanations.

#### **4.4. Cognitive Closure and Framing Rigidity**

A further epistemic concern involves the tendency of medical metaphors to generate rigid interpretive frameworks. Every metaphor establishes a frame through which information is selected, organized, and interpreted. Once a frame becomes dominant, alternative modes of understanding may become more difficult to access.

Medical metaphors are especially powerful framing devices because they activate highly coherent narrative structures. Illness implies diagnosis; diagnosis implies treatment; treatment implies recovery. These relationships form a tightly integrated cognitive network that guides interpretation in predictable ways.

The epistemic difficulty emerges when the metaphorical frame becomes sufficiently dominant that competing explanations are neglected or dismissed. Alternative conceptualizations may receive less consideration not because they are weaker explanations but because the medical frame has already structured perception and reasoning.

Framing rigidity reduces interpretive flexibility. Instead of encouraging multiple explanatory possibilities, it channels reasoning along a predetermined path. Political phenomena become understandable primarily through categories already supplied by the metaphor. Consequently, the range of conceptual alternatives available to inquiry may narrow.

An epistemically healthy environment requires openness to competing interpretations, conceptual revision, and alternative explanatory frameworks. To the extent that medical metaphors encourage the premature stabilization of a single interpretive model, they risk producing a form of cognitive closure that limits inquiry rather than expanding it.

#### **4.5. Emotional Contagion and Affective Shortcuts in Reasoning**

Medical metaphors are not merely conceptual structures; they are also affectively charged cognitive instruments. Terms such as cancer, infection, contamination, disease, and surgery carry strong emotional associations derived from personal experience, cultural narratives, and collective memory.

These emotional associations influence cognition. Contemporary research in cognitive psychology demonstrates that emotional responses frequently shape judgment, attention, and inference (Kahneman, 2011). Consequently, the use of emotionally charged metaphors can affect how information is processed and evaluated.

The concern here is epistemic rather than moral. The issue is not whether particular emotions are ethically justified but whether emotional activation alters the quality of reasoning itself. When a metaphor triggers strong affective responses, attention may become concentrated on emotionally salient features while alternative considerations receive less scrutiny.

Medical metaphors often facilitate rapid intuitive judgments by activating familiar emotional schemas. Such judgments can be cognitively efficient, but efficiency is not equivalent to accuracy. Emotional salience

may increase confidence in a particular interpretation without increasing its evidential support.

This phenomenon is especially significant because metaphors often operate below the level of explicit argumentation. Rather than presenting reasons, they activate associations. Consequently, emotional responses may influence conclusions before those conclusions have been subjected to critical examination.

From an epistemic perspective, the problem is not emotion itself. Emotions can contribute to understanding in important ways. The concern is the substitution of affective immediacy for reflective evaluation. When metaphorically induced emotions become shortcuts for reasoning, understanding may become less responsive to evidence and more dependent upon intuitive reactions.

#### **4.6. The Illegitimate Transfer of Scientific Authority**

Perhaps the most subtle epistemic danger associated with medical-political metaphors is their capacity to transfer the prestige and authority of scientific knowledge into domains that differ fundamentally from scientific inquiry.

Medicine occupies a unique position in modern societies. It is associated with expertise, empirical evidence, technical competence, and practical effectiveness. Medical judgments often command high levels of public trust because they are grounded in specialized knowledge and systematic investigation.

When political issues are framed through medical language, some of this epistemic authority may be implicitly transferred to the political domain. Political interpretations begin to appear as though they possess the same degree of objectivity, certainty, and technical necessity that characterizes medical diagnosis.

Yet political questions differ fundamentally from medical questions. They involve competing values, conflicting priorities, normative judgments, and alternative visions of collective life. Such matters rarely admit the kind of empirical resolution associated with clinical medicine.

The epistemic problem therefore lies in the possibility of confusing metaphorical resemblance with evidential warrant. Because a political situation is described through medical terminology, it may appear more

scientifically grounded than it actually is. The metaphor creates an impression of expertise without necessarily providing additional evidence.

Musolff (2016) observes that political metaphors often function as cognitive shortcuts that naturalize particular interpretations. Medical metaphors are particularly effective in this respect because they draw upon one of the most authoritative knowledge systems available in contemporary culture. The resulting transfer of credibility may encourage acceptance of interpretations that have not undergone the same level of evidential scrutiny that scientific claims ordinarily require.

The analysis presented in this chapter has shifted the discussion from conceptual reconstruction to epistemic evaluation. While medical-political metaphors provide powerful cognitive tools for understanding abstract political realities, they also introduce a series of epistemic risks. By simplifying complex phenomena, generating category mistakes, obscuring agency and causality, narrowing interpretive possibilities, activating affective shortcuts, and transferring scientific authority into non-scientific domains, these metaphors can distort political understanding in subtle but significant ways.

Importantly, these concerns are epistemic rather than ethical. The argument advanced here is not that medical-political metaphors are morally objectionable or politically harmful, but rather that they may impair the quality of understanding and reasoning through which political realities are interpreted. Having examined these epistemic limitations, the discussion can now proceed to a distinct but related level of analysis. The next chapter investigates the ethical implications of medical-political metaphors and evaluates their consequences for moral recognition, respect, and normative responsibility in political discourse.

## **5. Ethical Violations of Medical-Political Metaphors**

Whereas the previous section examined the epistemic shortcomings of medical-political metaphors, the present section turns to their normative and ethical implications. The concern here is not whether such metaphors accurately represent political reality, but whether they respect the moral status of persons, preserve conditions of mutual recognition, and remain compatible with the ethical requirements of democratic coexistence. From

the perspective of discourse ethics, political morality, and theories of recognition, medicalized political language raises serious concerns because it tends to transform political opponents into objects of treatment rather than subjects of moral consideration.

Medical-political metaphors are ethically significant because they do not merely describe political actors differently; they reposition them within a moral economy of worth, vulnerability, and legitimacy. When political opposition is framed through categories such as “infection,” “tumor,” or “disease,” the ethical grammar of political engagement is altered: disagreement ceases to be a form of rational contestation and becomes a symptom of pathological deviation. This shift has profound implications for moral perception, recognition, and responsibility.

### **5-1. Moral Devaluation and Dehumanization**

Medical-political metaphors frequently produce a form of moral devaluation in which political opponents are no longer recognized as full moral persons. Instead, they are conceptualized as pathological entities within a larger “body politic.” When dissenters are described as “viruses,” “cancerous cells,” or “diseased organs,” they are implicitly stripped of those properties that ground moral respect—autonomy, dignity, and rational agency.

From a Kantian perspective, this transformation is ethically significant because it undermines the requirement to treat persons as ends in themselves. Once individuals are redescribed as pathological objects, the moral obligation to engage with them as autonomous agents is weakened or suspended. In such cases, ethical regard is replaced by a logic of containment and elimination.

Similarly, Iris Marion Young’s account of cultural imperialism helps illuminate how such metaphors establish hierarchies of moral worth by defining certain forms of political existence as deviant rather than legitimate. Miranda Fricker’s notion of recognition-related harms further clarifies how this process can occur prior to any explicit interaction: credibility and moral standing are pre-emptively undermined by the very terms of description.

### **5-2. Instrumentalization of Human Beings**

A second ethical concern arises from the instrumentalization of individuals through the metaphor of the political body. In this framework,

society is construed as a biological organism whose health must be preserved, and individuals are implicitly assigned functional roles within that organism.

Political opponents, in particular, are reconfigured as defective components whose value is determined solely in relation to systemic stability. The ethical risk here lies in the reduction of persons to functional means: they are no longer treated as independent centers of moral value but as elements whose justification depends on their contribution to collective "health."

This logic stands in tension with Kantian ethics, which insists that persons must always be treated as ends in themselves. It also raises concerns within discourse ethics, where Habermas emphasizes that legitimate political order depends on communicative relations among equal participants rather than hierarchical relations of management and treatment.

The metaphor of "political surgery," for instance, implicitly legitimizes harm to individuals by framing it as necessary for the survival of the whole. Yet from an ethical standpoint, the mere appeal to collective well-being cannot by itself justify the suspension of individual moral status.

### **5-3. Epistemic Injustice as an Ethical Harm**

Although epistemic exclusion was analyzed in the previous section from a cognitive standpoint, it also has a distinct ethical dimension. When medical-political metaphors are employed, dissenting voices are often pre-emptively categorized as symptoms rather than interlocutors. This categorization undermines the moral conditions of communicative equality.

In Miranda Fricker's terms, such processes constitute a form of testimonial injustice insofar as speakers are denied the status of credible moral agents before their claims are even considered. The ethical harm lies not only in misrepresentation but in the structural denial of participation in moral dialogue.

What is ethically significant here is that the exclusion occurs at the level of moral recognition. Individuals are not simply disagreed with; they are repositioned outside the space of meaningful moral address. This transformation undermines the possibility of reciprocal ethical engagement, which is a necessary condition for any form of democratic morality.

#### **5-4. Manipulation of Moral Emotions**

Medical-political metaphors also raise ethical concerns insofar as they strategically mobilize moral emotions in ways that bypass reflective judgment. Emotions such as fear, disgust, and anxiety are not ethically problematic in themselves; rather, the concern arises when they are deliberately structured to predetermine moral conclusions.

For example, framing political dissent as “infection” or “contagion” activates deeply rooted affective responses associated with bodily threat and impurity. These responses can then be redirected toward political targets, thereby short-circuiting deliberative moral evaluation.

From the perspective of moral psychology (Haidt), such processes illustrate how intuitive emotional responses can precede and shape moral reasoning. The ethical issue is not emotionality itself, but the instrumentalization of emotion in ways that restrict the autonomy of moral judgment. When affective reactions are engineered through metaphorical framing, the conditions for free and reflective moral assessment are weakened.

#### **5-5. Erosion of Mutual Recognition**

A further ethical consequence of medical-political metaphors is the erosion of mutual recognition. Ethical and political life presupposes that individuals recognize one another as legitimate participants in a shared normative space. This recognition is not merely cognitive but moral: it involves acknowledging the other as a subject capable of reason, justification, and participation in collective life.

Within a Hegelian and post-Hegelian framework (Taylor, Habermas), recognition is a constitutive condition of ethical community. Medicalized metaphors disrupt this condition by reclassifying the other not as a participant but as a pathological object.

Once political opponents are conceptualized as diseased entities, the relational symmetry required for recognition collapses. The other is no longer addressed as a “you” within a shared normative world but as an “it” to be managed. This shift has profound ethical implications, as it undermines the reciprocity at the heart of moral relations.

#### **5-6. Moral Legitimation of Harmful Actions**

Medical-political metaphors also play a role in the moral legitimation of

actions that would otherwise require substantial justification. When political exclusion, coercion, or elimination is framed in therapeutic terms, the moral grammar of such actions is fundamentally altered.

In this framework, harmful interventions are redescribed as necessary treatments. Political opposition becomes a symptom; its removal becomes a form of care. This transformation allows actions that involve harm to be perceived not as violations but as moral obligations.

The ethical danger lies in the normalization of harm through metaphorical reframing. Actions that would ordinarily demand justification within a framework of rights, dignity, and consent are instead presented as self-evidently necessary responses to a pathological condition. This bypasses the need for moral deliberation and weakens the normative constraints on political action.

## **6. Macro-Level Consequences for Political Culture and Democratic Institutions**

The previous chapter focused on the ethical status of medical-political metaphors. This chapter turns to their broader societal and institutional consequences. At this level of analysis, the concern is no longer the moral standing of individuals or the epistemic structure of reasoning, but the ways in which metaphorical framings, when stabilized in public discourse, gradually shape political identity formation, institutional performance, and the long-term configuration of democratic life. In other words, this section abstracts from individual-level moral relations and focuses on structural transformations in institutional communication and political organization.

Medical-political metaphors, once normalized in public discourse, do not remain confined to rhetorical expression. Over time, they sediment into the background assumptions of political culture, shaping how political actors are perceived, how institutions function, and how democratic participation is imagined. The following sections examine these macro-level transformations.

### **6-1. Polarization of Political Identity**

One of the most significant macro-level effects of medical-political metaphors is their role in structuring political identity in increasingly

polarized terms. When political disagreement is framed through the language of pathology—such as infection, contamination, or disease—political identity tends to be reorganized along binary lines of belonging and exclusion.

In such a framework, political actors are not primarily understood as holders of competing views within a shared civic space, but as representatives of fundamentally opposed identity categories. The result is a shift from issue-based disagreement to identity-based antagonism. Political differences become markers of group membership, reinforcing rigid boundaries between “us” and “them.”

Over time, this contributes to the stabilization of antagonistic identity structures in which compromise becomes more difficult to conceptualize, not because of ethical disagreement, but because of the way political identities are cognitively and symbolically configured.

## **6-2. Erosion of Civic Trust**

A further macro-level consequence is the gradual erosion of civic trust. Civic trust refers to the background expectation that other participants in the political system, including institutions and fellow citizens, operate within a shared framework of legitimacy and mutual intelligibility.

When political discourse is persistently organized through medicalized metaphors, this shared framework becomes destabilized. Opponents are no longer interpreted as legitimate participants in a common political project, but as non-aligned or oppositional elements within it. This shift increases reduced trust in communication channels.

As a result, social trust—both horizontal (between citizens) and vertical (between citizens and institutions)—becomes increasingly fragile. Political interpretation becomes more defensive and less cooperative, and public discourse tends to operate under conditions of reduced trust in communication channels rather than baseline trust.

## **6-3. Weakening of Deliberative Institutions**

Medical-political metaphors also have important implications for the functioning of deliberative institutions, including parliaments, political parties, media systems, and civil society organizations.

Deliberative institutions depend on the assumption that disagreement is not only permissible but structurally constitutive of political life.

However, when disagreement is metaphorically reframed as pathology, the institutional value of deliberation is weakened. Political opposition may come to be perceived as something to be managed, contained, or corrected rather than engaged (Foucault, 1977, pp. 170–177).

This shift can gradually alter institutional norms. Parliamentary debate becomes less oriented toward genuine contestation and more toward symbolic affirmation; media discourse becomes increasingly polarized; and party competition may shift away from policy-based negotiation toward identity-based confrontation.

In this way, the metaphorical framing of political conflict has the potential to reshape the internal logic of deliberative institutions, reducing their capacity to function as spaces of structured disagreement.

#### **6-4. Normalization of Exceptional Governance**

Another significant macro-level effect is the normalization of exceptional forms of governance. When political or economic crises are framed through medical metaphors – such as emergency surgery, containment, or urgent treatment – they often generate a temporal logic of urgency and exception.

Within such a framework, extraordinary measures appear not as deviations from normal governance but as necessary responses to systemic pathology. In Foucauldian terms, such developments illustrate how discourses of security and protection can transform exceptional interventions into routine techniques of governance, thereby extending the reach of political power through appeals to collective well-being (Foucault, 2007, pp. 44–49). This can contribute to the gradual normalization of governance practices that concentrate decision-making power and reduce institutional constraints.

Over time, the repeated association of political problems with emergency conditions can shift expectations about governance itself, making exceptional interventions appear routine rather than extraordinary. This has structural implications for the balance of institutional authority, even in the absence of explicit institutional change.

#### **6-5. Long-Term Effects on Political Culture**

Beyond immediate institutional effects, medical-political metaphors can contribute to long-term transformations in political culture. Political

culture refers to the shared norms, expectations, and interpretive habits through which citizens understand political life.

One potential effect is the normalization of self-censorship, as individuals anticipate that certain forms of speech will be interpreted through pathological categories. Another is increased conformity, as deviation from dominant interpretive frames becomes cognitively and socially costly.

Over time, these dynamics may contribute to political apathy, particularly when citizens perceive political engagement as structurally constrained or symbolically predetermined. If political disagreement is consistently framed in pathological terms, individuals may withdraw from participation rather than engage in what appears to be an already foreclosed discursive space.

The cumulative effect is a gradual transformation of political culture, in which the interpretive openness required for vibrant democratic life is reduced, and political imagination becomes increasingly constrained by dominant metaphorical frameworks.

## **7. Conclusion**

The findings of this study suggest that medical-political metaphors warrant far closer philosophical scrutiny than they have typically received in discussions of political language. Far from functioning as merely rhetorical devices that ornament political discourse, such metaphors operate as cognitive and normative mechanisms that restructure the very conditions under which political understanding, evaluation, and judgment become possible. From the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, they project relatively stabilized medical schemas—such as diagnosis, pathology, treatment, and surgery—onto the domain of politics, thereby generating a cognitive architecture in which political action is interpreted less as a field of rational and value-laden contestation than as a set of pathological conditions requiring therapeutic intervention.

The analysis developed in this article demonstrates that this conceptual transposition produces three interrelated levels of consequence. At the epistemic level, medical-political metaphors contribute to the simplification of complex political realities, induce category mistakes, obscure agency and structural causality, and facilitate an illegitimate

transfer of scientific authority into domains where such authority is methodologically unwarranted. At the ethical level, these metaphors reshape the moral grammar of political engagement by reconstituting political opponents as pathological entities—"patients," "tumors," or "infected bodies"—thereby undermining conditions of mutual recognition, enabling forms of epistemic and moral devaluation, and legitimizing exclusionary or coercive responses under the guise of therapeutic necessity. At the macro-institutional level, the gradual sedimentation of such metaphorical frameworks within political culture contributes to the polarization of political identities, the erosion of civic trust, the weakening of deliberative institutions, and the normalization of exceptional modes of governance.

A central claim advanced in this study is that the normative force of these metaphors does not reside in their propositional truth-value, but rather in their capacity to pre-structure the field of political intelligibility. In this sense, medical-political metaphors do not merely describe political reality; they delimit the horizon within which political reality can be meaningfully perceived and interpreted. Their philosophical significance therefore lies not at the level of explicit argumentation, but at the level of what might be called the conditions of possibility of political reason itself.

Consequently, the critical task is not the elimination of metaphor from political language—a project that would be neither feasible nor desirable—but rather the cultivation of reflective and normatively sensitive practices of metaphor selection. Such practices should distinguish between metaphors that expand the space of political understanding, pluralism, and mutual recognition, and those that, by naturalizing exclusion, pathologizing dissent, or legitimizing coercion, systematically constrict the horizons of democratic life. From this standpoint, the struggle over political metaphors is ultimately a struggle over the conditions under which political reality itself becomes thinkable, intelligible, and governable. Political metaphors are therefore not peripheral rhetorical devices but constitutive elements of political reason itself, shaping the horizons within which collective judgment, democratic contestation, and political action become possible.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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## Original Research Paper

# Reinterpreting spirituality in Iranian architecture through Mulla Sadra's transcendent philosophy and the fourfold model of cognition

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## Abstract

Iranian architecture has historically evolved in close association with spirituality, a relationship reflected in its spatial organization and philosophical foundations. Drawing upon Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Philosophy and the Fourfold Model of Cognition, this study investigates the spiritual dimensions of Iranian architecture. Employing a qualitative logical-interpretive approach, the research draws on Islamic-Iranian philosophical sources and selected examples of traditional Iranian architecture. Its theoretical framework is grounded in Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Philosophy (al-Hikma al-Muta'aliyah), based on the principles of the Primacy of Existence, the Gradation of Existence, and Substantial Motion. From this perspective, architecture is understood not merely as a physical artifact but as an existential phenomenon capable of expressing philosophical principles. The Fourfold Model of Cognition, rooted in Iranian philosophical thought and the distinction between the apparent (zāhir) and hidden (bāṭin), provides an analytical framework for examining the relationship between architecture and wisdom. Comprising four interconnected levels—concepts (meanings), foundations (principles), patterns (design frameworks and methods), and exemplars (cases and applications)—the model traces the movement between meaning and matter and between the hidden and the apparent. Based on theoretical analysis and observations of the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, the findings indicate that Iranian architecture, through Transcendent Philosophy, transcends aesthetic and functional dimensions to create a mystical and ontological experience of space. The study concludes that Mulla Sadra's philosophical foundations can support the revitalization of spirituality in contemporary architecture, while the Fourfold Model of Cognition provides a methodological framework for interpreting and designing architectural spaces from a spiritual perspective.

**Keywords:** Spatial authenticity, primacy of existence, substantial motion, gradation of existence, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque

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## مقاله پژوهشی

# معنویت و معماری ایرانی از منظر حکمت متعالیه با اتکاء به روش چهارگانه شناخت

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## چکیده:

معماری ایرانی در طول تاریخ همواره در پیوندی عمیق با معنویت شکل گرفته است؛ پیوندی که نه تنها در سازمان‌دهی فضایی و کالبدی آن، بلکه در مبانی فلسفی و نظری آن نیز بازتاب یافته است. این پژوهش با بهره‌گیری از حکمت متعالیه ملاصدرا و الگوی چهارگانه شناخت، به بررسی ابعاد معنوی معماری ایرانی می‌پردازد. پژوهش حاضر با رویکردی کیفی و روش تحلیل منطقی-تفسیری، بر پایه منابع فلسفی ایرانی-اسلامی و نمونه‌هایی منتخب از معماری سنتی ایران انجام شده است. چارچوب نظری پژوهش بر حکمت متعالیه ملاصدرا (الحکمة المتعالیة) استوار است که بر اصول اصالت وجود، تشکیک وجود و حرکت جوهری بنا شده است. بر اساس این دیدگاه، معماری صرفاً یک پدیده کالبدی و ساخته‌شده انسانی نیست، بلکه حقیقتی وجودی است که می‌تواند بازتاب‌دهنده این اصول فلسفی باشد. الگوی چهارگانه شناخت، که ریشه در اندیشه فلسفی ایرانی و تمایز میان ظاهر و باطن دارد، چارچوبی تحلیلی برای فهم رابطه میان معماری و حکمت فراهم می‌آورد. این الگو شامل چهار سطح مرتبط با یکدیگر است: مفاهیم (معانی)، مبانی (اصول)، الگوها (چارچوب‌ها و روش‌های طراحی) و مصادیق (نمونه‌ها و کاربردها) که از طریق آن، حرکت متقابل میان معنا و ماده، و میان باطن و ظاهر، مورد بررسی قرار می‌گیرد. یافته‌های پژوهش بر اساس تحلیل نظری و بررسی مسجد شیخ لطف‌الله نشان می‌دهد که معماری ایرانی با تکیه بر اصول حکمت متعالیه، فراتر از ملاحظات زیبایی‌شناختی و کارکردی، امکان تجربه‌ای عرفانی و وجودشناختی از فضا را فراهم می‌کند. این رویکرد، برداشتی فراتر از فرم و عملکرد ارائه داده و معماری را با ابعاد معنوی و شهودی تجربه انسانی پیوند می‌دهد. نتایج پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که مبانی فلسفی حکمت متعالیه ملاصدرا می‌تواند چارچوبی نظری برای بازآفرینی ابعاد متعالی معماری معاصر فراهم آورد و الگوی چهارگانه شناخت نیز روشی ارزشمند برای تفسیر و طراحی فضاهای معماری با رویکردی معنوی ارائه می‌کند.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** اصالت فضا، اصالت وجود، حرکت جوهری، تشکیک وجود، مسجد شیخ لطف‌الله

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## Original-Forschungsarbeit

# Neubetrachtung der Spiritualität in der iranischen Architektur durch Mullā Šadrās transzendente Philosophie und das vierstufige Erkenntnismodell

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### Zusammenfassung:

Die iranische Architektur hat sich im Laufe der Geschichte in enger Verbindung mit Spiritualität entwickelt. Diese Verbindung zeigt sich nicht nur in ihren räumlichen Strukturen, sondern auch in ihren philosophischen Grundlagen. Ziel dieser Studie ist es, die spirituellen Dimensionen der iranischen Architektur auf der Grundlage der Transzendentalen Philosophie Mullā Šadrās und des Vierstufigen Erkenntnismodells zu untersuchen. Die Untersuchung folgt einem qualitativen, logisch-interpretativen Forschungsansatz und stützt sich auf Quellen der iranisch-islamischen Weisheitstradition sowie auf die Analyse ausgewählter Beispiele traditioneller iranischer Architektur, insbesondere der Scheich-Lotfollāh-Moschee. Die theoretische Grundlage bildet die Transzendente Philosophie (al-Hikma al-Muta'aliyya), die auf den Prinzipien der Ursprünglichkeit des Seins (Aṣālat al-Wuğūd), der Abstufung des Seins (Taškik al-Wuğūd) und der substanziellen Bewegung (al-Haraka al-Ġawhariyya) beruht. Aus dieser Perspektive wird Architektur nicht lediglich als materielles Objekt verstanden, sondern als ein existenzielles Phänomen, das geistige und philosophische Bedeutungen verkörpert. Das Vierstufige Erkenntnismodell mit seinen Ebenen Begriffe, Grundlagen, Muster und Manifestationen ermöglicht die Analyse der Bewegung von innerer Bedeutung zu äußerer Form und umgekehrt. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die iranische Architektur über funktionale und ästhetische Aspekte hinaus eine mystische und ontologische Erfahrung des Raumes ermöglicht. Die Prinzipien der Transzendentalen Philosophie Mullā Šadrās sowie das Vierstufige Erkenntnismodell bieten daher einen geeigneten theoretischen und methodischen Rahmen zur Interpretation und Wiederbelebung spiritueller Dimensionen in der zeitgenössischen Architektur.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Räumliche Authentizität, Primat der Existenz, substanzielle Bewegung, Gradation der Existenz, Scheich-Lotfollah-Moschee

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## **1. Introduction**

Iranian architecture, as one of the richest and most profound manifestations of artistic and cultural expression, has always maintained a close relationship with the beliefs, values, and intellectual traditions of Iranian society. Throughout history, this relationship has been shaped by religious, mystical, and philosophical traditions, shaping a holistic conception of spirituality in architecture. Iranian architecture not only provides a setting for everyday life and human activities but also creates a spatial context for contemplation, worship, and fostering a connection between humanity and the Divine. The presence of symbolic motifs, sacred geometry, numerical patterns, and ritual spaces in Iranian architectural works reflects an approach that extends far beyond mere functionalism—one that seeks to establish a meaningful relationship between the body, the soul, and the spirit, guiding human beings from the material realm toward the realm of meaning. In contemporary architecture, however, this spiritual dimension has been largely neglected, and architectural production has become increasingly dominated by economic considerations and functional requirements.

Throughout history, spiritual concepts have been manifested in Iranian architecture in ways that are evident not only in religious buildings such as mosques, Sufi lodges, and mausoleums but also in non-religious structures, including Persian gardens, palaces, and traditional houses. Through the deliberate use of symbolic elements such as light, water, color, geometry, and calligraphy, Iranian architecture has sought to create spaces capable of providing not only visual beauty but also inner tranquility and spiritual elevation. Consequently, many scholars regard Iranian architecture as a symbolic language that conveys profound meanings rooted in the intellectual tradition of Iranian-Islamic wisdom. Among the philosophical systems capable of explaining this relationship, the Transcendent Wisdom (*al-Hikmah al-Muta'āliyah*) of Mulla Sadra occupies a particularly significant position. This philosophical system is founded upon principles such as the Primacy of Existence, the Gradation of Existence, and Substantial Motion. It conceives the universe as a continuous process of perfection and existential ascent (*Šadr al-Muta'allihin Širāzī*, 2002). From this perspective, architecture transcends its physical form to become a manifestation of a particular degree of existence and a medium through which the human journey toward spiritual perfection may unfold. Accordingly, a deeper understanding of

these philosophical foundations and their architectural manifestations can provide valuable insights for contemporary architects and artists.

This study adopts a qualitative research approach grounded in logical reasoning to address the following fundamental question: How can spiritual concepts be preserved and reinforced in contemporary Iranian architecture? The findings are expected to provide architects, designers, and researchers in the fields of art and architecture with a conceptual framework for integrating art, knowledge, and spirituality in the creation of contemporary architectural spaces.

## **2. Literature Review**

The literature relevant to this study can be organized into three thematic categories: (1) meaning and spirituality, (2) Transcendent Wisdom, and (3) the relationship between Transcendent Wisdom and art and architecture.

**Meaning and Spirituality:** Nasr (2010), in *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, explains the sacred nature of Islamic art and architecture and interprets Islamic architecture as a manifestation of Divine Unity grounded in philosophical and mystical principles. Sahaf (2016) similarly examines the fundamental concepts of Iranian wisdom and their relationship with Iranian architecture. Maleki (2017) examines the concept of meaning, its significance in traditional and contemporary architecture, and meaning-centered architectural approaches. Norberg-Schulz (2008), in *Meaning in Western Architecture*, traces the evolution of meaning across different periods of Western architectural history.

**Transcendent Wisdom:** Shajari (2015) discusses the concepts of human nature, the soul, and human perfection. Yazdanpanah and Dargahi-Far (2020), in *Characteristics of Transcendent Wisdom*, examine the philosophical, mystical, and ontological foundations of this intellectual tradition. Pouyan (2020) explores the concept of existence from the perspectives of both Transcendent Wisdom and Islamic mysticism, whereas Adelzadeh (2023) investigates the soul and intellectual cognition, and presents a comparative analysis of Peripatetic philosophy and Transcendent Wisdom. Likewise, Souzanchi (2010) explains the principles of the Unity of Existence and the Gradation of Existence, while Nasr, through his studies of Mulla Sadra and Transcendent Wisdom, highlights

the integration of reason, revelation, and intuitive knowledge as the defining characteristics of this philosophical tradition.

**Transcendent Wisdom, Art, and Architecture:** Rastaei and Hekmat Mehr (2023), in *Theoretical Foundations of Islamic Art*, explain the ontological, epistemological, anthropological, theological, axiological, and aesthetic foundations of Islamic art from the perspective of Transcendent Wisdom. Similarly, Sahaf (2012), in his doctoral dissertation, examines the relationship between the body, soul, and spirit in explaining the spirituality of the Iranian house based on the philosophical principles of Transcendent Wisdom. A summary of the related studies, together with their methodologies and principal findings, is presented in Table 1.

*Table 1. Literature review related to the topic of Transcendent wisdom and its manifestations in art and architecture.*

| Authors/<br>Year                                                   | Research<br>Method                                                                     | Research Title                                                                                                                               | Results and Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Motevali<br>Haghighii,<br>Sahaf,<br>Kamalizadeh (2023a)<br>(2024b) | Descriptive -<br>Analytical,<br>case<br>studies<br>with an<br>interpretive<br>approach | The steps of space perception in the Allahverdi Khan portico, with looking at the concept of the Mulla Sadra's theory of substantial motion. | Islamic art, through its trans-material perspective, expresses divine unity. Likewise, Iranian architecture, as the symbolic manifestation of an eternal order, presents the material world as a transient realm through which human beings journey toward a higher state of existence and inner tranquility. Within this worldview, movement and perception are inseparably intertwined, each depending upon the other for its realization.                                                                    |
|                                                                    | Theoretical foundation,<br>logical<br>reasoning                                        | Excellence in Iranian architecture by relying on the Transcendent Wisdom (Al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah)                                          | The separation of contemporary architecture from the philosophical foundations of Iranian wisdom has contributed to a crisis of identity. Based on the principles of the Primacy of Existence, the Gradation of Existence, and Substantial Motion, architecture possesses both essential and existential dimensions, with primacy accorded to its existential aspect. Accordingly, the application of these philosophical principles can provide a foundation for the development of contemporary architecture. |
| Labkhandagh (2024)                                                 | Deductive reasoning<br>Method                                                          | Mosque and Meaning: Examining the Place of "Sacred Spatial Order" in Utopia, from the Origin of Sadraean Cultural Theory                     | Grounded in Transcendent Wisdom, Sadraian cultural theory explains the reciprocal relationship between systems of meaning and spatial order. Within this framework, the mosque serves as the focal point of the monotheistic order of meaning and plays a fundamental role in shaping the Islamic city and endowing its urban elements with meaning through its centrality and architectural characteristics.                                                                                                   |

| Authors/<br>Year                                                                      | Research<br>Method                                                                           | Research Title                                                                                                                                                                     | Results and Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Jalili-Nia,<br>Jodeyri<br>Abbasi,<br>Shafizadeh<br>, Sattari<br>Sarbangholi<br>(2024) | Mixed -<br>Qualitative<br>, historical-<br>interpretive<br>and<br>descriptive                | Manifestation of<br>Transcendent<br>Wisdom in Iranian-<br>Islamic<br>Architectural<br>Works and<br>Buildings of the<br>Safavid Period (The<br>Place of Sheikh<br>Shahabuddin Ahri) | According to Mullā Ṣadrā, architecture encompasses both essential and existential dimensions, with primacy accorded to its existential dimension. Substantial Motion provides the framework through which architecture progresses from materiality toward meaning. The findings of this study suggest that, by drawing upon the philosophical foundations of Ṣadrian thought, it is possible to formulate principles for the development of contemporary Iranian architecture. |
| Ghasemi,<br>Sahaf,<br>Jalaeian<br>Ghane<br>(2024a)                                    | Qualitative<br>,<br>descriptive<br>-analytical<br>approach<br>with a<br>logical<br>strategy  | In the seeking of the<br>imagination from<br>wisdom perspective<br>and its role in<br>Iranian art and<br>architecture                                                              | Drawing upon the ideas of Islamic philosophers, this study develops four principles – Re-creation of Reality, Unity of Opposites, Reflection of Truth, and Architecture as an Endless Process – derived from the role of the imaginal faculty in Iranian art and architecture, and explains the theoretical foundations and architectural manifestations of each principle.                                                                                                    |
| Nikoofar,<br>Ahari,<br>Nadimi,<br>Salem<br>(2023)                                     | Interpretati<br>on and<br>Conclusion<br>from Mulla<br>Sadra's<br>Opinions                    | From Disposition to<br>Love:<br>Understanding<br>Architect's Work in<br>Sadrian School                                                                                             | As a purposeful creator, the architect, through an understanding of existence and causal relationships, shapes the built environment to create spaces suited to human life. Beyond establishing a new order within nature, this creative process contributes to the perfection of human being and transforms architecture into a manifestation of beauty and virtuous action.                                                                                                  |
| Daneshma<br>nd, Fattahi<br>(2023)                                                     | Descriptive<br>- Analytical                                                                  | Introducing the<br>Transcendent<br>Perceptual Process<br>In order to<br>perceived the<br>Aesthetic Quality of<br>Space                                                             | The aesthetic quality of architectural space is a multidimensional construct that extends beyond sensory perception to encompass cognitive, affective, and intuitive processes. Accordingly, the aesthetic perception of space is shaped through four interrelated levels: sensory perception, affective engagement, semantic understanding, and cognitive integration.                                                                                                        |
| Gheisi<br>(2023)                                                                      | Descriptive<br>-<br>Comparati<br>ve                                                          | Reading the<br>Architectural<br>Decorations of<br>Sultan<br>Shahabuddin's<br>Tomb and<br>Comparing It with<br>Some Principles of<br>Transcendent<br>Wisdom                         | The architecture and ornamentation of the Shrine of Sultan Shahab al-Din may be interpreted as symbolic expressions of key concepts within Transcendent Wisdom, including the Primacy of Existence, the Gradation of Existence, the Unity of Being, and Substantial Motion. Architectural elements such as light, spatial continuity, hierarchical organization, and ornamental motifs are employed to express these philosophical principles.                                 |
| Zamani,<br>Akbari,<br>Motevali<br>(2022)                                              | Analytical<br>and<br>historical<br>description<br>, combined<br>with<br>logical<br>reasoning | A comparative study<br>of the formation of<br>the porch of Allah<br>Wardikhan of the<br>holy shrine of Razavi<br>based on the<br>ontology of Mulla<br>Sadra                        | The Muslim architect seeks to create spaces that foster the experience of presence within the realm of meaning. Architectural principles such as centrality, positive spatial organization, unity within multiplicity, spatial continuity, and hierarchical order are grounded in the philosophical foundations of Transcendent Wisdom.                                                                                                                                        |

| Authors /<br>Year                                    | Research<br>Method                                                       | Research Title                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Results and Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Moein<br>Mehr,<br>Majidi<br>(2022)                   | Descriptive<br>- Analytical                                              | Identifying School<br>Architectural<br>Design Criteria<br>Based on Mulla<br>Sadra's Theory of<br>Substantial Motion<br>as an Effective<br>Factor in the<br>Formation of<br>Human Identity                                                                       | Based on the theory of substantial motion, education is understood as a process of human existential transformation. Accordingly, educational environments should be designed in accordance with the existential dimensions of human beings as well as their temporal and spatial contexts.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Baniasadi<br>Baghmiran<br>, Asgari<br>(2022)         | Qualitative<br>, Content<br>Analysis                                     | Influencing the<br>Works of Art and<br>Architecture in the<br>Islamic-Iranian<br>Civilization by the<br>Sublime Art and<br>Wisdom                                                                                                                               | Within the framework of Islamic religious aesthetics, the Muslim architect and artist participate in a mode of intuitive creativity that reflects divine creation through the harmonious integration of form and meaning. This worldview is manifested in architectural principles such as centrality, light, harmony with nature, geometry, balance, privacy, and a sense of mystery.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Sedighi,<br>Panahi,<br>Foroutan,<br>Dibadj<br>(2021) | Qualitative<br>, analytical,<br>descriptive,<br>and logical<br>reasoning | Effective Factors in<br>Interpretation or<br>Reading the Islamic<br>Architectural Based<br>on Transcendent<br>Wisdom.                                                                                                                                           | The interpretation of architecture from the perspective of Mulla Sadra's philosophy depends upon the architect's cognition and the pre-understandings associated with his or her existential condition. In light of substantial motion and the relativity of time, this cognition is formed through instinctive, innate, and volitional dimensions and is shaped by beliefs, values, and the surrounding cultural context.                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Taghdir<br>(2021),<br>(2019)                         | Logical<br>reasoning                                                     | Rereading of<br>Creation and<br>Perception Process<br>in Architectural<br>Pieces, On the basis<br>of Transcendent<br>Wisdom.<br><br>Structure of<br>Creation and<br>Perception Process<br>in Architectural<br>Pieces, on the basis<br>of Transcendent<br>Wisdom | According to Transcendent Wisdom, human beings, through their creative faculty, serve as manifestations of the divine act of creation. By reinterpreting the process of cosmic creation, the structure of architectural perception and creation can be explained through five interrelated stages: the existential level of the architect and the observer, the external faculties of perception, the internal cognitive faculties, the constituent elements of architecture, and the four fundamental dimensions of human needs – material, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual – which together determine the quality of this creative process. |
| Shajari,<br>Silvayeh<br>(2020)                       | Analytical,<br>interpretiv<br>e<br>description                           | A Visualization the<br>Relation Between<br>the Mosque's Dome<br>and the Levels of<br>Existence in the<br>Transcendent<br>Wisdom                                                                                                                                 | By directing the observer's gaze toward the heavens, the mosque dome symbolizes transcendence and unity. Within the framework of Transcendent Wisdom, the dome represents the manifestation of the sensory, imaginal, and intellectual realms. Its material substance corresponds to the material world, its form reflects the imaginal realm ('ālam al-mithāl), and the ascending geometry from the base to the apex of the dome symbolizes the existential journey from multiplicity to unity.                                                                                                                                                         |

| Authors/<br>Year                                     | Research<br>Method                                                       | Research Title                                                                                                                         | Results and Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Amrolahzadeh, Rahmati (2018)                         | Interpretation and inference from Quranic verses and Transcendent Wisdom | A Review of Ibn 'Arabi's Interpretation of 'Arsh in Light of Transcendental Wisdom and its Application in Religious Architecture       | According to the principle of the gradation of existence in Transcendent Wisdom, the Divine Throne ('Arsh) is manifested differently at each level of existence. Within the material realm (Nāsūt), this reality finds expression in sacred architecture, particularly mosques and temples. Religious artists have sought to represent this metaphysical truth in Islamic architecture by translating intelligible realities into sensible forms.                                                                                                          |
| Sadeghi, Dadgar, Samavati (2018)                     | Descriptive-analytical, content analysis, library studies                | Explaining aesthetic components in Transcendent Wisdom and their manifestation in Iranian bazaars                                      | The aesthetic components of Transcendent Wisdom may be classified into two categories: mental and physical. The mental components pertain to psychological and perceptual dimensions, whereas the physical dimensions are associated with factors such as proportion, geometry, and spatial hierarchy.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Shafi'zade, Koohi Geygloo, Abbaszadeh (2018)         | Mixed, Descriptive, Comparative Analysis                                 | Comparing Mulla Sadra's concept of substantial motion with knot-making principles in Islamic art based on the equivalence of existence | Geometric interlacing, through characteristics such as repetition within perfection, the capacity for transformation by means of secondary patterns, and the preservation of unity within multiplicity, reflects the principle of continuous creation in Šadrian philosophy. Within this perspective, the gnostic artist manifests the perfection of creation through the generation of diverse geometric patterns, expressing the process of existential perfection (lāba' d lāba', successive renewal of being) in Islamic architecture.                 |
| Soleimani Sheijani, Khakpour, Raeissamiei (2014)     | Historical and Descriptive Interpretation                                | A Review on the principles and objectives of contemporary architecture in Iran from Mulla Sadra's point of view                        | According to Mullā Šadrā's conception of existence and essence, architecture possesses both essential and existential dimensions. The essential dimension addresses material and functional requirements, whereas the existential dimension expresses the intrinsic reality of the architectural work.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Shajari, Tabatabaei Lotfi (2016)                     | Descriptive-analytical                                                   | Creativity in Architecture Inspired by Transcendent Wisdom. Contemporary Wisdom                                                        | Within the framework of Transcendent Wisdom (al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah), human creativity is regarded as a manifestation of divine vicegerency (khilāfah) and the creative attributes of God. As such, it unfolds across different degrees corresponding to the gradation of existence and finds expression in art and architecture. From this perspective, architecture represents the conscious transformation of the environment by human beings and can be understood within the descending and ascending ontological order of the realms of existence. |
| Baniasadi Baghmiran i, Hosseini, Shahcheraghi (2024) | Qualitative, Comparative Analytical, Documentary Studies                 | Empty space; The place of manifestation and perception of meaning in Islamic architecture                                              | Void space, as the medium through which meaning becomes manifested, profoundly influences the observer's perception. By transcending materiality, such space creates the conditions for the emergence of meaning and shapes both conscious and subconscious perception. Consequently, it guides the observer through a gradual journey from outward form to inner reality, ultimately leading toward spiritual perfection.                                                                                                                                 |

A substantial body of research has addressed a wide range of topics, including the process of artistic creation and perception, the principles and objectives of Iranian architecture, aesthetic components, creativity, the role of imagination, the concept of empty space, and the principle of Substantial Motion. Collectively, these studies have contributed to a deeper understanding of architecture from the perspective of Transcendent Wisdom. Nevertheless, a review of the existing literature indicates that the concept of spirituality has received relatively limited scholarly attention within the theoretical framework of Transcendent Wisdom. Furthermore, an analysis of recent research methodologies reveals that the application of the Fourfold Recognition Method to the interpretation of artistic and architectural works represents a relatively new approach in this field. Accordingly, the novelty of the present study lies in integrating the philosophical principles of Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Wisdom with the Fourfold Recognition Method to establish a theoretical framework for explaining spirituality in Iranian architecture. Unlike previous studies, which have primarily examined either the philosophical foundations or the physical characteristics of the built environment in isolation, this research seeks to establish a systematic relationship between the ontological and aesthetic principles of Transcendent Wisdom and the spatial experience of architecture. In doing so, it provides a framework for analyzing Iranian architecture from both philosophical and experiential perspectives.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

This study is theoretical in its objective and qualitative-interpretive in nature. It adopts the philosophical framework of Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Wisdom and employs the Fourfold Recognition Method to analyze the concept of spirituality in Iranian architecture. Within this framework, the Fourfold Recognition Method serves as a theoretical model for explaining the relationship between human beings, space, and meaning.

The research began with the extraction and interpretation of the philosophical foundations of Transcendent Wisdom through a descriptive-analytical approach. These philosophical principles were subsequently operationalized as architectural components that could be systematically analyzed and examined through selected examples of Iranian architecture. The research process was carried out in four successive stages:

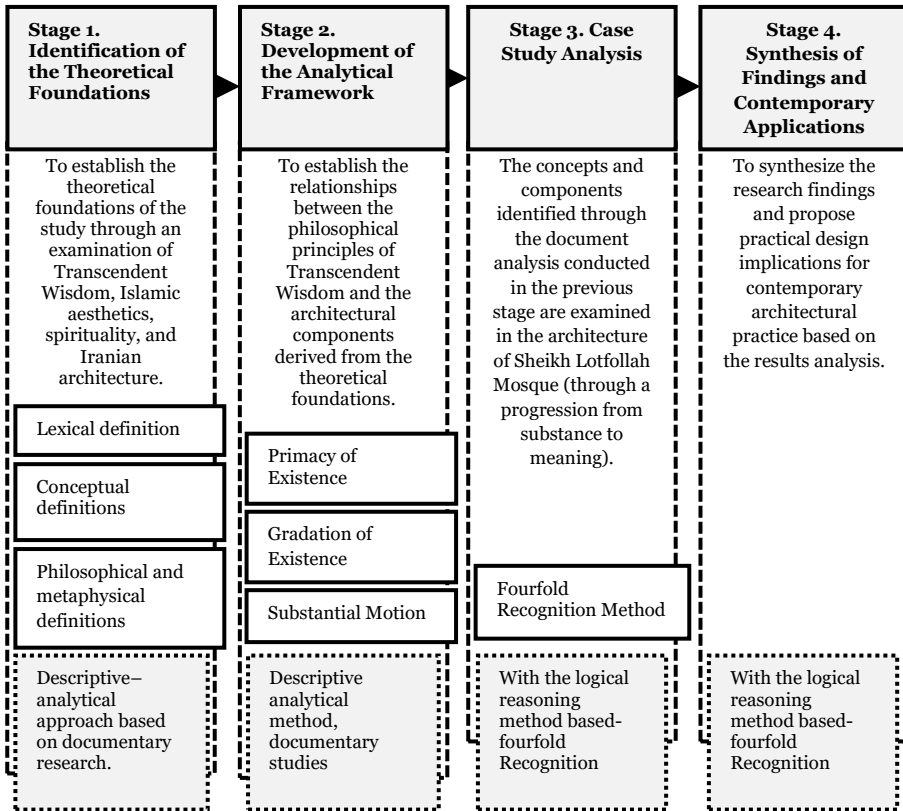


Figure 1. Research Process and the Methods Applied at Each Stage.

**Review and extraction of the theoretical foundations:** In the first stage, scholarly and documentary sources related to Transcendent Wisdom, Islamic aesthetics, spirituality, and Iranian architecture were systematically reviewed. Based on this review, the philosophical principles underpinning the concept of spirituality were identified and extracted.

**Development of the analytical framework:** Building upon the theoretical foundations, the relationships between the philosophical principles of Transcendent Wisdom and architectural components were established. In this framework, concepts such as the Primacy of Existence, the Gradation of Existence, Substantial Motion, and Sadrian aesthetics were operationalized as architectural indicators that could be systematically analyzed, including spatial hierarchy, light, geometry, movement, and perceptual experience.

**Case study analysis based on the Fourfold Recognition Method:** The selected case study, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, was analyzed using logical reasoning and the Fourfold Recognition Method, which examines architectural works at four analytical levels. To further verify the findings, additional examples of Iranian architecture were also examined using the same analytical framework.

**Extraction of findings and interpretation of contemporary applications:** In the final stage, the analytical findings were interpreted in light of the principles of Transcendent Wisdom. Their capacity to explain spirituality in Iranian architecture and their applicability to contemporary architectural design were subsequently evaluated. Figure 1 illustrates the research process and the methodology employed at each stage.

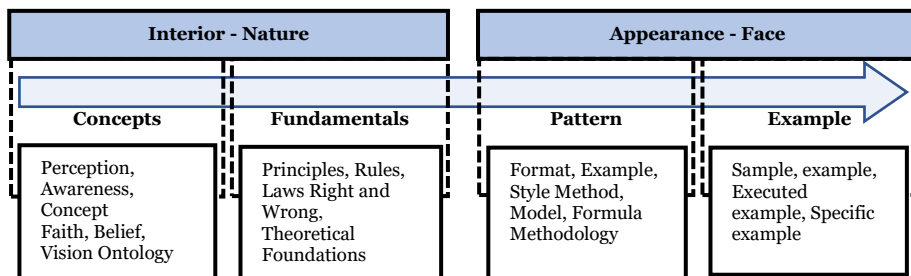


Figure 2. The Fourfold Recognition Method (Jalaeian Ghane, Ghasemi, & Sahaf, 2025, p. 69).

Based on the principle of the outward and inward dimensions (zāhir and bātin), Sahaf (2016, p. 52) developed the Fourfold Recognition Method, which consists of four principal components: Concepts, Foundations, Patterns, and Instances. This framework provides a systematic means of examining the relationship between abstract concepts and their concrete manifestations. According to this method, human understanding of existence and worldview unfolds through four successive stages: (1) understanding concepts, (2) establishing foundational principles, (3) developing patterns, and (4) generating instances—that is, tangible examples or objects produced according to general patterns and adapted to specific contexts. Collectively, these four interconnected stages constitute the Fourfold Recognition Method (Motevali Haghighi, Sahaf, & Kamalizadeh, 2024b) (Figure 2).

## **4. Theoretical Foundations**

The theoretical framework of this study is organized into three sections. The first section examines the definition of meaning and spirituality in philosophy and wisdom traditions. The second explores the beauty and aesthetic theory in Sadrian philosophy, and the third discusses the ontology of beauty and the philosophical foundations of Mulla Sadra.

### **4.1. Definition of Meaning and Spirituality in Philosophy and Wisdom**

A useful starting point for clarifying the concepts of meaning and spirituality is an examination of their lexical definitions. A review of three major Persian dictionaries—Dehkhoda Dictionary (Dehkhoda, 1998), Moein Dictionary (Moein, 2004), and Sokhan Dictionary (Anvari, 2002)—shows that the Persian terms referring to meaning (*ma' nā*) and spirituality (*ma'naviyyat*) belong to the same lexical family and share a common semantic origin. Collectively, these dictionaries define meaning as that to which a word, phrase, or sentence refers, namely its concept, intention, or significance. Likewise, spirituality is defined as that which pertains to meaning, the inner dimension, inward thought, or the non-material aspect of reality.

A review of the writings of contemporary scholars further indicates that the term spirituality has become increasingly prominent in modern intellectual discourse. It appears explicitly in the works of thinkers such as Henry Corbin, Huston Smith, Titus Burckhardt, Daryush Shayegan, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, suggesting that its contemporary usage has become widespread only in recent decades. Nasr (1999, pp. 19–20), in his article *Spirituality and Science: Convergence or Divergence?*, argues that defining spirituality is even more difficult than defining science itself, since the concept has been employed in highly diverse and often ambiguous ways. He explains that the modern European use of the term is relatively recent, having first emerged within Catholic circles during the past one or two centuries. In contemporary discourse, the term is frequently used either as a substitute for religion or, in some cases, in contrast to it. Nasr further observes that the corresponding terms in Eastern languages preserve the original etymological meaning of the Latin *spiritus*, referring directly to the spirit. For example, the Arabic term *rūHāniyyah* derives from *al-rūH* (spirit) and conveys essentially the same meaning without the semantic ambiguity associated with many contemporary Western interpretations.

Given the central role of this concept in the present study, it is necessary to formulate an operational definition of spirituality from a descriptive and interpretive perspective. Based on the foregoing discussion, spirituality may be understood as that which relates to the spirit (rūH) within the traditional tripartite conception of the human being as comprising body, soul, and spirit. Since the spirit is regarded as having a Divine origin, spirituality signifies a relationship with the spiritual realm and, ultimately, with the Creator. Consequently, spirituality encompasses those dimensions of human existence associated with the knowledge of God (ma'rifah), faith in Divine Unity (tawHid), and adherence to Divine guidance. Because spirituality fundamentally involves an inward mode of understanding and an inner experience of meaning, it cannot be fully captured through precise conceptual definition. For this reason, meaning and spirituality remain among the most complex and elusive concepts in contemporary discourse. Within the framework of the present study, spirituality is therefore understood as a mode of monotheistic orientation grounded in both inward cognition and recognition of the Divine (Sahaf, 2012, pp. 94–95; Sahaf, 2016, pp. 54–55).

Since art seeks to express and manifest meaning through form and matter, making the intelligible perceptible, the separation of art from spirituality has no place within either theoretical or practical wisdom. Nevertheless, many works that are conventionally regarded as "works of art" are, as acknowledged by numerous philosophers and artists, primarily concerned with material concerns and embody little, if any, spiritual content – or at least not the form of spirituality understood by religious thinkers and advocates of metaphysical reality. This condition can largely be attributed to the quantitative and materialistic worldview that dominates contemporary society, as well as to the interpretation that both artists and their cultural context assign to the meaning of artistic works. As awareness of the hierarchical dimensions of human existence diminishes, spirituality itself is increasingly reduced to a material and quantitative concept. To clarify this issue, it is useful to consider the different dimensions of human life. These extend continuously from the material and physiological realm through the psychological and psychic dimensions, and ultimately toward the realm of the spirit and its relationship with the unseen world.

A broader examination of the history of Iranian philosophical thought further clarifies this understanding of spirituality. From the pre-Islamic period, beginning with the teachings of Zoroaster in the sixth century BCE and continuing through Mani and Mazdak, to the post-Islamic intellectual

traditions represented by Avicenna (Peripatetic Wisdom), Suhrawardi (Illuminationist Wisdom), Ibn 'Arabi (Mystical Wisdom), and Mulla Sadra (Transcendent Wisdom), as well as later philosophers such as Mulla Hadi Sabzevari and Seyyed Jalal al-Din Ashtiani, Iranian philosophical thought has consistently maintained a profound spiritual orientation (Corbin, 2008, pp. 504–510). This continuity of thought reveals a fundamental characteristic of Iranian wisdom: for more than 2,600 years, spirituality has remained an enduring and living principle founded upon Divine Unity (TawHid). Throughout these intellectual traditions, theological belief has constituted the central axis around which philosophical reflection has evolved. Consequently, spirituality should not be regarded as an isolated philosophical concept but rather as a universal and shared foundation underlying the diverse schools of Iranian wisdom. When discussing spirituality within the Iranian intellectual tradition, one is therefore referring to a deeply rooted and self-evident worldview rather than to a marginal or exceptional philosophical position.

This historical continuity also explains the key distinction between philosophy and wisdom (Hikmah) within the Islamic intellectual tradition. As Nasr explains, philosophy in the Islamic world, like that of other traditional civilizations, has always maintained a close relationship with religion and was therefore understood as wisdom rather than as an autonomous intellectual discipline. It never sought to challenge truths revealed through Divine revelation, whose primary source in Islam is the Holy Qur'an, together with the Prophetic traditions (Nasr, 2008). A similar relationship existed for many centuries in the Christian West, where philosophy remained closely integrated with theology and sought to provide a rational understanding of a world fundamentally shaped by religious reality. It was only after the Renaissance, and particularly from the seventeenth century onward, that philosophy in the West gradually developed into an increasingly independent and predominantly rational discipline.

Accordingly, it may be concluded that philosophy and wisdom were originally closely intertwined. However, with the emergence of the rise of rationalism, philosophical inquiry gradually diverged from wisdom. Within the context of the present study, wisdom (Hikmah) may therefore be understood as Divine Philosophy, while a sage (Hakīm) is one who possesses insight into the inner meanings of reality and the spiritual dimensions of existence. Consequently, the intellectual heritage of Iran is more accurately characterized as a tradition of Iranian-Islamic Wisdom than as one founded solely upon rational philosophy in its modern sense (Sahaf, 2012, pp. 95–96).

4.2. Beauty and Aesthetics in Sadrian Philosophy

Among Islamic philosophers, Mulla Sadra devoted greater attention to aesthetic arguably more than many of his predecessors, to the extent that the seventh volume of *Al-Asfār al-Arba‘ah* may be regarded as an independent treatise on aesthetics. He defines beauty as "*al-jamīl huwa al-ladhī yustaḥsan*" ("the beautiful is that which is perceived as beautiful") and considers it the perfection appropriate to every existent. From his perspective, art and beauty arise through the attainment of higher degrees of existence within the imaginal realm (*‘ālam al-mithāl*) and through the perception of its universal forms. Accordingly, beauty is inseparable from perfection and constitutes a degree of existence itself; every being partakes of beauty in proportion to its share of existence. Mulla Sadra attributes the origin of all beauty to the Divine Reality, maintaining that the beauties of the world are reflections of the Absolute Divine Beauty. Consequently, the perception of beauty is not merely a sensory experience but an existential one that guides human beings toward truth and perfection (Taiebinazari & Monfared, 2023, p. 64; Hashem Nejad, 2006, p. 321; Ghasemi, Sahaf, & Jalaieian Ghane, 2024b, p. 259).

| Aesthetic issues                      | Conclusion                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Belief in the plurality of beauty     | The beings of the universe differ from one another in the degree and intensity of their existence (Mohtasham & Hamzenejad 2017, p. 75).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Belief in the unity of beauty         | All beings share a single reality of existence (Mohtasham & Hamzenejad 2017, p. 75).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Levels of beauty                      | The degree of beauty possessed by each being corresponds to its degree of existence (Mohtasham & Hamzenejad 2017, p. 75).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Ultimate level of beauty              | According to Mulla Sadra, God represents the highest degree of beauty (Mohtasham & Hamzenejad 2017, p. 75).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Belief in the inclusiveness of beauty | Earthly and physical beauties are never purely material or corporeal; rather, they derive their reality from higher levels of existence. Regardless of the level at which beauty appears, it participates in Eternal Beauty and therefore possesses an inherently transcendent character (Taiebinazari & Monfared, 2022, p. 65). Therefore, the Absolute Existence (God) and beauty are identical (Arab-Pour & Raqabadi, 2022, p. 81). |
| Beauty skepticism                     | He maintains that beauty exists in varying degrees of intensity and regards it as a graded reality (Taiebinazari & Monfared, 2022, p. 65).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Originality of beauty                 | Existence and beauty constitute a single reality in the external world and derive their unity from this ontological identity (Arab-Pour & Raqabadi, 2022, p. 81).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| The 11th Principles of Aesthetics     | The terms Al-bahā', Istihsān, Mawzūn, Tanāṣuf, Tanāsub, I'tidāl, Jūdah al-Tarkīb, Naẓm, Laṭīf, Ghunch, Dalāl (Hashemnejad, 2013) represent various concepts associated with aesthetics and beauty.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

Figure 3. Mulla Sadra's Perspective on Aesthetics.

Mulla Sadra further maintains that God is the ultimate source of all beauty, perfection, and order, and that every form of beauty in the universe is a manifestation of His infinite Jamal (Şadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, 1981, p. 35; Şadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, 1975, p. 39). He regards the beauty found in this world as a reflection of the beauty of the higher realms, which assumes forms of imperfection and change when manifested in the material world. From this perspective, beauty corresponds to the perfection of the soul, and its perception naturally evokes delight.

Consistent with this understanding, Schuon argues that art is authentic only insofar as it manifests Divine Truth and guides human beings from the outward forms of things toward their inner reality (Amiri, 2018, p. 28, citing Schuon, 2004, p. 44). Likewise, Michon (2004), drawing upon the Prophetic tradition "*Allah is Beautiful and loves beauty*," maintains that the mission of Islamic art is to embody Divine principles through artistic forms. Beauty in Islamic art is therefore not merely a formal or visual quality but an expression of a spiritual reality.

Mulla Sadra also explains the relationship between love, beauty, and artistic creation by tracing artistic creativity back to Divine creation itself. In his view, the artisan's love for the work they create represents one of the degrees of love, and the artist participates in the manifestation of beauty through the creative act. By comparing the image of the beloved to a work of art, he explains the emergence of love through three successive stages: *takrār al-mushāhadāt* (repeated contemplation), *tawārud al-naẓar* (repeated visual encounter), and *istiḥsān* (aesthetic appreciation) (Emāmī-Jomeh, 2018, p. 123). Accordingly, art is understood as the product of the soul's perfection and its existential growth, while genuine artistic creation ultimately originates from Divine inspiration and the intuitive contemplation of beauty (Taiebinazari & Monfared, 2023, p. 67).

Within the specific framework of Sadrian aesthetics, beauty is regarded as inseparable from the reality of existence itself. The manifestation of Divine Light in the sensible world can therefore be interpreted through a series of concepts developed by Mulla Sadra, particularly in *Al-Asfār al-Arba'ah*. The most significant of these concepts include:

**Al-Bahā<sup>1</sup>:** Beauty, radiance, elegance, and that which gives rise to intimacy and attraction.

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البهاء 1.

**IstiHsān**<sup>2</sup>: The recognition and appreciation of beauty; one of the fundamental concepts of Islamic aesthetics, closely associated with *Husn* (beauty) and *maHāsin* (beautiful qualities) (Hashem Nejad, 2006; Pazouki, 2005, p. 23).

**Mawzūn (Harmony)**<sup>3</sup>: Denoting proportion, rhythm, and balance, particularly in relation to poetry and musical expression.

**Tanāṣuṭ**<sup>4</sup>, **Tanāsub**<sup>5</sup>, and **I'tidāl**<sup>6</sup> (Symmetry, Proportion, and Balance): Principal components of sensible beauty, referring to harmony, proportional relationships, and equilibrium among constituent elements (Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn Shīrāzī, 2002, Vol. 7, pp. 173–180; Hashem Nejad, 2006, p. 145).

**Jawdat al-Tarkīb**<sup>7</sup> and **Naẓm**<sup>8</sup> (Excellence of Composition and Order): Concepts describing the quality of composition and the orderly arrangement of elements, both regarded as essential indicators of perceptible beauty.

**Laṭīf**<sup>9</sup>, **Ghanj**<sup>10</sup>, and **Dalāl**<sup>11</sup>: Aesthetic attributes referring to delicacy, subtle elegance, gracefulness, and refined manifestations of beauty in both human beings and the higher degrees of existence (Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn Shīrāzī, 2002, Vol. 2, p. 77; Ibn Manzūr, 1993, Vol. 2, p. 338).

In addition to these concepts, terms such as *Talālu'* (radiance), *Shafīf* (transparency), and *Badī'* (creative originality) also appear in Mulla Sadra's writings as aesthetic concepts closely associated with aesthetics (Hashem Nejad, 2006). The expression of these aesthetic principles varies according to the nature of each artistic discipline. In the performing arts, qualities such as proportion, symmetry, excellence of composition, gracefulness, and elegance are particularly prominent. In the visual arts,

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2. استحسان

3. موزون

4. تناسف

5. تناسب

6. اعتدال

7. جودت التركيب

8. نظم

9. لطيف

10. غنج

11. دلال

concepts such as Al-Bahā', IstiḤsān, and delicacy and subtle refinement assume greater significance. In the applied arts—including architecture, literature, music, and traditional crafts—principles such as harmony, balance, and order play a central role. Nevertheless, all artistic disciplines draw upon these aesthetic foundations, albeit with different degrees of emphasis.

Accordingly, within Transcendent Wisdom, beauty is fundamentally an ontological concept intrinsically linked to perfection, the gradation of existence, and Divine Reality. Consequently, qualities such as order, proportion, balance, grandeur, and the perception of beauty provide theoretical framework for the analysis of Iranian architectural works.

#### **4.3. Ontology of Beauty and the Philosophical Foundations of Mulla Sadra**

Explaining the ontology of beauty from Mulla Sadra's perspective requires a brief review of the principal foundations of Transcendent Wisdom (al-Hikmah al-Muta'āliyah), which are outlined below.

**Primacy of Existence (Aṣālat al-Wujūd):** The distinction between existence (wujūd) and essence (māhiyyah) constitutes one of the most fundamental issues in Islamic philosophy. When considering any entity, two questions naturally arise: Does it exist? and What is it? According to the doctrine of the Primacy of Existence, objective reality is constituted by existence, whereas essence, although manifested in the external world, possesses no independent reality apart from existence, and its realization is entirely dependent upon it (Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn Shīrāzī, 2002; Hekmat, 2002). From this perspective, existence is the original, objective, and indefinable reality, apprehended through immediate and intuitive knowledge (al-'ilm al-Huḍūrī), whereas essence serves only as the conceptual framework through which beings are understood and has no independent reality apart from existence (Motevali Haghighi, Sahaf, & Kamalizadeh, 2024a).

**Unity and Gradation of Existence (Waḥdat al-Wujūd and Tashkīk al-Wujūd):** According to Mulla Sadra, all beings participate in the same reality of existence; their differences arise not from distinct kinds of existence but from varying degrees of existential intensity and perfection. This doctrine, known as the Gradation of Existence, explains the diversity of beings as the result of different existential ranks rather than differences in the essence of existence itself. To illustrate this idea, Mulla Sadra

compares existence to light, which, despite being one reality, manifests in varying degrees of intensity and luminosity. Consequently, the higher the existential rank of a being, the greater its perfection and capacity for knowledge, whereas lower degrees are characterized by greater limitation and deficiency. At the summit of this hierarchy stands the Necessary Being (Wājib al-Wujūd), the most perfect degree of existence and the ultimate source of all levels of reality (Motevali Haghighi, Sahaf, & Kamalizadeh, 2024a).

Accordingly, unity and multiplicity are not regarded as contradictory concepts within Transcendent Wisdom. Rather, multiplicity represents the manifestation of different degrees of a single, unified reality. The universe is therefore understood as the manifestation of one Truth manifested through varying degrees of perfection and deficiency, perfection and imperfection, thereby giving rise to the diversity of created beings (Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn Shīrāzī, 2002).

**Substantial Motion (Al-Harakah al-Jawhariyyah):** The concepts of motion and change have occupied a central place in philosophy since ancient Greek philosophy (Faramarz Qaramaleki, 2009). Within Transcendent Wisdom, Substantial Motion refers to the gradual actualization of potentiality into actuality. Mulla Sadra maintains that every being is intrinsically directed toward greater perfection and immateriality, and that no level of existence remains static (Moein Mehr & Majidi, 2022, p. 105). Every movement is therefore understood as a transition from deficiency toward perfection (Tabātabā'ī, 1991).

The fundamental distinction between Mulla Sadra's philosophy and that of earlier philosophers lies in his assertion that motion occurs not merely in accidents but within the very substance of beings. Consequently, the human being is understood as a dynamic and continuously evolving reality whose existential transformation and perfection unfold through the process of Substantial Motion (Motevali Haghighi, Sahaf, & Kamalizadeh, 2024a, p. 50).

**Architecture and the Primacy of Existence:** According to Transcendent Wisdom, the proper understanding of any phenomenon requires simultaneous consideration of both its essence and its existence. Architecture likewise possesses both an essential and an existential dimension. The essential dimension addresses functional and material requirements and remains conditioned by time and place, whereas the

existential dimension reflects the architect's existential orientation and serves as a manifestation of the Divine Names within the material world. Consequently, the true nature of architecture cannot be fully understood without acknowledging its existential dimension.

While contemporary architecture has frequently become confined to functional and physical considerations, Sadrian philosophy, through its emphasis on the inseparable relationship between outward form and existential reality, provides a philosophical foundation for reinterpreting the meaning, value, and spiritual significance of architecture (Motevali Haghighi, Sahaf, & Kamalizadeh, 2024a).

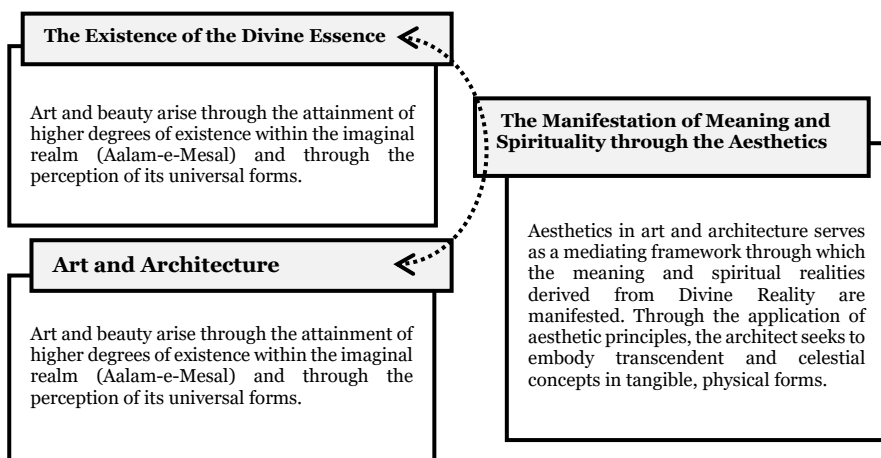
**Architecture and the Principle of the Gradation of Existence:** Human beings manifest their presence in the world through place. Within architectural theory, the doctrine of the Gradation of Existence (*Tashkik al-Wujūd*) constitutes one of the principal philosophical foundations for explaining the relationship between form and meaning, as well as the validity of symbolism in architecture. Based on the philosophical principle of the Unity of the Intellect and the Intelligible (*IttiHād al-‘Āqil wa al-Ma‘qūl*), every architectural work possesses two modes of existence: external existence, referring to its objective realization in the physical world, and essential (or fixed) existence, referring to its prior existence within the architect's knowledge and consciousness. Consequently, an architectural work exists at the level of fixed existence before its material realization (Souzanchi, 2010). Within Transcendent Wisdom, this ontological distinction provides the basis for explaining the principle of unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity, thereby offering a philosophical framework for understanding the relationship between meaning, form, and the existential presence of architectural works.

**Architecture and Substantial Motion:** Since human beings, according to Transcendent Wisdom, are continuously progressing through Substantial Motion toward existential perfection, architecture can likewise serve as a medium for this ontological journey. Iranian architecture, through the conscious use of light, geometry, order, proportion, and spatial silence, creates an environment that encourages contemplation, reflection, and the inner spiritual journey. From this perspective, architectural space is not a neutral physical container but an active medium through which successive levels of perception unfold before the observer moves through it, gradually progressing from the material realm toward spiritual

meaning. Human movement within architectural space may therefore be understood as the architectural manifestation of Substantial Motion, a process in which sensory perception gradually develops into deeper forms of spiritual and intuitive understanding (Baniasadi Baghmirani, Hosseini, & Shahcheraghi, 2024).

## **5. Analysis: Spirituality in Art and Architecture from the Perspective of Transcendent Wisdom and Sadrian Aesthetics**

Based on the philosophical foundations derived from Transcendent Wisdom, the relationship between philosophical concepts and the spatial organization of Iranian architecture can be systematically interpreted. This section analyzes that relationship with particular emphasis on Sadrian aesthetics, using Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque as a case study. Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between spirituality and beauty in art and architecture. Within Sadrian thought, beauty is not merely an artistic attribute but a path toward the realization of Absolute Truth. Art and architecture grounded in wisdom and spirituality are therefore capable of elevating human perception beyond the material realm through beauty itself, providing the conditions for spiritual ascent and intuitive contemplation.



*Figure 4. Relationship between Spirituality and Beauty in Art and Architecture from the Perspective of Transcendent Wisdom*

Within the traditional classification of the arts, the applied arts comprise those artistic disciplines that combine aesthetic value with practical function. Architecture is therefore regarded as an applied art that, in addition to fulfilling material needs, embodies multiple levels of meaning, symbolism, and spiritual journey. Through material form, it serves as a manifestation of transcendent realities (Esmaeili, Jalaieian Ghane, & Sahaf, 2025).

Within the framework of Sadrian philosophy, architectural space may be understood as the manifestation of existence (*wujūd*) itself. Just as, in Transcendent Wisdom, essences represent different modes of manifestation of the one reality of existence, architectural space likewise manifests itself diverse forms and conditions. From this perspective, space in Iranian architecture possesses an ontological rather than merely physical significance. Its various spatial configurations—including enclosed, semi-open, and open spaces—may be regarded as distinct existential manifestations through which different degrees of spatial presence are embodied in architectural form.

These three spatial conditions may further be correlated with the three existential dimensions of the human being in Transcendent Wisdom — body, soul, and spirit—thereby reflecting the tripartite nature of the human constitution within the built fabric of Iranian architecture. Accordingly, architectural space, extending from the enclosed spaces to the open courtyard, unfolds through the Gradation of Existence, manifesting successive levels of being. This progression from materiality toward meaning corresponds directly to the doctrine of Substantial Motion, whereby existence continuously advances from potentiality to actuality and from multiplicity toward unity. From this interpretation, two principal conclusions may be drawn regarding the correspondence between the principles of Transcendent Wisdom and the structure of Iranian architecture:

(1) Primacy is accorded to space rather than merely to form or material, since space constitutes the medium through which human beings experience existence, and this experience is rooted in the existential dimensions of human beings.

(2) The three principal spatial typologies—enclosed, semi-open, and open spaces—correspond to the three existential dimensions of the human being—body, soul, and spirit. Iranian architecture therefore reflects

humanity's spiritual journey through the hierarchy of existence, progressing from the sensory world toward the imaginal realm.

#### **4.4. Progression from Matter to Meaning in Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque**

Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, situated on the eastern side of Naqsh-e Jahan Square, is one of the four principal architectural elements defining the central urban space of Isfahan. In his explanation of the hierarchical progression toward the spatial center, Mahmoud Tavasoli, drawing upon the views of Nader Ardalan (Bakhtiar & Ardalan, 1973) as well as Arthur Upham Pope (Pope, 1991), presents a diagrammatic interpretation of the movement from the public space of the square to the interior sanctuary (shabestan) of the mosque. The successive stages of this spatial journey are outlined below.

"If the spatial sequence is traced from the entrance, and the two transitional pause-spaces – the threshold to the corridor and the threshold to the prayer hall – are added to the five principal spaces, a total of seven spatial stages emerge, each possessing distinct morphological characteristics." (Tavasoli, 1995; Tavasoli, 2015)

**1. Naqsh-e Jahan Square:** The spatial journey begins in the vast rectangular square measuring approximately 165 × 510 m. Although the immense scale of the square does not allow the observer to perceive all of its major visual elements simultaneously, this expansive horizontal space creates a continuous relationship between earth and sky, symbolically uniting the terrestrial and the celestial realms.

**2. The Forecourt of the Mosque:** This transitional space serves as the observer's first preparation for entering an environment of a different scale and character.

**3. The Entrance Iwan:** Situated five steps above the level of the forecourt, the entrance *iwan* forms a narrower transitional space and constitutes the final exterior zone before entering the mosque.

**4. The Entrance Threshold:** Containing the main entrance door, this threshold functions as the first pause-space and marks the passage into the interior. It symbolizes the threshold to another world. From this point onward, the inner realm gradually reveals itself.

**5. The Corridor:** The corridor constitutes the central spatial element of Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque. Had the mosque been constructed elsewhere – even elsewhere around Naqsh-e Jahan Square, such as on the site of Ali

Qapu Palace or the Shah Mosque – it would not have possessed its present spatial quality, because the proportional relationship between the exterior and interior spaces would have been fundamentally altered. It is within this corridor that the gradual separation from the external world and the transition toward the interior occur. During the passage through this intermediary space, the sounds, colors, movement, and activity of the outside world progressively fade away. The corridor thus functions as an intermediate realm between humanity (represented by the public square) and spirituality (represented by the prayer hall). It is a space situated between body and spirit—an imaginal realm mediating between the material and the spiritual worlds.

**6. The Threshold of the Prayer Hall:** This threshold constitutes the final pause-space before entering the innermost sacred realm.

**7. The Prayer Hall (Shabestan):** The prayer hall represents the ultimate interior realm – the realm of the unseen, a distinct world characterized by its spiritual presence.

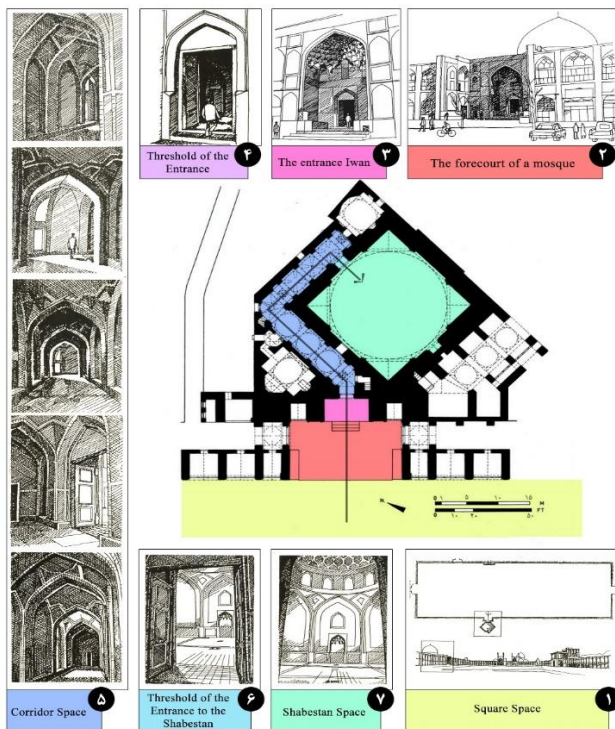
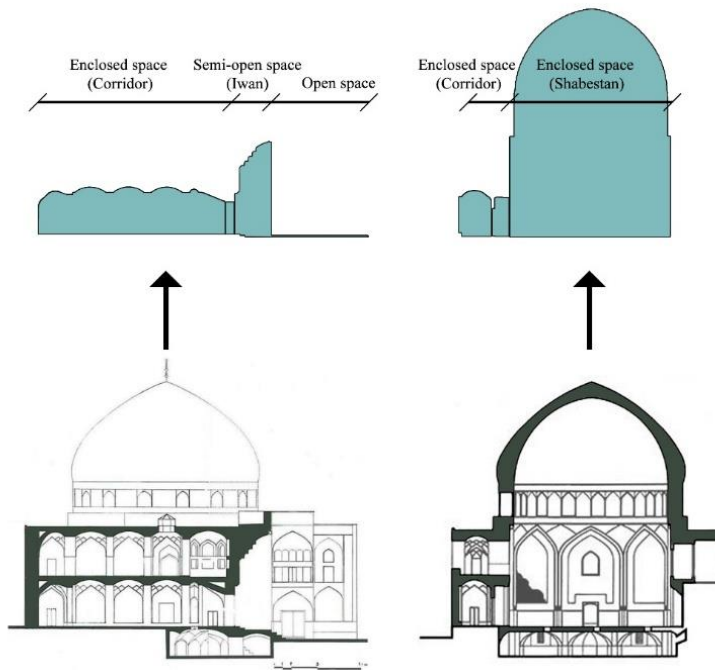


Figure 5 illustrates the complete sequence of these seven spatial stages together with the movement of visitors through the mosque.

Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque was selected as the case study for the present research for several reasons. First, its construction coincided with the flourishing period of Transcendent Wisdom and the lifetime of Mulla Sadra. Second, it occupies an exceptional position within Iranian-Islamic architecture. Finally, its spatial organization and architectural characteristics distinguish it from other Safavid-period mosques. Through features such as its carefully articulated spatial hierarchy, sophisticated orchestration of natural light, coherent geometric organization, and rich symbolic content, the mosque provides an appropriate case for explaining the relationship between the theoretical principles of Transcendent Wisdom and their architectural manifestation. For this reason, it has frequently been used in previous scholarship as one of the most representative examples for analyzing the semantic, perceptual, and spatial dimensions of Iranian architecture.



*Figure 6. Sections of the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque (right: section through the prayer hall (Mehrali, 2020); left: section through the entrance iwan (Karimi, Abouei, & Heydari, 2017)), illustrating the correspondence between the three spatial typologies of Iranian architecture – enclosed, semi-open, and open spaces – and the three existential dimensions of the human being (body, soul, and spirit) within the framework of al-Hikma al-Muta’aliyah.*

The spatial organization of Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque represents one of the most refined examples of a gradual and hierarchical progression from the outward to the inward. Unlike most Iranian mosques, its entrance does not lead directly to an open courtyard. Instead, visitors reach the prayer hall only after passing through a curved transitional corridor. This deliberate deviation symbolizes an inward journey, a gradual detachment from multiplicity, and a preparation for the reception of spiritual meaning. As illustrated in Figure 5, this sequence may be interpreted as an architectural manifestation of the soul's Substantial Motion, progressing from the corporeal toward the spiritual realm.

The journey begins at Naqsh-e Jahan Square, representing the realm of multiplicity, and culminates in the domed sanctuary, symbolizing unity and spiritual meaning. This progression offers a tangible expression of the transition from potentiality to actuality, reflecting the human journey from multiplicity toward unity. It closely parallels Mullā Ṣadrā's concept of Substantial Motion, according to which existence continuously progresses from its lowest material level toward higher degrees of immateriality and spiritual perfection.

The change in direction within the entrance corridor introduces a moment of pause and reflection, mentally preparing visitors for entry into the sacred domain of the mosque. Furthermore, the framed visual connection between the corridor and the domed chamber reinforces this contemplative transition. From Mullā Ṣadrā's perspective, this process may be understood as the gradual manifestation of meaning through architectural form. Throughout the circulation path, light transforms from a soft, dispersed, and fragmented illumination into a concentrated and unified radiance within the domed chamber (Figure 7).

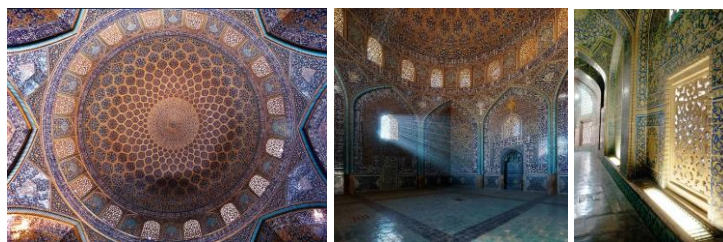


Figure 7. Right: soft and dispersed natural light within the transitional corridor (Photograph by Sadaf Khadem Beheshti); Center: concentrated illumination inside the domed chamber; Left: the centrally illuminated domed chamber (Mehrali, 2020).

The geometric order of the domed chamber is organized according to a radial, center-oriented geometry that may be interpreted as an architectural manifestation of the Gradation of Existence. Its geometric composition expresses a progression from lower to higher existential levels (Figure 7). Consequently, the domed chamber symbolizes the highest spiritual state attainable by the human being, in which, at the culmination of Substantial Motion, the soul is liberated from the constraints of material existence.

#### **4.5. Progression from Matter to Meaning in Other Works of Iranian-Islamic Architecture**

Although the present study adopts Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque as its principal case study, many of the philosophical concepts derived from al-Hikma al-Muta'aliyah can also be identified in other masterpieces of Iranian-Islamic architecture. To demonstrate the broader applicability of the findings, several representative examples are briefly presented below.

**Jameh Mosque of Isfahan:** As illustrated in Figure 8, unlike the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, the Jameh Mosque of Isfahan has multiple entrances, all of which ultimately converge within the central courtyard. Serving as an intermediate spatial domain, the courtyard connects the various entrances to the principal prayer space while directing movement toward the southern iwan and ultimately the domed sanctuary. This spatial sequence can be interpreted through the concept of Substantial Motion, as visitors are gradually guided from public spaces toward progressively deeper levels of spiritual presence as they move through the mosque.

Moreover, the hierarchical arrangement and varying spatial qualities of the entrances, courtyard, iwan, and domed chamber, together with the progressive changes in elevation leading toward the sanctuary, express successive degrees of existence that can be interpreted through the principle of the Gradation of Existence. At the same time, despite their functional and formal diversity, these architectural elements are integrated into a coherent spatial system that represents the transition from multiplicity to unity, an interpretation that corresponds philosophically to the principle of the Primacy of Existence. Accordingly, the spatial organization of the Jameh Mosque of Isfahan may be regarded as a representative model of Iranian architecture, in which hierarchical spatial organization enables the gradual progression from the outward experience of space toward its inner spiritual reality.

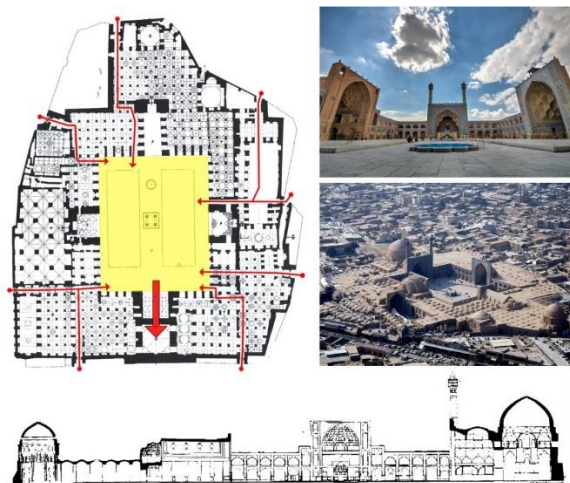


Figure 8. Jameh Mosque of Isfahan (Jabal Ameli, 2013).

**Shah Mosque (Imam Mosque of Isfahan):** The spatial organization of the Shah Mosque (Imam Mosque) is structured around a hierarchical sequence consisting of the entrance, transitional corridor, courtyard, iwans, and the principal domed sanctuary. Entry into the mosque occurs through a corridor that gradually turns toward the qibla, guiding visitors from the urban environment into a sacred realm before leading them to the central courtyard and ultimately the domed chamber. This spatial progression can be interpreted through the concept of Substantial Motion, as the visitor's perception gradually evolves from engagement with the external world toward increasingly profound levels of spiritual awareness.

Furthermore, the differing spatial qualities of the entrance, corridor, courtyard, iwans, and domed sanctuary express a distinct hierarchy of existential levels that may be explained through the principle of the Gradation of Existence. Within this hierarchy, the domed chamber serves as both the spatial and spiritual focal point of the mosque, representing its highest existential level.

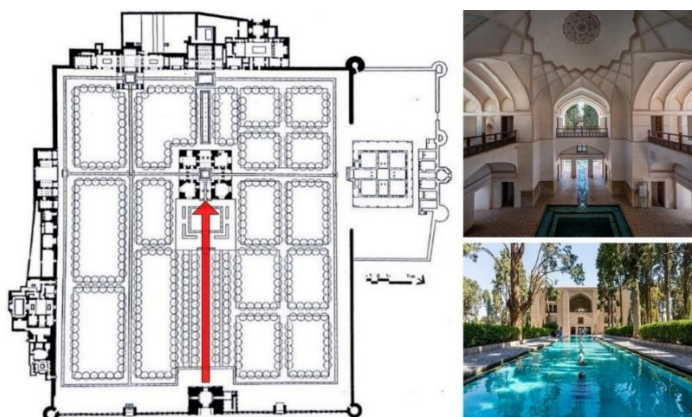
Despite the diversity of spaces, circulation paths, and architectural elements, all components of the mosque are integrated into a coherent spatial system organized around the qibla. From the perspective of Transcendent Wisdom, this unity may be interpreted through the principle of the Primacy of Existence, whereby the multiplicity of

architectural elements ultimately serves the realization of a single ontological reality and a unified experience of sacred space. Consequently, the spatial organization of the Shah Mosque can likewise be regarded as a representative model of Iranian architecture, in which hierarchical spatial order guides visitors through a gradual progression from multiplicity to unity and from outward appearance to inner spiritual reality.



*Figure 9. Shah Mosque (Imam Mosque), Isfahan (Khanzadeh, 2024)*

**Fin Garden, Kashan:** The spatial organization of Fin Garden is structured around a central axis, a system of water channels, the central pavilion (kushk), and a geometrically ordered network of circulation paths.



*Figure 10. Fin Garden, Kashan (Daneshmand & Atik, 2024).*

The movement of visitors from the entrance toward the center of the garden provides a gradual experience of spatial discovery and an increasing awareness of its geometric order. This progression may be interpreted through the concept of Substantial Motion, as spatial perception continuously develops throughout the journey.

At the same time, the principal axis, central pavilion, watercourses, and surrounding spaces, while forming parts of a unified spatial system, differ in their spatial qualities, visual prominence, and functional significance. These differences reflect successive degrees of existence that correspond to the principle of the Gradation of Existence.

Moreover, the geometric unity of the garden, together with the diversity of its natural and architectural elements—including water, vegetation, pathways, and built structures—exemplifies unity within multiplicity, a characteristic consistent with the principle of the Primacy of Existence in Transcendent Wisdom. Accordingly, the spatial organization of Fin Garden may also be regarded as an exemplary model of Iranian architecture, in which spatial order and perceptual hierarchy gradually guide visitors toward an experience of unity emerging from multiplicity

**Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Shrine Ensemble:** The spatial organization of the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Shrine Ensemble is structured around a sequential progression of entrance spaces, courtyards, corridors, and ceremonial spaces culminating in the principal mausoleum. This spatial sequence gradually guides visitors from public domains toward progressively more sacred realms and may therefore be interpreted through the concept of Substantial Motion, as the visitor's spatial experience progressively advances toward deeper levels of spiritual presence and existential awareness.

The differences in the location, spatial quality, and degree of sanctity among the various spaces within the complex likewise express a hierarchy of existential levels that may be explained through the principle of the Gradation of Existence.

At the same time, despite the functional and formal diversity of its architectural components, the ensemble is unified within a coherent spatial system centered on the shrine itself. Philosophically, this characteristic corresponds to the principle of the Primacy of Existence,

whereby diverse architectural elements converge toward a unified ontological reality.

Accordingly, the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Shrine Ensemble may also be regarded as an outstanding example of Iranian architecture, whose hierarchical spatial organization represents a gradual progression from multiplicity to unity and from outward experience toward inner spiritual awareness.

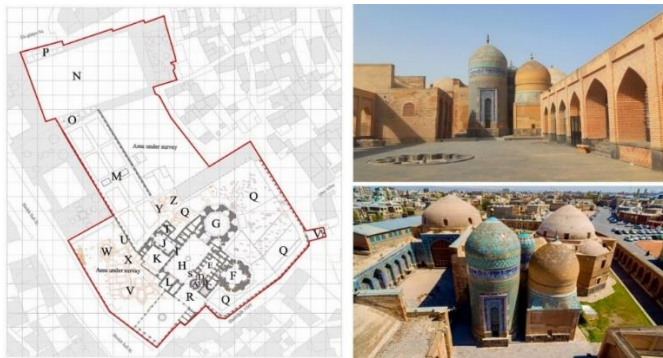


Figure 11. Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Shrine Ensemble (Yousefi, Alizadeh Sola, & Tavousi, 2013)

An examination of these case studies demonstrates that, despite differences in function, spatial organization, and historical context, they share a common spatial logic. In each example, the movement of visitors from public spaces toward the principal architectural spaces is organized through a gradual and hierarchical sequence, whereby spatial experience progresses from multiplicity to unity and from the initial levels of perception toward deeper levels of presence and meaning. This characteristic can be interpreted through the concept of Substantial Motion, understood as the progressive development of human perception through space.

Furthermore, the differences in location, spatial quality, and degree of sanctity among the various spaces express a hierarchy of existential levels that corresponds to the principle of the Gradation of Existence. At the same time, despite the functional and formal diversity of their architectural components, each complex is organized as a coherent and purposeful spatial system. This unity within multiplicity can be understood through the principle of the Primacy of Existence.

Accordingly, it can therefore be concluded that these three philosophical principles are not confined to a single architectural example; rather, they constitute an interpretive framework provides an interpretive framework for understanding the spatial organization of a wide range of significant works of Iranian architecture. The findings of this study therefore extend beyond the selected case study and may be generalized to other examples of Iranian architecture characterized by hierarchical and meaning-based spatial organization.

#### **4.6. Application of the Principles of al-Hikma al-Muta'aliyah in Contemporary Architecture**

The practical application of al-Hikma al-Muta'aliyah in contemporary architecture lies primarily in emphasizing the existential and spiritual dimensions of architectural space. According to the principle of the Primacy of Existence, architecture should not be confined to the creation of form and physical structure; rather, it should provide a setting that enriches lived experience and strengthens the individual's relationship with meaning.

Likewise, the principle of the Gradation of Existence underscores the importance of creating spatial hierarchies and graduated perceptual sequences, enabling users to experience their surroundings through a progressive and increasingly profound process of spatial awareness as they move through the built environment.

From another perspective, the concept of Substantial Motion offers inspiration for the design of spaces that encourage discovery, contemplation, and gradual existential transformation. Within this framework, the deliberate use of light, geometry, proportion, spatial order, and carefully structured spatial sequences not only enhances the aesthetic quality of architecture but also creates conditions conducive to spiritual experience and reflective engagement.

Accordingly, al-Hikma al-Muta'aliyah may serve as a robust theoretical framework for rethinking contemporary architectural practice, reinforcing its humanistic and spiritual dimensions while providing philosophical guidance for the creation of meaningful architectural environments.

*Table 2. Practical framework for applying the principles of al-Hikma al-Muta'aliyah in contemporary architectural design based on the Fourfold Recognition Framework.*

| <b>Sadrian Philosophical Principle</b> | <b>Concept</b>                                                  | <b>Design Foundation</b>                                                                                      | <b>Architectural Pattern</b>                                                                       | <b>Contemporary Design Application</b>                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Primacy of Existence                   | Unity within multiplicity                                       | Creating coherence among architectural elements while avoiding spatial fragmentation; prioritizing open space | Integrated spatial organization, legible spatial structure, logical functional relationships       | Designing architectural complexes that organize diverse spaces within a unified architectural identity                                                                                 |
| Gradation of Existence                 | Spatial hierarchy and varying degrees of experiential intensity | Creating intentional differentiation among spaces according to their significance and degree of privacy       | Spatial hierarchy, gradual variation in height, lighting, materials, scale, and accessibility      | Designing public, semi-public, and private spaces within architectural environments                                                                                                    |
| Substantial Motion                     | Progressive transformation of human perception                  | Designing spaces based on movement and the gradual discovery of place                                         | Hierarchical circulation, spatial sequence, gradual changes in light, scale, and visual perception | Designing experiential circulation routes that unfold progressively                                                                                                                    |
| Synthesis of the Three Principles      | From multiplicity to unity                                      | Meaning-oriented and human-centered design                                                                    | Hierarchical spatial organization, gradual guidance of users, strengthening the sense of place     | Creating contemporary architecture with an Iranian-Islamic identity that not only fulfills functional requirements but also provides meaningful and perceptually enriching experiences |

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate a meaningful and meaningful relationship between the fundamental principles of Mullā Ṣadrā's al-Hikma al-Muta'aliyah and the spatial organization of Iranian architecture. The analysis of Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, conducted through the Fourfold Recognition Framework, revealed that concepts such as the Primacy of Existence, the Gradation of Existence, and Substantial Motion are not

merely abstract philosophical doctrines; rather, they are embodied in the mosque's spatial organization and in the perceptual experience of its users. The analysis of additional architectural precedents further indicates that spatial hierarchy, the gradual transition from public to sacred spaces, the orchestration of natural light, geometric order, spatial proportion, and the continuity of architectural elements collectively facilitate a progressive experiential journey from the outward to the inward and from multiplicity toward unity.

From a methodological perspective, this study demonstrates that the Fourfold Recognition Framework provides an effective analytical model for translating philosophical concepts into architectural indicators suitable for systematic analysis. The framework establishes a coherent relationship between the theoretical foundations of al-Hikma al-Muta'aliyah and the analysis of architectural works, while also offering a methodological approach applicable to the study of other examples of Iranian architecture.

The creation of spiritually meaningful architecture in contemporary practice—similar to that found in traditional Iranian architecture—ultimately depends upon the architect's inner conviction and spiritual awareness. Within the Fourfold Recognition Framework, this dimension is represented through inner (psychic) cognition, which forms the conceptual foundation of architectural creation. In Iranian philosophical thought, self-knowledge (*ma'rifat al-nafs*) constitutes the prerequisite for the soul's journey toward perfection, leading to the elevation of the human being through successive existential levels and representing the ultimate objective of life within the tradition of Islamic wisdom. Grounded in this epistemological perspective, contemporary architects may move beyond purely formal or functional approaches and, by emphasizing the ontological essence of architecture rather than its external appearance, create environments that foster deeper existential and spiritual experiences.

Accordingly, Iranian architecture may be understood as a symbolic language that, through the application of philosophical principles and transcendent aesthetic values, not only produces spaces of beauty and functional excellence but also serves the existential journey of human beings. Recognizing this dimension offers valuable guidance for contemporary architectural practice, particularly at a time when many urban and architectural environments have become increasingly detached

from identity, meaning, and spiritual significance. Revitalizing the spiritual dimension of Iranian architecture therefore requires a critical reinterpretation and application of the principles of al-Hikma al-Muta‘āliyah in both architectural theory and design practice. The present study represents a step toward this objective.

Table 3 presents the analysis of the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque using the Fourfold Recognition Framework, illustrating the gradual translation of philosophical concepts from the realm of inner meanings into their tangible architectural and spatial manifestations.

#### **Author contributions**

The authors confirm the study conception and design: Khosro Sahaf, Navid Jalaeian Ghane; data collection: Navid Jalaeian Ghane. Alireza Jalaeian Ghane; analysis and interpretation of results: Khosro Sahaf, Navid Jalaeian Ghane. Alireza Jalaeian Ghane; draft manuscript preparation: Navid Jalaeian Ghane. The results were evaluated by all authors, and the final version of the manuscript was approved.

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#### **Conflict of Interest**

"The authors declare no potential conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work. In addition, the ethical issues including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and, or falsification, double publication and, or submission, and redundancy have been completely witnessed by the authors".

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## Original Research Paper

# The geopolitics of modern architecture in Iran: the role of Swedish engineering firms during the first Pahlavi era

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## Abstract

This paper examines the role of Swedish engineering firms in Iran's architectural modernization during the First Pahlavi era, focusing on infrastructure as an underexplored instrument of state formation, national integration, and geopolitical self-assertion. While the contributions of major European engineering firms to Pahlavi modernization are well recognized, Scandinavian companies have received limited scholarly attention. Addressing this gap, the study investigates the technical, conceptual, and cultural dimensions of Swedish engagement in Iran, with particular reference to the Ahvaz White Bridge and the Ghazian-Mian Poshteh Bridge. Adopting a descriptive-analytical methodology and drawing on archival materials, historical documentation, architectural records, and field investigations, the research examines how Swedish engineers facilitated the transfer of modernist ideas, reconfigured spatial orders, and reshaped Iran's building culture. The findings demonstrate that Swedish firms played a role extending beyond that of contractors or technical service providers. Their projects introduced advanced materials, including reinforced concrete and steel, as well as movable bridge technologies previously unknown in Iran, while embodying the broader discourse of Pahlavi modernization. These structures functioned not only as engineering achievements but also as visible symbols of state authority and Iran's aspiration to reposition itself within global modernity. Their strategic locations further highlight their geopolitical significance and role in territorial integration. Swedish companies also acted as cultural agents and conduits for international architectural models, contributing to a form of "architectural diplomacy" that facilitated the reception of new architectural vocabularies and legitimised modernist aesthetics. The study contributes to transnational architectural history, technology transfer, and the geopolitics of infrastructure by demonstrating how peripheral European actors shaped non-Western modernization trajectories and how infrastructure served state-building projects.

**Keywords:** Swedish construction company SENTAB, architectural modernism in Iran, building culture, construction history

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## مقاله پژوهشی

# ژئوپلیتیک معماری مدرن در ایران: نقش شرکت‌های مهندسی سوئدی در دوره رضاشاه پهلوی

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## چکیده:

این پژوهش نقش شرکت‌های مهندسی سوئدی را در مدرن‌سازی معماری ایران در دوره نخست پهلوی بررسی می‌کند و زیرساخت را به‌عنوان ابزاری مهم، اما کمتر مطالعه‌شده، در فرآیند دولت‌سازی، یکپارچگی ملی و تثبیت موقعیت ژئوپلیتیکی ایران مورد توجه قرار می‌دهد. با وجود توجه پژوهشگران به نقش شرکت‌های مهندسی اروپایی در نوسازی دوره پهلوی، نقش شرکت‌های اسکاندیناویایی کمتر بررسی شده است. این پژوهش با هدف پر کردن این خلأ ابعاد فنی، مفهومی و فرهنگی حضور سوئدی‌ها را با تمرکز بر پل سفید اهواز و پل غازیان-میان‌پشته مطالعه می‌کند. تحقیق با روش توصیفی — تحلیلی و بهره‌گیری از اسناد آرشیوی، مستندات تاریخی، مدارک معماری و مطالعات میدانی، چگونگی انتقال ایده‌های مدرنیستی، بازپیکربندی سازمان فضایی و تحول فرهنگ ساخت‌وساز ایران را بررسی می‌کند. یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد شرکت‌های سوئدی فراتر از پیمانکاران و ارائه‌دهندگان خدمات فنی عمل کردند. پروژه‌های آنان با معرفی مصالح پیشرفته‌ای مانند بتن مسلح و فولاد و فناوری‌های نوین پل‌های متحرک، ضمن بازتاب گفتمان گسترده‌تر نوسازی پهلوی، به نمادهای اقتدار دولت و تلاش ایران برای بازتعریف جایگاه خود در مدرنیته جهانی تبدیل شدند. استقرار هدفمند این سازه‌ها در مناطق راهبردی نیز اهمیت ژئوپلیتیکی آن‌ها را در یکپارچگی سرزمینی برجسته می‌سازد. افزون بر این، شرکت‌های سوئدی به‌عنوان کنشگران فرهنگی و واسطه‌های انتقال الگوهای معماری بین‌المللی، در نوعی «دیپلماسی معماری» مشارکت کردند که پذیرش اجتماعی واژگان جدید معماری و مشروعیت زیبایی‌شناسی مدرنیستی را تسهیل نمود. این پژوهش به مطالعات تاریخ معماری فراملی، انتقال فناوری و ژئوپلیتیک زیرساخت‌ها کمک می‌کند.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** شرکت ساختمانی سوئدی SENTAB، مدرنیسم معماری در ایران، فرهنگ ساخت‌وساز، تاریخ فناوری ساخت‌وساز

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## Original-Forschungsarbeit

# Die Geopolitik der modernen Architektur im Iran: Die Rolle schwedischer Ingenieurfirmen während der Ära Reza Schah Pahlavis

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### Zusammenfassung:

Diese Studie untersucht die Rolle schwedischer Ingenieurfirmen bei der architektonischen Modernisierung Irans während der ersten Pahlavi-Ära und betrachtet Infrastruktur als ein bislang unzureichend erforschtes Instrument der Staatsbildung, nationalen Integration und geopolitischen Selbstbehauptung. Während der Beitrag bedeutender europäischer Ingenieurbüros zur Pahlavi-Modernisierung anerkannt ist, blieb die Rolle skandinavischer Unternehmen weitgehend unbeachtet. Die Forschung schließt diese Lücke durch die Analyse der technischen, konzeptionellen und kulturellen Dimensionen des schwedischen Engagements anhand der Weißen Brücke von Ahvaz und der Ghazian-Mian-Poshteh-Brücke. Auf Grundlage einer deskriptiv-analytischen Methodik sowie von Archivmaterialien, historischen Dokumenten, architektonischen Aufzeichnungen und Felduntersuchungen wird gezeigt, wie schwedische Akteure den Transfer modernistischer Ideen ermöglichten, räumliche Strukturen veränderten und die iranische Baukultur beeinflussten. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass ihre Rolle über die eines technischen Auftragnehmers hinausging. Durch die Einführung neuer Materialien wie Stahlbeton und Stahl sowie innovativer beweglicher Brückentechnologien trugen ihre Projekte zur technologischen Modernisierung bei und wurden zugleich zu Symbolen staatlicher Autorität und nationaler Modernisierungsbestrebungen. Darüber hinaus fungierten schwedische Unternehmen als kulturelle Vermittler internationaler Architekturmodelle und wirkten an einer Form der „Architekturdiplomatie“ mit. Die Studie leistet somit einen Beitrag zur transnationalen Architekturgeschichte, zum Technologietransfer und zur Geopolitik der Infrastruktur.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Bauunternehmen, SENTAB, architektonischer Modernismus im Iran, Baukultur, Bautechnikgeschichte

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## **1. Introduction**

Architecture, understood not simply as a physical artefact but as a profound expression of cultural consciousness and social transformation, carries multiple layers of meaning. Within the development of contemporary Iranian architecture, one of the most persistent theoretical debates turns on the tension between continuity with tradition and confrontation with modernity. Tradition, in this context, exceeds the mere reproduction of historical forms or the imitation of earlier models; it denotes the endurance of foundational intellectual frameworks and "modes of dwelling" across time, forming the ontological basis of the cultural identity of lived spaces (Naqizadeh, 1999, p. 90). That identity is not a fixed essence but a dynamic process, shaped within changing historical and social conditions—a way of "remaining oneself" while sustaining an ongoing dialogue with past and present (Mahdavinnejad, 2005, quoting Edward Said). Historically, this architectural identity took shape at the intersection of history, cognition and culture (Rahimzadeh, 1996, pp. 261–273; Alizadeh et al., 2025, p. 92).

The advent of modernism, however, brought a systematic rupture: a failure to sustain dialogue between traditional concepts and internalised modern paradigms. Current scholarship often traces these ruptures to the reductive functionalism and technological fixation of the Modern Movement (Alexander, 2002, p. 9). However, such criticism tends to pass over the intricate geopolitical mechanisms of the contemporary era, and the specific "agents of change" through which this transition was effected. During the reign of Reza Shah, the built environment served as a strategic instrument for projecting a modernised national identity. This process was accelerated by the involvement of foreign architects and firms, who introduced new construction models and systematic approaches, leading to the formation of a new building culture.

Historians have scrutinised the role of dominant foreign powers in Iran's modernisation, yet the strategic input of so-called politically neutral catalysts remains a conspicuous lacuna in the literature. This study addresses that omission by examining Swedish construction firms active during the First Pahlavi period. Analysing the formal, technical and cultural dimensions of their output, the research evaluates how neutral international actors contributed to the formation of a modern building

culture – a process situated at the crossroads of technological diplomacy, political non-alignment and vernacular accommodation.

## **2. Literature Review**

Scholarship on Iranian architecture during the First Pahlavi period is varied, extending from stylistic analysis to socio-political critique. For the purposes of the present study, the literature may be organised into four principal thematic areas.

### **2.1. Intellectual Currents and the Synthesis of Modernity**

Early scholarship concentrated on the internal logic and intellectual shifts that enabled the departure from Qajar traditions. Kiani (2004) offers a seminal account of these transformations, moving beyond descriptive narration to examine the intellectual currents (both conscious and unconscious) that underlay the emergence of contemporary Iranian architecture. A particular strength of his work lies in its shift of emphasis from completed forms to methods of design. Bani-masoud (2009), likewise, traces a comprehensive genealogy of the period, drawing attention to the “hybridity” that emerged as traditional concepts became entangled with Western paradigms in the urban landscape. Ghobadian (2014) sharpens this trajectory through a comparison of the Qajar and Pahlavi eras, arguing that although the Qajar period introduced spatial innovations, it was the Pahlavi state’s adoption of European modernist tendencies that produced a distinctly “quasi-modernist” pattern in Tehran (i.e. a spatial expression of the country’s wider geopolitical turn towards the West).

### **2.2. State-Building and the Geopolitics of Space**

A substantial body of scholarship treats architecture as an ideological instrument of the state, and socio-historical work has done much to establish the political terrain on which these questions unfold. Abrahamian (1998, 2010) contends, for example, that Reza Shah’s state-building amounted to a comprehensive project in which architecture served to recast Iran’s public image while consolidating both domestic and regional authority. Cronin (2004) develops a related argument, stressing that the modernization of the built environment was inseparable

from state nationalism, with architecture and ancient history mobilised as instruments of identity formation. Akbari (2006) demonstrates how the Pahlavi dynasty fashioned a modern national identity through legal reform, public education and what he terms “geopolitical architecture,” thereby transforming the urban fabric into a vehicle for state propaganda.

### **2.3. The Agency of Foreign Practitioners and Professional Shifts**

The role of international actors is perhaps the best-documented dimension of this period. Hasanpour et al. (2017) offer a valuable comparative study of Iran and Turkey, observing that in Iran, foreign architects such as André Godard and Maxime Siroux cultivated a distinctive “antiquarian” traditionalism, in marked contrast to the radical secularism of Turkish modernism. These figures, together with Nikolai Markov, Roland Dubrulle and others, have been the subject of detailed monographs produced by the Architecture of the Period of Transformation Research Group (e.g. Soroushiani et al., 2008), which document their involvement in establishing modern institutional infrastructures alongside private-sector buildings. Yet, as Rahimnia et al. (2017) point out, the prominence of these foreign practitioners marginalised traditional Iranian architects, reducing their role from that of master builders to conservation specialists. The result was a professional field increasingly shaped by Western systematic methodologies and industrial-scale construction.

### **2.4. Critical Historiography and Methodological Debates**

Recent scholarship has taken a more critical turn, as established narratives of Pahlavi modernisation have come under increasing scrutiny. Nari Ghomi (2015) offers a critique of interpretive-historical research in the field, contending that many studies remain constrained by reductive perspectives and calling instead for a more multidimensional and critical approach adequate to the complexity of architectural change. Haeri (2008) reinforces this position by challenging prevailing representations of intellectual currents in Pahlavi architecture and pressing for greater historical precision. Taken together, these debates register a growing dissatisfaction with purely descriptive or Eurocentric histories and indicate the need for new analytical lenses through which to grasp the nuanced role of “other” actors in the modernisation process.

## **2.5. The Gap**

For all the depth of this scholarship, however, a clear gap remains in relation to lesser-known engineering firms. French, German and Russian influences have been studied in considerable detail, yet the role of Swedish architects and firms has received almost no attention. That absence matters, because it leaves unexamined one aspect of architectural change during the First Pahlavi period: the contribution of actors not directly aligned with the dominant foreign powers commonly associated with Iran's modernisation. It has also narrowed discussion of the ways technical expertise, political positioning and architectural production intersected in this period. The present study takes up this gap by examining the work of Swedish construction companies and by clarifying their place within the broader processes of modernisation, identity formation and architectural exchange.

## **3. Methodology**

This study employs a descriptive-analytical methodology within a historical-interpretive framework. It examines the role of Swedish engineering firms in reshaping contemporary Iranian building culture, treating built works as historically situated artefacts formed at the intersection of political ambition, technical expertise and local spatial conditions. Data collection proceeds through the systematic triangulation of primary and secondary sources. Primary evidence comprises archival materials from Iranian and Swedish national repositories, historical technical records, photographs, maps, and physical field surveys of the selected structures. These materials are read alongside secondary scholarship on Pahlavi-era modernisation, cultural geopolitics and bilateral Iran–Sweden relations, allowing the material characteristics of the projects to be situated within their broader political frameworks.

The research centres on two purposefully selected case studies: the Ghazian–Mian Poshteh Bridge in Bandar Anzali and the Ahvaz White Bridge. Both were major infrastructural interventions that introduced modern steel and concrete technologies to Iran, yet they occupied distinct geopolitical nodes. Bandar Anzali, on the Caspian coast, functioned as Iran's northern gateway and as a primary contact zone for transnational

trade and political influence. Ahvaz, by contrast, served in the south as a vital industrial and economic artery tied to oil extraction, transport and state-led regional development. Bringing these two sites into comparison makes it possible to analyse how foreign-built infrastructure operated under differing regional dynamics. The analytical framework considers these bridges across three interrelated dimensions:

**Formal and Spatial:** analysing the architectural expression, urban integration, and physical relationship of the bridges to their surrounding landscapes.

**Technical:** examining the construction systems, material technologies, and the transmission of specialised engineering expertise.

**Cultural-Geopolitical:** investigating how these projects operated as instruments of Pahlavi state-building and “technological diplomacy.”

The research unfolds in four stages. It first establishes the theoretical intersections between architectural identity and technological diplomacy. It then reconstructs the historical conditions that enabled Swedish enterprise in Iran. The third stage undertakes a comparative architectural and historical analysis of the two bridge projects. The final stage synthesises these findings in order to discuss the broader implications of Scandinavian engineering for the emergence of a modern building culture in Iran.

## **4 .Theoretical Framework**

### **4.1. Contemporary Iranian Architecture and the Crisis of Identity**

#### *4.1.1. The Ontological Disruption of Lived Space*

One of the central questions in contemporary Iranian architectural discourse is the “crisis of identity,” a condition produced by the profound displacement of intellectual paradigms, cultural frameworks, and modes of spatial production. As Stuart Hall (2013) argues, identity is a fluid process that operates both as a marker of selfhood and as a mechanism of differentiation within social relations. To understand identity is to recognise the “self” against the “other,” a dialectic that Charles Jencks (1977) describes as the classification of objects and individuals through the act of relating oneself to an external reference. Read alongside Woodward’s (2004) emphasis on the assessment of identity through similarities and differences,

this suggests that architectural identity is not a fixed inheritance but a continuing process of differentiation and recognition.

In pre-modern Iranian architecture, identity was anchored in the continuity of archetypal patterns, indigenous aesthetics, and accumulated experiential knowledge. Design was not an exercise in individualist creativity but a refinement of established principles that harmonized environmental, cultural, and spiritual needs (Hojjat, 2005, p. 59). This traditional spatial structure possessed an inner semantic stability such that innovation occurred through the reinterpretation—rather than the rejection—of the past (Motamedmanesh 2025a, p. 11).

With the arrival of modernity and the Industrial Revolution, that coherence began to unravel. Technology, instrumental rationality, and the growth of industrial cities imposed new conditions on architecture. A decisive force in this transformation was the change in humankind's understanding of itself—its place, role, and meaning in the world (Naqizadeh, 2000, p. 81). The transition from traditional to modern society was accompanied by far-reaching intellectual, philosophical, economic, and technological shifts, which in turn generated new conceptions of space and its function. In this sense, the problem of identity in the modern world arose directly from these upheavals, and architecture, as a structure of meaning, entered into crisis as well (Ghotbi, 2008, p. 81).

#### *4.1.2. Geopolitical Dimensions of Architectural Identity*

These transformations were not simply aesthetic. They were embedded in shifting structures of cultural and spatial geopolitics. Architecture, as the materialization of state power, became a principal instrument of nation-building and modernization. This is especially evident in modernizing societies that sought to redefine themselves under the “gaze of the other,” negotiating between internal self-representation and international prestige. The industrialization of construction practices produced a growing detachment from climatic and local specificities, as buildings were increasingly replicated according to globalized Western models. The rise of absolute functionalism, which privileged economic efficiency over psychological and spiritual resonance, resulted in what Mahdaveinejad (2005, p. 9) describes as the imprisonment of humanity within a “mechanized lifestyle.” By reducing architecture to a construction-driven process (Naqizadeh, 2000, p. 85) and embracing the homogenizing

"International Style," the modern era generated spaces that were technically advanced yet rootless, devoid of a genuine "sense of place" (Norberg-Schulz, 1996, p. 424). In Iran, this rupture was sharpened by the First Pahlavi state's "top-down" modernization policies. During this period, the state prioritized the importation of Western forms as part of a geopolitical strategy to recast Iran's international image (Molaei & Azghandi, 2011, p. 141). Because this modernization lacked an indigenous theoretical framework, it produced built environments that were often alien to Iran's social fabric.

This strategy was most visible in the "frontier cities" of the modernization project, notably Ahvaz and Bandar Anzali. In these strategically significant urban centres, the involvement of European engineering firms constituted a deliberate act of techno-diplomacy. Infrastructure projects became the primary sites of mediation between European technological modernity and Iranian spatial reality. As shown in Table 1, the identity crisis in Iranian architecture resulted from the convergence of the external pressures of global modernity with an internal rupture in traditional continuities. A superficial engagement with modernism, coupled with the erasure of meaning-bearing traditional elements, produced urban spaces defined by function, economy, or form rather than by identity and belonging.

*Table 1. The identity crisis in Iranian architecture and its influencing factors*

| Period               | Architectural Features                                                 | Crisis Factors                                                                            | Consequences                                                                 |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Global Modernity     | Industrialization;<br>Functionalism;<br>Detachment from local context. | Instrumental rationality;<br>Technological obsession;<br>Neglect of semantic meaning      | Crisis of Meaning:<br>Decline in psychological and spiritual resonance.      |
| Global Modernity     | Industrialization;<br>Functionalism;<br>Detachment from local context. | Instrumental rationality;<br>Technological obsession;<br>Neglect of semantic meaning      | Crisis of Meaning:<br>Decline in psychological and spiritual resonance.      |
| First Pahlavi Period | Importation of Western forms;<br>Rupture with traditional typologies.  | Accelerated, state-led modernization;<br>Absence of indigenous design frameworks          | Cultural Detachment:<br>Urban spaces as tools of geopolitical image-making.  |
| Contemporary Era     | Placeless architecture;<br>Emphasis on "Form-as-Spectacle."            | Globalization;<br>Systematic erasure of vernacular memory;<br>Instrumental view of space. | Rootless Urbanism:<br>Production of spaces devoid of belonging and identity. |

## 4.2. Building Culture and the Process of Its Transformation

### 4.2.1. Building Culture as a Geopolitical Construct

A central conceptual pillar of this study is the notion of “building culture,” defined here as a collective system of knowledge, social relations, and cultural values that not only shapes the material form of space but also serves as a repository of a society’s collective memory. As Davis (2006, p. 24) argues, the built environment manifests historical and cultural processes and is continually reconstructed through the interplay of social institutions and human consciousness. This culture is never static. It changes, at times through gradual sedimentation, at others through abrupt intervention, in dialogue with prevailing geopolitical and economic conditions. Within this framework, the transformation of Iranian building culture during the First Pahlavi period cannot be reduced to a merely stylistic or technical shift; it must be understood as a geopolitically conditioned process in which foreign actors served as structurally significant agents of change.

By the late nineteenth century, the unprecedented rise of Western powers had shifted the global centre of civilisation, science, and technology westward. Iran progressively lost its historical position within the spheres of political and cultural power, precipitating a profound identity crisis. Unlike the Western experience, the emergence of a modern identity in Iran was oscillatory, caught in a persistent tension between the tendencies of Orientalism and Occidentalism. This divided identity, interacting with indigenous, historical, and nationalist currents, created a complex framework for architectural transformation. From the mid-nineteenth to the twentieth century, Iran’s architectural culture consequently became an instrument through which the state sought to project a stable and powerful image in a competitive geopolitical arena (Grigor, 2004, p. 22). Building culture, in this sense, was a spatial response to Iran’s precarious geopolitical condition and its tense relations with foreign powers.

At the turn of the twentieth century, military defeats and economic instability fostered among Iranian intellectuals a sense of national backwardness, accompanied by an ardent desire to recover the glories of past empires (Ansari, 2003, pp. 61–69). Out of this emerged an eclectic architectural movement that operated as a political language, an attempt

to articulate cultural independence through an “Iranian-style” modernization. Architects used this movement to reproduce national identity as a medium for articulating power against colonial encroachment (Kiani, 2004, p. 267; Grigor, 2013, pp. 221–222).

During the reign of Reza Shah, this project expanded into a broad modernization of the economy, education, health, and transportation. Architecture was mobilized to reshape the nation’s cultural-political image in line with European nation-building models. The importation of foreign experts formed part of a systematic effort to accelerate the physical development of cities and to institutionalize modern architectural concepts. In Tehran, the erasure of Qajar urbanism and the emergence of Neo-Achaemenid and modernist styles inaugurated a new national narrative, one that privileged a modern, consumer-oriented middle class (Grigor, 2013, p. 28).

#### *4.2.2. Technology Transfer and the Evolution of Building Culture*

Contrary to common assumptions of sudden rupture, construction history shows that building culture evolves conservatively and remains deeply rooted in socio-cultural habitus (Davis, 2006, p. 5). Technological change is rarely instantaneous; it emerges through complex negotiations between tradition and innovation (Pi-Sunyer & De Gregori, 1964, pp. 247–248).

Modern industrial materials entered Iran through specific geopolitical channels, often by way of technical contracts that mirrored the wider global balance of power. The industrialization of construction shifted material production from the artisan’s workshop to the factory, introducing standardized precision through emerging capitalism and competition (Davis, 2006, p. 174; Peters, 1996, p. 30). Traditionalist cultures, however, often resisted such innovations. As Forty (2012, p. 79) notes, the “culture of construction” is inherently risk-averse; builders often reject new materials because of cultural attachment and unfamiliarity. The high risk of structural failure also rendered the construction sector more conservative than other fields (Fitchen, 1986, pp. 35–36).

In Iran, this resistance was both cultural and structural. Traditional builders, tied to familiar resources and wary of technical uncertainties, adopted a cautious approach, while anti-industrial sentiment in the nineteenth century, together with economic constraints, further limited

the uptake of industrial materials. Architecture thus became the principal arena for the symbolic confrontation between East and West, tradition and modernism, and cultural independence versus political influence. In this context, each new material and construction technique carried a specific message of geopolitical positioning and ideological preference.

Crucially, this spatial transformation was an exercise in techno-diplomacy. Reza Shah's administration navigated the competitive landscape of colonial influence by seeking partnerships with politically "neutral" countries. The engagement of Scandinavian firms enabled the state to acquire advanced Western technological expertise while avoiding the political entanglements associated with the Great Powers. These firms therefore functioned as vital intermediaries, techno-diplomatic agents through whom the Iranian state negotiated the tension between modernity and sovereignty. This dynamic of negotiated modernization found one of its most potent expressions in large-scale infrastructure projects, where Swedish expertise acted as a catalyst in the transformation of the Iranian culture of building.

### **4.3. The First Pahlavi Period: The Geopolitics of Transition**

#### ***4.2.3. Stylistic Currents and the Politics of Form***

The First Pahlavi period brought a fundamental reordering of architectural production in Iran, driven by the state's deliberate programme of modernization. Architecture no longer remained simply a craft tradition. It became an instrument of political authority and a medium through which a nascent national identity could be articulated. Within less than two decades, three overlapping stylistic currents took shape.

The first was a transitional hybrid rooted in late-Qajar forms. Native builders absorbed selected elements of European neoclassicism alongside traditional motifs, producing buildings that sustained a measure of cultural continuity while marking a break with the immediate past (Bani-masoud, 2009, p. 27). The second current, which gained momentum as state institutions consolidated their role as principal patrons, was early international modernism. Influenced by the Viennese school, German Expressionism, and French Art Nouveau, and reinforced by the return of European-trained Iranian architects, this work introduced new spatial logics and building typologies into the urban fabric (Bani-masoud, 2009,

p. 187). The third current, Achaemenid and Sasanian revivalism—referencing the most significant pre-Islamic dynastic periods (Motamedmanesh, 2026, p. 92; 2025b, p. 22)—served an explicitly ideological function. Through evocations of imperial grandeur, the state projected historical depth and territorial legitimacy onto public architecture (Kiani, 2004, p. 41). This plurality is evident in the infrastructure of large cities, where each project negotiated the tension between nationalist symbolism and technical pragmatism.

These currents were made possible by a sweeping reorganisation of urban spaces. Traditional fabrics were demolished to create broad boulevards, with governmental buildings strategically placed as civic anchors. These boulevards became stages on which architecture was performed, compelling architects to design façades that projected a modern public image (Rajabi, 1976, p. 112). The result was a profound shift in architectural logic: from traditional introversion to modern extroversion. Traditional Iranian architecture, which was organised around central courtyards and climate-responsive privacy, gave way to outward-facing buildings in which the façade became the principal medium of urban interaction (Kiani, 2004, p. 183). The shift was not merely formal. It carried ideological weight: the new society had to render modernity visible in the public realm.

This rapid transformation generated wholly new building types (e.g. hospitals, schools, transport hubs, and banks) that had no historical framework within indigenous tradition. As a result, not only spatial forms but also the language of design, materials, and visual patterns underwent a fundamental metamorphosis (Flamaki, 1992, pp. 277–290). Yet the speed of change produced a cultural rupture. Many structures operated less as spaces rooted in collective memory than as top-down symbols of state power. Even where indigenous elements were incorporated, they often remained “superficial,” failing to establish an organic connection with the existing social fabric.

#### *4.2.4. Cultural Geopolitics under Reza Shah*

Under Reza Shah, architecture and urban planning served as instruments through which the Pahlavi state projected domestic power and constructed a revised international image. The physical modernization of cities should therefore be read as a geopolitical project:

a deliberate effort to reposition Iran within the modern global order through space and infrastructure as instruments of internal authority and external signalling. This was not gradual reform, but a state-directed confrontation with modernity, producing one of the most critical ruptures in the history of Iranian urbanism (Kiani, 2004, pp. 31–40).

Before this period, Iranian architecture remained grounded in indigenous traditions. With the rise of Reza Shah, this continuity was decisively broken. Architecture was transformed from a community-rooted practice into a centralized instrument of the state (Pakzad, 2010, p. 344). Intellectually, the shift was propelled by a nationalist-modernist orientation that imagined Iran's future as inseparable from Western progress (Katouzian, 1993, pp. 210–225; Grigor, 2009, pp. 20–28). Under Reza Shah's autocratic modernization, even antiquarian revivalism was recast as an official expression of patriotism; architecture thus became a medium for representing the legitimacy of the centralized state (Davari Ardakani, 2021, p. 110; Abrahamian, 2010, pp. 171–185).

This nationalist-modernist orientation resonated with wider global conditions. In the early twentieth century, many modernizing states in the Global South came under the influence of Western developmentalist projects. Seeking alignment with this trajectory, the Pahlavi state adopted Western scientific and cultural knowledge while reforming social and urban structures. The process gave rise to a new class of architects and professionals who sought to realise modern ideals within the redefined landscape (Atabaki, 2006, p. 8; Beheshti, 2016, pp. 229–242). Projects such as hospitals, schools, and banks became spatial embodiments of nation-building, instruments of spatial geopolitics that communicated discipline, cohesion, and Iran's aspiration to join the community of modern states.

This logic of spatial representation extended beyond the capital. In strategically significant gateway cities such as Tabriz, Ahvaz and Bandar Anzali, architecture formed part of the state's "politics of representation," transmitting signs of authority and progress to domestic citizens and international observers alike. Within this framework, infrastructure, particularly bridges, carried a double significance: as technical achievements enabling economic integration, and as geopolitical statements of territorial control and modern statehood.

Iran's industrialization also introduced a new form of industrial architecture. Factories, bridges, and way stations symbolized the power, function, and rationality of the modern state (Pahlevanzadeh & Pahlevanzadeh, 2013, pp. 340–355). The materialization of such projects also required social infrastructure, notably the dispatch of students to European universities. On their return, these graduates shaped a distinctive “Iranian quasi-modernism” by blending European styles with local conditions (Askari Chavardi et al., 2017, p. 100). Although architectural production was influenced by local resources and by the architect's outlook, the decisive role belonged to the state and its institutions, which acted as the principal patrons (Mokhtari Taleghani, 2017, p. 55).

Alongside domestic developments, foreign architects and construction companies played a pivotal role. Seeking to accelerate modernization, the state formally invited Western designers to participate in governmental projects. Their early influence was largely decorative, but they later designed fully modern structures with entirely new functions (Kiani, 2004, p. 153). The government strategically invited architects from countries such as Germany and France to oversee major projects, gradually transforming the face of Iranian cities (Shabani & Kamiab, 2012, p. 88). At the same time, the state did not set aside its reliance on neutral European powers. This direct interaction between foreign experts and European-trained Iranian graduates facilitated the transfer of new styles and technologies, ensuring that modernization operated as both a technical and a cultural-geopolitical process. This dynamic reached its technodiplomatic apex through the intervention of Swedish engineering firms.

#### **4.4. Identity, Modernity, Cultural Geopolitics: A Conceptual Framework**

The three core concepts structuring this analysis (i.e. identity, modernity, and cultural geopolitics) are not discrete categories but mutually constitutive ones. Each operates at a different analytical level, yet together they furnish a coherent lens through which to read architectural transformation in early twentieth-century Iran.

Identity is understood here not as a fixed attribute, but as a dynamic and contested process shaped by historical continuity, collective memory, and spatial practice. In Iranian architecture, identity is expressed through the relationship between built form and cultural tradition. Such a relationship can be fundamentally disrupted during an era of profound

self-questioning. The rupture with indigenous building practices, together with the marginalisation of climatic, symbolic, and communal logics, produced what we term an “architectural identity crisis”: a condition in which new forms were imposed without corresponding shifts in cultural consciousness or social meaning.

Modernity, in turn, is treated not as a universal developmental trajectory, but as a geographically and politically mediated process. In Iran, modernity arrived not through endogenous intellectual or technical evolution, but through the state-directed importation of Western models. This imported modernity was selective, instrumental, and often symbolic, deployed to signal Iran’s membership in the modern world rather than to address indigenous spatial or social needs (Figure 1). Architecture became the chosen medium through which the state performed modernity, addressing at once a domestic audience and an international one.



*Fig 1. Architecture and urban planning under Reza Shah as instruments of geopolitical representation*

The modernization of Iranian cities functioned as a spatial strategy to project national authority and reposition Iran internationally. The image illustrates the inherent contradictions of this period: while the city embraced symbols of Western lifestyle—such as the Tehran Opera House (ordered by Reza Shah in 1935 following his visit to Turkey)—it lacked basic infrastructure like sewage systems. In the foreground, a water cart illustrates the continued reliance on traditional supply methods in a metropolis aspiring to European standards (Photograph: Dmitri Kessel © The Picture Collection Inc.)

Cultural geopolitics refers to the spatial dimension of power relations between states and cultures, in which architecture and infrastructure operate as instruments of political representation and territorial signalling. In the First Pahlavi context, architecture was inseparable from

Iran's geopolitical positioning: every material choice, construction technique, and stylistic reference carried implications for Iran's relationship with the West, its assertion of sovereignty, and its negotiation of neutrality amid competing imperial powers. Infrastructure projects stood at the intersection of technological diplomacy and spatial control, embodying both functional necessity and geopolitical messaging.

These three concepts are mutually implicated. The identity crisis arose because modernity was imported in a manner that bypassed indigenous tradition. On the other hand, the particular form that modernity assumed was itself shaped by the geopolitical context in which Iran sought to redefine itself. Architecture, within this framework, becomes legible as a site where identity is negotiated, modernity is performed, and geopolitical relations are spatially inscribed.

It is within this integrated model that the role of Scandinavian engineering firms, and the infrastructures they constructed, can be properly understood: not merely as technical contractors, but as techno-diplomatic mediators who facilitated the transfer of modern construction culture while operating within the spatial logic of cultural geopolitics. The following section examines how this mediation unfolded in the specific case of Sweden-Iran relations and the bridges that materialised through them.

## **5. Modernity as Geopolitical Transfer: From Military Reform to Spatial Order**

### **5.1. The Introduction of Modernity to Iran through Contacts with Europe**

Modernity entered Iran neither by accident nor as a wholly internal development. It took shape through sustained contact with Europe: first under the pressure of military necessity, then through state policy, and eventually in spatial, infrastructural, and architectural form.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Middle East had become a strategic arena for Europe's imperial powers. Repeated military defeats and the threat of colonial domination pushed Iranian elites towards the reform of traditional structures, above all the army and security apparatus. The systematic modernisation of Iran's military began with Abbas Mirza, the reform-minded Qajar crown prince. Deeply

affected by the consequences of Iran's defeats in the Russo-Persian wars, Abbas Mirza initiated a series of targeted measures intended to familiarise the country with Western military technology. These included sending students and envoys to Europe, translating scientific and military texts into Persian, and inviting foreign military advisers to train Iranian troops (Jahanbeglou, 2000, pp. 228–231).

From the early nineteenth century until the rise of the Pahlavi dynasty, Iran hosted several foreign missions, each with its own strategic orientation: three French, three British, two Austrian, one informal Italian, one Russian in the form of the Cossack Brigade, and finally a Swedish mission tasked with organising the gendarmerie (Cronin, 2008: 201). The formal recruitment of the Swedish military mission in 1910 marked a decisive turning point: approved by the National Consultative Assembly, the measure was justified primarily by Sweden's neutrality in global colonial rivalries. At a moment when imperial competition in Iran had reached its height, the selection of Sweden (i.e. a minor yet trusted European power) offered the Iranian state a calculated means of pursuing military modernisation without granting political concessions.

The first tangible result of this collaboration was the establishment of a state gendarmerie under Swedish command during the First World War. By 1915, the force numbered more than 7,000 men under the leadership of seventy-five Iranian and Swedish officers, and served as the country's only coherent military unit at the time (Miroshnikov, 1978, pp. 90–96). Its success in maintaining domestic order led the government to extend the contracts of the Swedish officers; in July of that year, a bill approving the continued service of six Swedish officers was submitted to parliament and ratified (Ghaem Maqami, 1976, p. 320).

Although initially concerned with military reconstruction, this phase of modernisation gradually extended its reach into political, social, administrative, spatial, and cultural domains. Foreign military officers and advisers stationed across Iran were not merely instructors. They also embodied Western lifestyles, spatial disciplines, and civilisational values. Concepts such as modern spatial order, administrative efficiency, and engineered aesthetics gradually entered the consciousness of Iranian administrators, community, and architects. Thus, the presence of Swedish officers within Iran's military institutions

can be read not only as part of an endogenous reform project, but also as an element in the geopolitical transfer of technology and culture under the guise of security diplomacy.

## **5.2. The Historical Background of Iran's Relations with the Scandinavian Countries**

Relations between Iran and the Scandinavian states, particularly Sweden, have in recent centuries been most visible in diplomatic, economic, and cultural cooperation. Their roots, however, extend further, into shared interests in heritage, archaeology, and security. These relations can be traced to the seventeenth century, when Safavid Iran drew the attention of European adventurers. Swedish travellers such as Bengt Oxenstierna and Nils Mattsson Kiöping visited Iran, exploring historic sites including Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam. At the same time, the diplomatic mission of Ludvig Fabritius to the court of Shah Abbas I marked the first significant step towards formal and commercial ties between the two countries. A gold coin from 1700, struck to commemorate Fabritius' presence in Isfahan, remains tangible evidence of these early exchanges (Motamedmanesh, 2022, p. 302; Nylander, 1979, pp. 345–359).

By the nineteenth century, Iranian-Swedish relations had moved beyond cultural contact. Amid imperial rivalries, smaller European states sought a place in the political geography of the Middle East through cultural, scientific, and security diplomacy, while Iran sought neutral partners for its development projects. Military and security ties between Iran and Sweden, as noted earlier, played a decisive role in establishing the national security. A further turning point came in 1920 with the formal establishment of the Iranian embassy in Stockholm, inaugurating a new phase of bilateral diplomacy (Embassy of Iran in Stockholm, 2017).

By the 1930s, Swedish scholars were active in linguistics, religious studies, and Iranian history. Figures such as Nathan Söderblom, Henrik Samuel Nyberg, Geo Widengren, Stig Wikander, and Sven Hartman laid the foundations of Iranian studies in Scandinavia and created an intellectual platform for cultural diplomacy between the two nations. The first Swedish-led archaeological excavations in Iran began in 1932, with surveys at sites such as Shah Tepe (Arne, 1945) and Takht-e Soleyman (von der Osten & Naumann 1961), advancing knowledge of ancient Iranian civilisations. The Swedish archaeologist Ture Arne assembled

collections of Luristan and Amlash bronzes and compared them with material from China, Italy, and Scandinavia, exploring the possibility of historic civilisational contacts (Arne, 1934; Marino-Hultman, 1974, pp. 61–65). From the 1960s, this activity expanded to include research by Swedish archaeologists on Achaemenid art and architecture (Nylander, 1970; 1966; Tilia, 1972).

### **5.3. The Role of Scandinavians in Development of Iran's Urban Infrastructures**

Technical and industrial collaboration developed alongside these ties. The Swedish company Verkstad Motala AB designed and built a steel bridge over the Karun River in Ahvaz in 1906, one of the earliest Scandinavian engineering contributions to Iran's infrastructure. The Danish construction firm Kampsax A/S contracted with the Iranian government in 1933 for the construction of the Trans-Iranian railway, employing a large number of Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish engineers and workers; the project was successfully completed in 1938 (Nouri & Soleymani, 2021, p. 83). Decades later, in 1964, the Swedish SKF Bearing Co. signed a contract to establish a bed-frame production plant in Iran, reflecting the sustained expansion of industrial cooperation (Embassy of Iran in Stockholm, 2017).

Beyond completing the infrastructures, Scandinavian firms, particularly Kampsax, played a formative role in cultivating Iran's emerging engineering sector. Newly established Iranian construction companies were entrusted with portions of the work, allowing them to learn modern building practices through direct collaboration with European engineers. At the same time, thousands of Iranian labourers received systematic training in contemporary construction methods, creating a skilled national workforce whose expertise continued to shape civil administration long after the project's completion (Andersen, 2008, 645). Indeed, Danish construction companies represented a notable feature of the interwar international construction landscape. Their ascent was instrumental in fostering post-WWI economic globalisation, a period marked by surging demand that propelled construction firms into expanded activity across domestic and foreign markets (Geoffrey, 2005, p. 119).

These collaborations must also be understood within their geopolitical setting. Scandinavian states, with their policies of neutrality, models of sustainable industrial development, and high international rankings in

transparency and governance, consistently ranked among Iran's preferred partners. During the reign of Reza Shah, when liberal economic policies and industrial modernisation programmes were pursued, conditions were especially favourable for attracting investment from neutral, development-oriented countries. Iran's strategic position, abundant energy resources, and large consumer market added to this appeal. Within this framework, Sweden—with its historical record of cooperation, absence of political entanglements, and focus on technological advancement—emerged as one of Iran's most trusted partners (IRNA, 2003).

#### **5.4. The Swedish Construction Firm SENTAB in Iran**

At the centre of these collaborations stood the Scandinavian consortium SENTAB (Svenska Entreprenad AB) of Stockholm. SENTAB was established by the Swedish engineer Jacob Mellegård, who came to Tehran as an engineer in the 1930s. The company secured major contracts under Reza Shah and contributed to the construction of the modern nation. Its work included key infrastructure and buildings across Iran, including bridges, hospitals, and roads. The University of Tehran and Mehrabad Airport in Tehran are among the company's best-known projects (Mellegård, 2020).

By the 1960s, SENTAB had become closely integrated with the Swedish construction giant Skanska (then known as Skånska Cementgjuteriet). Skanska, now recognised as one of the world's largest and most reputable construction companies, began operations in Malmö in 1887. Within a decade of its founding, the company undertook its first international commission, and it has since remained active in global infrastructure projects. Known for technical innovation, high standards, and an interdisciplinary approach, Skanska has helped shape the architectural and infrastructural landscapes of numerous countries. Its landmark projects include London's St. Mary Axe ("the Gherkin"), New York's Madison Square Garden, and parts of the city's subway system, developments that have consolidated its reputation as a major force in global construction (Skanska Annual Report, 2011). This international pedigree underscores the significance of SENTAB's involvement in Iran's modernisation projects, revealing that Pahlavi-era development drew directly on the capacities of a leading global construction firm (Figure 2).

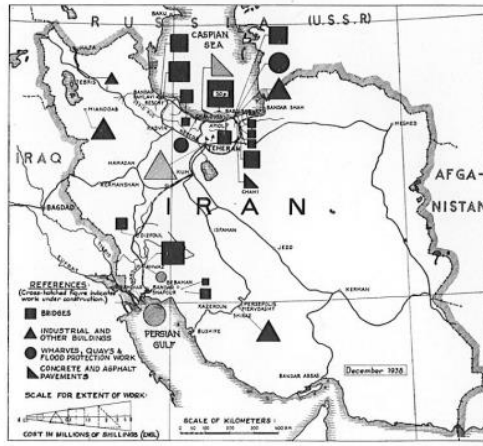


Fig 2. Map of buildings and infrastructure projects constructed by SENTAB (The Swedish National Archive)

#### 5.4.1. The Ahvaz White Bridge: A Paradigm of Structural Sovereignty

SENTAB's formal entry into Iran's infrastructural landscape was codified through a landmark twelve-article agreement, ratified on 7 June 1934. Signed by Mirza Ali Khan Mansur, then Minister of Roads and Communications, and Oscar Lindahl, representing SENTAB (Islamic Azad University), the contract exceeded the terms of a commercial transaction. It effectively mandated a transfer of "structural sovereignty," as the Swedish firm assumed comprehensive responsibility for the geotechnical surveying, architectural drafting, and subsequent construction of a massive bridge over the Karun River.

The pre-eminent achievement of this bilateral cooperation was the Ahvaz White Bridge (Pol-e Sefid). Completed in 1936, the structure stood as Iran's first steel suspension bridge and was reputedly the fourth of its kind globally. Architecturally, the bridge marked a clear departure from the lithic traditions of Persian masonry. Its technical distinction lay in the sophisticated integration of two substantial suspension spans, measuring 136 and 130 metres, with three 49-metre arch sections, producing a total length of 501.2 metres (Mojtahedzadeh, 2015, pp. 234-235). In contrast to the perceived stasis of traditional masonry crossings, this arch-suspension hybrid introduced structural elasticity and aesthetic lightness, facilitated by the German Krupp's advanced steel fabrication.

The five-part segmentation of the bridge demonstrates considerable technical command over the volatile alluvial conditions of the Karun riverbed, turning the structure from a functional crossing into a deliberate display of modern engineering adapted to the Iranian landscape. Its technological significance was defined by highly inventive on-site construction methods: "The foundation work involved the use of interlocking iron sheet piles driven by heavy hammers to create watertight cofferdams. Within these enclosures, the riverbed was excavated using pneumatic drilling and controlled dynamite blasting, followed by continuous dewatering to allow for the casting of reinforced concrete piers. These piers were designed as hollow structures, utilizing a dry-mix concrete that was manually vibrated by rhythmic hammering on the formwork to eliminate air voids... The assembly of the massive steel arches was a logistical triumph; half-arch segments were first prefabricated on shore using triangular wooden trestles and launched into the river over greased slipways. To achieve the millimetric precision required for the hinged connections, engineers utilized a large barge (dobe) as a primitive hydraulic lift—adjusting its buoyancy by filling and discharging water to raise or lower the heavy steel sections into position... Once aligned via a system of pulleys and tensioned cables, the segments were permanently joined with hot-driven rivets, creating a suspension-arch hybrid where the deck's load is entirely transferred to the primary arches through vertical tension rods" (Mohammadi, 1998, pp. 69-76) (Figure 3).

Given the technological constraints of the 1930s, this complexity established the bridge as a leading icon of modern engineering. Beyond its utilitarian function, the structure's enduring status as Ahvaz's defining urban landmark, with substantial cultural and touristic value, was formally recognised in 1999 through its inscription on the National Heritage List (No. 2493).

From a geopolitical perspective, the bridge's location was strategically chosen. By enabling the movement of commodities and personnel across the Karun, the structure anchored oil-rich Khuzestan more securely within the administrative and economic orbit of the central government. This was no small consideration, coming barely a decade after the suppression of Sheikh Khaz'al's rebellion, when the region's autonomy

had been forcibly curtailed and the state's authority over its southern peripheries remained a matter of active consolidation. The bridge therefore functioned as an instrument of soft power, projecting the image of a cohesive, technologically resurgent nation to local tribal hinterlands and to the expanding foreign interests within the regional oil industry.

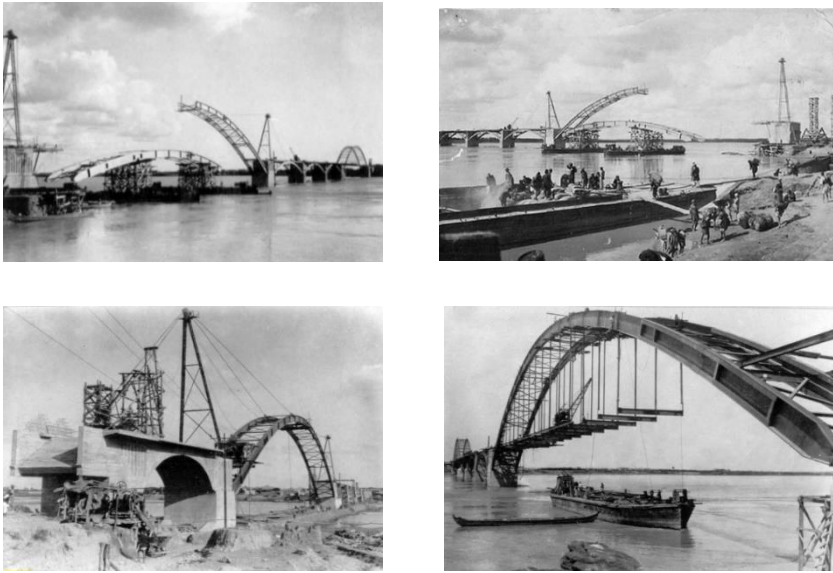


Fig 3. The construction of the Ahvaz White Bridge by Swedish engineers. Source: (Public Relations Office of Ahvaz Municipality)

#### 5.4.2. The Anzali Corridor: Mobility, Functionalism, and Territorial Control

Another significant expression of Iranian-Swedish cooperation during the First Pahlavi period was the construction of the strategic Ghazian-Mian Poshteh Bridge (Figure 4) over Anzali Lagoon. Erected between 1935 and 1937 through a consortium of Swedish and German expertise, these structures represented a model of functionalist architecture, carefully adapted to a pressing geopolitical requirement.

The project's defining architectural feature was its 25-metre movable steel span. This bascule or vertical-lift mechanism offered a sophisticated engineering response to a dual challenge: maintaining terrestrial connectivity between Ghazian and Anzali while ensuring that the maritime gateway to the Caspian remained open to large-scale naval

vessels (Azimi, 2020, pp. 286–287). The 210-metre structure combined reinforced concrete and steel, adopting a utilitarian aesthetic that privileged kinetic efficiency, a core tenet of the International Style that Swedish firms helped disseminate globally. Local folklore poignantly characterised the bridge as “eyes that blinked,” a poetic reference to the motion of its lifting spans, which eventually became an enduring element of Anzali’s urban identity.

Historically, bridge-building in northern Iran had been constrained by Qajar-era anxieties, as rulers often opposed infrastructural development for fear of facilitating foreign incursions. Under the Pahlavi administration, this isolationist stance gave way to an ambitious programme of modernised infrastructure. Within this new paradigm, the Ghazian Bridge emerged as a potent symbol of national integration and centralised state authority (Yousefi, 2020). The significance of these crossings extended beyond engineering utility. They established the first uninterrupted overland route connecting the Iranian cities of Rasht, Bandar Pahlavi (now Anzali), and Astara, as well as the wider Talesh region, to the Soviet-controlled territories of the South Caucasus. This corridor became a crucial axis for regional commerce and cultural exchange, and a strategic component of Reza Shah’s broader attempt to redefine Iran’s geopolitical posture along its northern frontier.

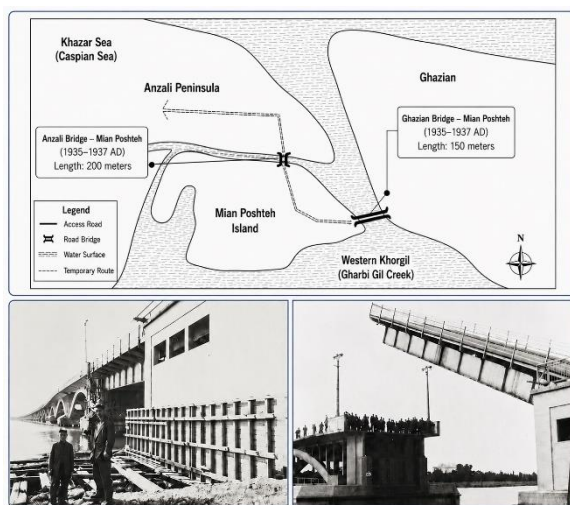


Fig 4. The Ghazian–Mian Poshteh Bridge during the First Pahlavi period. Source: (Azimi, 2020, modified by the authors)

### 5.4.3. Theoretical Synthesis: Bridges as Active Agents of Statecraft

Viewed through the lens of “infrastructural diplomacy,” these bridges appear not as neutral works of utility, but as active agents of statecraft (Fig 5). They served as primary instruments of territorial integration, transforming the Iranian landscape into a more coherent geopolitical entity. While the Ghazian-Mian Poshteh corridor functioned as a streamlined artery for trade with the Soviet Union and Europe, the Ahvaz White Bridge acted as a structural anchor for central government in the restive, oil-rich south.

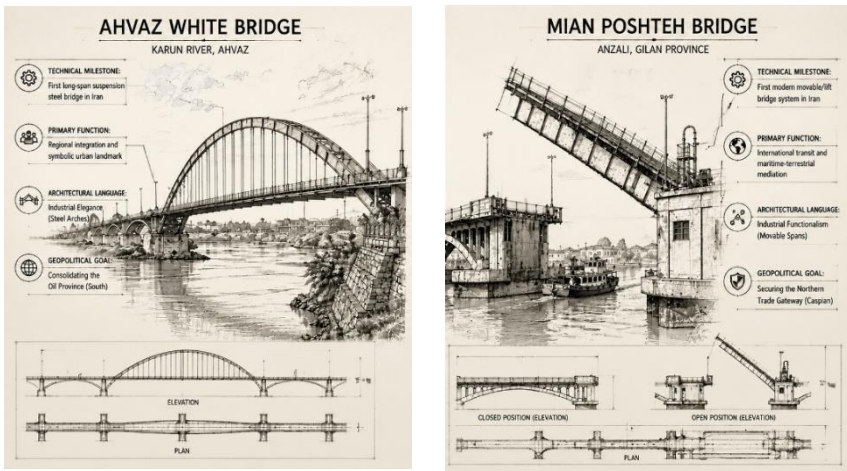


Fig 5. A comparative analysis of the Ahvaz White Bridge and Mian Poshteh Bridge. Source: Authors

By commissioning Swedish engineers, the Iranian state effectively bypassed the colonial overtones associated with British or Russian intervention. In the north, this neutral technology facilitated a “maritime-terrestrial mediation” that respected the fluid character of Caspian trade. In the south, by contrast, the suspension-arch hybrid of the White Bridge provided “visual permanence” and a monumental scale that challenged the dominance of foreign oil companies over the Khuzestan skyline. The architectural language of the two structures was therefore carefully calibrated: the industrial functionalism of Anzali’s movable spans prioritised kinetic efficiency and mobility, while the industrial elegance of Ahvaz’s steel arches emphasised stability and the symbolic “capture” of the Karun.

The convergence of formal freedom, technological innovation, and architectural respect for the natural landscape reveals the ideological complexity of these projects. Far from mere engineering feats, they materialised a state-led effort to recast Iran's identity at both regional and global scales. Within the framework of architectural diplomacy, the bridges functioned as mechanisms of soft-power projection, aligning the nation with the perceived advanced civilisations of the West while consolidating domestic unity during a period of intense international rivalry.

These projects were the iron and concrete manifestations of a resurgent Iran. Through the technical discipline of SENTAB, the Iranian landscape was reconfigured to support a centralised, modern state, fulfilling the theoretical promise of technology as a catalyst for profound socio-political transformation.

## **6. Discussion**

The architectural transformation of the First Pahlavi era was not merely a stylistic shift. It was the spatial manifestation of a deeper social and institutional reconfiguration. The emergence of Western-educated elites and the modernisation of economic structures generated new demands for urban spaces capable of accommodating the functions of a modern state. Hospitals, schools, railway stations and other public institutions developed under government supervision, became instruments of spatial geopolitics, communicating discipline, national cohesion, and Iran's aspiration to join the community of modern nations.

Modernity entered Iran initially through military and security channels. European officers, and Swedish advisers in particular, introduced concepts of order, efficiency, hierarchy, and spatial organisation that gradually extended beyond the military sphere into architecture, urban planning, and statecraft. This trajectory was later reinforced by foreign architects and engineers, together with Western-educated Iranian elites, fundamentally transforming the country's built environment. Within this process, Scandinavian construction companies, notably SENTAB and Kampsax, played a decisive role in redefining urban spatial structures and introducing modern building technologies. Their

involvement also carried a specific political significance. Because they were perceived as “neutral” in comparison with the dominant imperial powers, Scandinavian firms enabled Iran to pursue modernisation with a greater degree of strategic autonomy, a position later echoed in the country’s declaration of neutrality during the Second World War. Their participation therefore constituted a form of architectural diplomacy: a mode of soft geopolitics in which construction operated as a shared language of international collaboration.

Swedish firms functioned as cultural agents, not merely as contractors. The introduction of concrete, steel, and movable bridge technologies, together with simplified industrial forms, signalled an alignment with European modernist discourse and a departure from traditional design vocabularies. Equally important was the visibility of these large-scale projects in everyday urban life: their public presence operated pedagogically. As local populations witnessed the successful implementation of high-performance materials and complex structural systems in their own cities, initial scepticism towards unfamiliar technologies gradually diminished. These bridges were not simply technical milestones, rather they were performative demonstrations of efficacy. In this sense, they altered public perception, shifting the discourse from anxiety over technological disruption to acceptance of modern industrial logic as a credible and tangible standard of progress.

Exemplary works such as the two bridges studied here became living documents of transition, in which architecture served simultaneously as the language of the modern state and the instrument of modernisation. At the same time, the training of thousands of Iranian workers and collaboration with local contractors created durable forms of knowledge transfer, progressively displacing traditional building practices with an industrial and engineered logic (Moghassemi and Akhgar, 2022, p. 231). The architectural identity crisis of the period should not, therefore, be understood simply as rupture or loss. Rather, it marked a deliberate movement towards a new modern identity – one that used infrastructure as a medium of state authority, territorial integration and international representation, while also preparing society in terms of technique and institutional capacity.

## **7. Conclusions**

This study has shown that the modernisation of Iranian architecture under the First Pahlavi state was a multilayered process in which identity, modernity, and cultural geopolitics were closely intertwined. The participation of Swedish firms was instrumental in this transformation. They provided the technical expertise required for large-scale infrastructural development while also offering a politically “neutral” route to modernisation. Their role extended beyond that of contractors. They acted as cultural agents: conveyors of Western technologies, transmitters of new professional values, and mediators of an architectural language through which the modern state sought to represent itself.

At the theoretical level, this research advances a model of architecture as a site of negotiated modernity. It demonstrates that buildings and bridges were not neutral functional objects, but active participants in the reshaping of Iranian identity and the projection of geopolitical intent. Through infrastructural works, the Pahlavi state consolidated political authority, reorganised spatial order, and reconstructed Iran’s image at both national and international scales. Architecture thus became a medium through which modern rationality was materialised, territorial control was strengthened, and state power was reproduced.

An examination of Western participation in the making of modern Iranian architecture further reveals this process as part of a broader project of soft geopolitics. The contribution of Swedish companies, together with Western-trained Iranian architects and engineers, served as a catalyst in the formation of a new building culture; one that, despite its tensions, enabled Iran’s transition from inherited traditions to modern forms of spatial production. The case therefore suggests that the history of modern architecture in the non-Western world must be understood not only as a history of form, style, and material innovation, but equally as a history of political strategy, institutional negotiation, and the transfer of knowledge.

Ultimately, the Iranian-Scandinavian architectural encounter demonstrates that the built environment can function as a powerful instrument of cultural diplomacy and geopolitical signalling. By selecting partners outside the conventional circles of imperial power, the Iranian state used architecture to navigate a complex international landscape while leaving a durable imprint on the country’s administrative structures

and physical territory. This perspective opens further avenues for understanding the globalisation of architecture in local contexts, the role of international actors in shaping the built environment, and the redefinition of space itself as a cultural and political product.

#### **Author contributions**

The authors confirm the study conception and design: first author; data collection: second author; analysis and interpretation of results: first and second authors; draft manuscript preparation: first and second authors. The results were evaluated by all authors, and the final version of the manuscript was approved.

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#### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work. In addition, the ethical issues including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and, or falsification, double publication and, or submission, and redundancy have been completely witnessed by the authors.

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## Original Research Paper

# Transformation of cultural rituals in contemporary Iran: The role of Instagram in reshaping the celebration of traditional occasions

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## Abstract

The expansion of social media, particularly Instagram, has played a significant role in transforming the ways cultural rituals are experienced and represented in contemporary Iran. This study aims to elucidate the role of Instagram in the transformation of traditional rituals and to examine the impact of this platform's media logic on the form, meaning, and modes of enactment of cultural occasions. The study was conducted using a qualitative approach, and its data were collected through semi-structured interviews with active Instagram users who participated in this research. Purposive sampling was employed, and data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, which was ultimately achieved after 15 interviews. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the Braun and Clarke approach. The findings indicate that Instagram, as an active cultural intermediary, has contributed to the mediatization of rituals, the aestheticization of ceremonial practices, shifts in patterns of social participation, the individualization of ritual experience, transformations in symbolic meanings, and the strengthening of influencers' roles in redefining the ways rituals are performed. The results suggest that traditional rituals have moved beyond exclusively place-bound and collective frameworks and, within the context of the network society, have been transformed into visual, performative, and to some extent individualized experiences. In this process, rituals are not merely represented but are also reconfigured through interaction with Instagram's image-driven logic. Based on the findings, a form of "digital rituality" has emerged within the context of contemporary Iranian culture, in which traditional elements have become intertwined with new media mechanisms. This study demonstrates that understanding cultural transformations and the redefinition of identity in contemporary Iranian society is not possible without considering the role of digital platforms.

**Keywords:** cultural rituals, Instagram, digital rituality, network society, thematic analysis

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## مقاله پژوهشی

# تحول آیین‌های فرهنگی در ایران معاصر: نقش اینستاگرام در تغییر شیوه برگزاری مناسبت‌های سنتی

جواد مداحی مشیزی<sup>✉</sup>

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## چکیده:

گسترش رسانه‌های اجتماعی، به‌ویژه اینستاگرام، نقش مهمی در دگرگونی شیوه تجربه و بازنمایی آیین‌های فرهنگی در ایران معاصر ایفا کرده است. هدف این پژوهش تبیین نقش اینستاگرام در تحول آیین‌های سنتی و بررسی تأثیر منطق رسانه‌ای این پلتفرم بر فرم، معنا و شیوه برگزاری مناسبت‌های فرهنگی است. این مطالعه با رویکرد کیفی انجام شده و داده‌های آن از طریق مصاحبه‌های نیمه‌ساختاریافته با کاربران فعال اینستاگرام (مشارکت کنندگان این پژوهش) گردآوری شده است. نمونه‌گیری به‌صورت هدفمند انجام گرفت و گردآوری داده‌ها تا دستیابی به اشباع نظری ادامه یافت که در نهایت با انجام ۱۵ مصاحبه حاصل شد. داده‌ها با استفاده از روش تحلیل مضمون بر اساس رویکرد براون و کلارک تحلیل شدند. یافته‌های پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که اینستاگرام به‌عنوان یک میانجی فرهنگی فعال موجب رسانه‌ای‌شدن آیین‌ها، زیبایی‌شناختی‌شدن مناسک، تغییر الگوهای مشارکت اجتماعی، فردی‌شدن تجربه آیینی، تحول در معانی نمادین و تقویت نقش اینفلوئنسرها در بازتعریف شیوه‌های برگزاری آیین‌ها شده است. نتایج نشان می‌دهد که آیین‌های سنتی از چارچوب‌های صرفاً مکان‌مند و جمعی فاصله گرفته و در بستر جامعه شبکه‌ای به تجربه‌ای بصری، نمایشی و تا حدی فردمحور تبدیل شده‌اند. در این فرایند، آیین‌ها نه تنها بازنمایی می‌شوند، بلکه در تعامل با منطق تصویرمحور اینستاگرام بازپیکربندی می‌گردند. بر اساس نتایج، نوعی «آیین‌مندی دیجیتال» در بستر فرهنگ معاصر ایران شکل گرفته است که در آن عناصر سنتی با سازوکارهای رسانه‌ای جدید درهم‌تنیده شده‌اند. این پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که فهم تحولات فرهنگی و بازتعریف هویت در جامعه امروز ایران بدون توجه به نقش پلتفرم‌های دیجیتال امکان‌پذیر نیست.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** آیین‌های فرهنگی، اینستاگرام، آیین‌مندی دیجیتال، جامعه شبکه‌ای، تحلیل مضمون



## Original-Forschungsarbeit

# Der Wandel kultureller Rituale im gegenwärtigen Iran: Die Rolle von Instagram bei der Transformation traditioneller Formen des Feierns

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### Zusammenfassung:

Die zunehmende Verbreitung sozialer Medien, insbesondere von Instagram, hat eine bedeutende Rolle bei der Veränderung der Art und Weise gespielt, wie kulturelle Rituale im gegenwärtigen Iran erlebt, praktiziert und dargestellt werden. Ziel dieser Studie ist es, die Rolle von Instagram bei der Transformation traditioneller Rituale zu erklären und den Einfluss der medialen Logik dieser Plattform auf die Form, Bedeutung und Praxis kultureller Anlässe zu untersuchen. Die Untersuchung folgt einem qualitativen Forschungsansatz. Die Daten wurden durch halbstrukturierte Interviews mit aktiven Instagram-Nutzerinnen und -Nutzern (den Teilnehmenden der Studie) erhoben. Die Auswahl der Befragten erfolgte mittels eines gezielten Stichprobenverfahrens; die Datenerhebung wurde bis zum Erreichen der theoretischen Sättigung fortgeführt, die schließlich nach 15 Interviews erreicht wurde. Die Auswertung der Daten erfolgte mithilfe einer thematischen Analyse nach dem Ansatz von Braun und Clarke. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Instagram als aktiver kultureller Vermittler zur Mediatisierung von Ritualen, zur Ästhetisierung ritueller Praktiken, zur Veränderung von Mustern sozialer Teilhabe, zur Individualisierung ritueller Erfahrungen, zur Transformation symbolischer Bedeutungen sowie zur Stärkung der Rolle von Influencerinnen und Influencern bei der Neudefinition ritueller Praktiken beiträgt. Die Untersuchung verdeutlicht, dass traditionelle Rituale zunehmend ihre ausschließlich ortsgebundene und gemeinschaftliche Struktur verlieren und sich im Kontext der Netzwerkgesellschaft zu visuellen, inszenierten und teilweise individualisierten Erfahrungen entwickeln. In diesem Prozess werden Rituale nicht lediglich dargestellt oder reproduziert, sondern im Zusammenspiel mit der bildzentrierten Logik von Instagram neu konfiguriert. Auf Grundlage der Ergebnisse lässt sich feststellen, dass sich im Kontext der gegenwärtigen iranischen Kultur eine Form der „digitalen Ritualität“ herausgebildet hat, in der traditionelle Elemente mit den Mechanismen neuer Medien verflochten sind. Die Studie zeigt, dass ein Verständnis kultureller Transformationen und der Neubestimmung von Identität in der heutigen iranischen Gesellschaft ohne die Berücksichtigung der Rolle digitaler Plattformen nicht möglich ist..

**Schlüsselwörter:** kulturelle rituale, Instagram, digitale ritualität, Netzwerkgesellschaft, thematische Analyse

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## **1. Introduction**

Cultural rituals and ceremonial practices are among the most significant elements shaping the collective identity and historical memory of any society. In Iranian society, rituals such as Nowruz, Yalda Night, Muharram observances, Sizdah Bedar, and other national and religious ceremonies are not only prominent manifestations of Iranian culture but also serve profound social functions, including strengthening social cohesion, fostering a sense of collective belonging, transmitting cultural values across generations, and preserving emotional bonds within the contexts of family and neighborhood (Shayegan, 1383, p. 45). Within the socio-cultural fabric of Iran, where tradition and modernity are engaged in a complex interplay, these rituals have consistently functioned as dynamic and meaning-generating elements.

However, culture and its constituent elements are not static phenomena; rather, they are continuously reshaped through interaction with social, economic, and technological transformations. In recent decades, the expansion of communication technologies and the emergence of digital media have been among the most influential forces driving such cultural change. The development of the internet and social media has dramatically altered patterns of human communication and has given rise to a form of digital culture (Castells, 2010, p. 78). In Iranian society, Instagram, due to its visual and interactive nature, has become the most widely used social platform and has provided a new space for the representation of traditional rituals, both national and religious (Rezaei & Ahmadi, 1397, p. 62). For instance, Iranian users extensively share images and videos of Nowruz haft-sin tables, Muharram mourning rituals, Yalda Night celebrations, and other traditional occasions on this platform. This development raises an important question regarding the ways in which these rituals are represented within the Instagram environment.

The distinctive characteristics of Iranian society—including its young population, turbulent contemporary history, rich ethnic and cultural diversity, and particular media environment—suggest that the transformation of rituals in this context should not be understood merely as a reflection of global trends, but rather as a response to the specific historical, social, and political conditions of this society. In this regard, the active role of Iranian users in producing, disseminating, and

reinterpreting ritual-related content is of particular significance. Instagram users are not simply passive consumers of ritual content; rather, through specific modes of photography, narrative construction, and hashtag use, they participate in the reproduction and redefinition of cultural rituals. For example, the styles of decorating the Nowruz haft-sin table or the ways in which chest-beating and chain-beating ceremonies during Muharram are represented have been significantly influenced by patterns reproduced and circulated by users on Instagram. As Jenkins argues, new media, by enabling active user participation, have generated a form of "participatory culture" in which users play a role not only in consuming content but also in producing and reproducing it (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3).

Moreover, the spread of Instagram has affected not only the representation of rituals, but also the ways in which individuals participate in traditional occasions. Rituals that were previously conducted primarily in physical settings and within the framework of face-to-face interactions have now had part of their experience transferred to the virtual sphere. For example, participation in Muharram mourning ceremonies is no longer confined to physical presence in tekyehs and husseiniyehs; by sharing stories and posts from these events, users enact a new form of ritual participation whose nature differs from that of traditional participation (Giddens, 1991, p. 103). Similarly, the experience of Yalda Night is no longer limited to a family gathering, but has also acquired a dimension of public display on Instagram. This shift in patterns of participation raises important questions about its implications for the social functions of rituals, including social integration and collective solidarity (Turner, 1982, p. 94).

From a theoretical perspective, media are not merely tools for the transmission of information; they also play an active role in shaping cultural meanings and representing social realities (Hall, 2013, p. 55). This is directly related to the transformation of the symbolic and cultural meanings of traditional rituals in the process of media representation. Within the Instagram environment, the symbolic meanings of rituals—whether notions such as rebirth in Nowruz, sacrifice and martyrdom in Muharram, or gathering and joy in Yalda Night—become subject to reinterpretation and transformation. For example, when the haft-sin table is transformed from a symbol of blessing and renewal into a "visual

product" for display on Instagram, or when Muharram mourning is reduced from a collective act of faith to content intended to attract likes and followers, ritual symbolism becomes emptied of meaning and rituals are commodified. Such a transformation of meanings may have profound implications for the structure of collective identity, social cohesion, and the cultural memory of Iranian society.

The central issue of this study is not merely the "change" of rituals, but the problematization of these changes within the specific context of Iranian society. At first glance, the representation of traditional rituals on Instagram may appear to be positive and indicative of cultural dynamism; however, this phenomenon may also entail several negative consequences for Iranian society, which makes a critical examination necessary. These consequences include: the commodification of rituals, where they are transformed from symbolic and solidarity-building practices into "display commodities" whose value is defined more by their "display ability" and "likelihood of attracting likes" than by their deeper cultural significance; a crisis of meaning and symbolic emptiness, where rituals often retain their form while losing their deeper content and meaning; the weakening of social and solidarity-producing functions, as virtual interactions cannot fully replace the collective and embodied experience of rituals; the creation of a generational divide, as the older generation often cannot connect with the digitalized forms of these rituals; cultural standardization and the erosion of local diversity, as the algorithmic logic of Instagram tends to standardize rituals into uniform forms; and a potential impact on Iranian cultural identity, as the transformation of rituals in digital space may intensify cultural identity crises and weaken the connection of younger generations with their cultural roots.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that Instagram is not only a factor of change in cultural rituals, but may also provide a platform for their preservation and expansion. The widespread circulation of content related to cultural traditions and ceremonies on Instagram can increase public awareness of these rituals and strengthen the cultural memory of society (Jenkins, 2006, p. 140). However, the key question is to what extent, in the context of Iranian society, the destructive aspects of these transformations—particularly commodification, weakening of social solidarity, and identity crisis—outweigh their constructive aspects, and

what consequences this transformation will have for social cohesion and Iranian cultural identity.

Despite the importance of these developments, existing studies indicate that the relationship between Instagram and the transformation of cultural rituals in Iranian society has not yet been examined in a comprehensive and systematic manner. Many previous studies have either focused on the general impact of social media on culture or merely described cultural changes, without analyzing the problematic dimensions of these changes for Iranian society. As a result, it remains unclear exactly how Instagram influences the representation, experience, and performance of traditional occasions, and what consequences these changes have for cultural meanings, social functions, collective cohesion, and cultural identity in Iranian society.

Accordingly, the main problem of the present study is to examine the role of Instagram in changing the ways traditional occasions are experienced and celebrated in contemporary Iran. More specifically, it seeks to answer the following question: How does Instagram affect the ways traditional rituals are experienced, represented, and performed in Iran, and what consequences do these effects have for social cohesion, cultural identity, and collective memory in Iranian society? Drawing on qualitative interviews and the experiences of Iranian users, this study aims to show how Instagram contributes to the representation of cultural rituals, the redefinition of their modes of celebration, and the formation of new patterns of cultural participation—while also emphasizing both its positive and negative implications for Iranian society.

The significance and necessity of this study stem from several factors. First, changes in the ways cultural rituals are experienced and performed may affect their social and identity-related functions. In the past, rituals were grounded primarily in collective presence and direct interaction; in the context of Instagram, however, part of this experience has been transformed into mediated representation and digital display. As Giddens (1991, p. 64) argues, transformations associated with modernity and new media alter experiences of time, space, and social relations, and these changes in turn affect the formation of identity and cultural relationships. Second, the necessity of this study also stems from a clear gap in the existing literature. Although recent years have witnessed a growing body

of research on Instagram and culture, relatively few studies have directly and qualitatively examined Instagram's role in the transformation of rituals and traditional occasions in Iran. Third, the importance of this study is closely tied to the cultural conditions of Iranian society in the age of globalization. The expansion of global communication and the development of digital media have intensified cultural interactions and facilitated the circulation of new lifestyle patterns across societies. Understanding how Instagram shapes this process can therefore assist researchers, cultural policymakers, and cultural practitioners in developing more effective strategies for preserving, strengthening, and reproducing cultural heritage within the context of new media.

This study sets out to investigate how Instagram influences the representation, experience, and performance of traditional rituals in contemporary Iran. The primary objective is to explain the platform's role in transforming the ways cultural occasions are celebrated and lived. This overarching aim is pursued through four specific objectives: examining how traditional rituals are represented on Instagram; exploring how users contribute to the reproduction and redefinition of these rituals; analyzing the changes in patterns of participation in traditional occasions within the Instagram environment; and investigating the transformation of the symbolic and cultural meanings of rituals through their representation on this platform.

The central research question asks what role Instagram plays in reshaping the experience and performance of traditional occasions in Iran today. To address this, five subsidiary questions have been developed: How are traditional rituals represented on Instagram? In what ways do users participate in reproducing and redefining cultural rituals? What shifts have occurred in patterns of participation in traditional occasions due to Instagram use? How does the platform's representation of rituals affect their symbolic and cultural meanings? And how do users narrate their experiences of participating in traditional rituals within Instagram? By exploring these questions, the study seeks to offer a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between digital media and cultural transformation in Iranian society.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Domestic Studies

The transformation of cultural rituals in contemporary Iran, particularly under the influence of digital social networking platforms, has in recent years attracted the attention of scholars in sociology, communication studies, and cultural studies. Prior to the emergence of digital social media, Iranian researchers generally examined the transformation of rituals within the framework of the transition to modernity and broader structural changes in society. For example, Zokaei et al. (2016), in a study on the transformation of wedding ceremonies in Tehran, showed how processes of urbanization and individualization had affected the traditional forms of this ritual. Fazeli (2013), in his book *Cultural Studies of Everyday Life in Iran*, also addressed changes in patterns of cultural consumption in occasions such as Nowruz and religious festivals, and examined the role of traditional mass media in these transformations.

With the arrival of the internet and digital media into Iran's cultural sphere, researchers gradually began to pay attention to the impact of these developments on rituals. In a study entitled "Representation of Muharram Mourning Ceremonies in Cyberspace," Motamedi-Nejad and Rezaeizadeh (2017) demonstrated how blogs and early social networking platforms diversified modes of participation in this religious occasion. The study by Karimi and Shah-Qolian (2018) likewise indicated that the circulation of images and reports of religious rituals in cyberspace had led to the emergence of new forms of "performative religiosity."

From around 2016 onward, with the rapid expansion of Instagram users in Iran, greater scholarly attention was directed toward this platform. Rahmani and Mohammadpour (2019), in a qualitative study involving 30 active Instagram users in Tehran, found that Instagram had become an important tool for the "display of family rituals." Yazdanpanah (2020), in her research on young users in Tehran, showed that Instagram not only represents rituals but also contributes to shaping new norms for their performance. Some studies have focused specifically on the impact of Instagram on religious rituals. Sajjadi and Norouzi (2021), in a content analysis of 500 Instagram posts with hashtags related to Muharram and Safar, found that the representation of these ceremonies on the platform

had given rise to "digital mourning rituals," in which traditional elements are combined with modern visual formats. Ghasemi et al. (2020), in a field study conducted in Tehran, Isfahan, and Mashhad, also showed how the widespread circulation of images of religious processions and mourning ceremonies on Instagram had produced an implicit competition for the "visual spectacularization" of these rituals. National rituals such as Nowruz have likewise been influenced by Instagram. In a study entitled "Digital Nowruz: The Reconstruction of Nowruz Rituals on Instagram," Mirzaei and Farhangi (2022) analyzed the content of posts related to Nowruz. Their findings indicated the emergence of "new performative rituals," such as the widespread sharing of images of haft-sin tables, which in some cases had moved away from traditional elements and become more oriented toward visual appeal for Instagram audiences. Akbari (2021), in a study of families in Tehran, also found that the pressure to post "memorable" images of Nowruz celebrations on Instagram had led to changes in the manner of their performance and even in the costs associated with these rituals.

## **2.2. International Studies**

The study of cultural rituals' transformation under the influence of digital technologies and social networking platforms has garnered significant attention in international literature over the past two decades. International research in this area relies primarily on several theoretical frameworks. First, the concept of "identity performance," rooted in the work of Goffman (1959) and expanded by scholars such as Baym (2015) in the context of social networks, argues that social networks have become stages for the performance of individual and collective identities, and cultural rituals are reconstructed within these spaces. Second, the theory of "mediatization," developed by Hjarvard et al. (2015), examines the structural impact of media on changes in social and cultural forms.

A number of studies have addressed the impact of Instagram on everyday rituals and personal occasions. Marwick and Boyd (2011), in their seminal research on social networks, demonstrated how sharing images of life events on visually-oriented platforms leads to the creation of "new digital rituals" for occasions such as birthdays, weddings, and holidays. Laumann et al. (2018), in a comparative study of American and European Instagram users, found that the pressure to produce visually

appealing content from ceremonies like weddings has had a direct impact on related industries and has even led to a globalized standardization of the "Instagram wedding." The transformation of religious rituals under the influence of social networks has also been the subject of numerous studies. Campbell (2017), in the book *When Religion Meets New Media*, examines the phenomenon of "networked religion," showing how participation in religious rites through platforms like Instagram both helps expand faith communities and shifts the nature of participation from purely in-person to a hybrid of in-person and digital. Gillard (2020), in a study on the representation of Ramadan ceremonies on Instagram among Muslim communities in Europe and North America, points to the phenomenon of "digital fasting display," arguing that posting images of iftar tables and religious ceremonies has not only made the act of religiosity more public but has also led to the creation of new aesthetic norms for these rituals.

Examining the impact of Instagram on national and cultural rituals in various societies constitutes another segment of the international literature. Miller et al. (2016), in their extensive anthropological project on Instagram use in eight countries around the world, point to numerous cases of local ritual transformation under the influence of this platform. Chen (2019), in a study on the Chinese New Year celebration on Instagram, showed how related hashtags have helped create a "shared ritual space" among Chinese speakers scattered across the world, but simultaneously, some traditional symbolic elements have been simplified or distorted in digital representations. Several researchers, inspired by the concept of "communicative rituals" (Couldry and Hepp, 2018, p. 18), have analyzed the ritualistic content of Instagram. Papacharissi et al. (2020) have applied this framework to analyze Instagram challenges related to charitable causes, showing how these challenges reconstruct traditional collective rituals in a digital and global format. A portion of the international literature has also criticized the effects of social networks on cultural rituals. Turkle (2011), in *Alone Together*, warns that replacing deep ritual interactions with superficial displays in virtual space can lead to the erosion of authentic social bonds. On the other hand, studies such as Diaz-Andreu et al. (2021) on indigenous communities in Latin America have shown that Instagram can act as a tool for cultural resistance and the revitalization of rituals at risk of being forgotten.

A review of domestic and international studies indicates that although numerous researches have been conducted on social media, cultural identity, and lifestyle changes, there is a significant research gap on two levels: First, at the theoretical level, existing studies have primarily focused on broader frameworks such as "identity performance" or "mediatization" and have paid less attention to the systematic analysis of the transformation of symbolic meanings, social functions, and identity consequences of traditional rituals when confronted with the logic of visually-oriented platforms. Second, at the practical and methodological level, independent studies that specifically and qualitatively examine the role of social networks in changing the ways traditional occasions are performed within the Iranian context are very limited. This gap makes the necessity for independent and in-depth research, which can simultaneously explore the theoretical and fieldwork dimensions of this transformation in Iranian society, more evident.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

Examining the transformation of cultural rituals in the context of social media requires a theoretical framework capable of explaining both the social functions of rituals and the role of media in the representation and reinterpretation of culture. In the present study, the theoretical framework is organized around three principal axes: ritual theory, cultural representation theory, and network society theory, with additional perspectives from participatory culture and late modernity.

First, Victor Turner's ritual theory provides an important framework for understanding the social functions and symbolic meanings of rituals. Turner conceptualizes rituals as symbolic acts through which social values and identities are reproduced and through which individuals experience a shared sense of social belonging (Turner, 1982, p. 20). In Turner's view, rituals not only reflect the cultural structures of a society but also provide a basis for the formation of social solidarity. His concept of "communitas" refers to the sense of unity and solidarity that emerges among members of a community in the course of collective ritual practice (Turner, 1982, p. 45). From this perspective, rituals such as Nowruz, Yalda Night, and religious ceremonies in Iranian society are not merely symbolic phenomena; they also play a significant role in reinforcing cultural identity and social ties. More

specifically, Turner's concepts help identify the traditional functions of these occasions prior to the expansion of Instagram—including the production of cohesion, the reproduction of identity, and the creation of a shared emotional experience—and then examine which of these functions have been weakened, strengthened, or transformed in the shift to virtual space.

Second, Stuart Hall's theory of cultural representation draws attention to the role of media in the production and reinterpretation of cultural meanings. From Hall's perspective, media do not merely reflect reality; rather, they participate in the production of meaning through symbolic systems (Hall, 2013, p. 18). Hall emphasizes that media do not simply mirror culture, but actively construct meaning through framing, angle selection, and signifying practices (Hall, 2013, pp. 19–22). Within this framework, the images, videos, and narratives circulated on social networking platforms may be understood as part of a process of cultural representation through which the meanings attached to rituals and traditional occasions are reinterpreted.

Third, Manuel Castells's theory of the network society explains the broader structural context of these transformations. Castells argues that new communication technologies have given rise to a network-based social structure in which cultural and social interactions are increasingly organized through media systems (Castells, 2010, p. 92). Under such conditions, social networking platforms have become among the most important spaces of cultural interaction, enabling individuals to participate in the production, representation, and reinterpretation of culture. This theory helps explain why users now share their personal experience of a ritual in the form of Instagram posts or stories, and how such acts are tied to the platform's networked architecture—including followers, likes, and algorithmic visibility.

Alongside these perspectives, Henry Jenkins's concept of participatory culture is important for analyzing the role of users in digital environments. Jenkins argues that in new media environments, users are not merely consumers of content; they also participate in the production and reinterpretation of cultural meanings (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3). Consequently, social media users play an active role in the reproduction and redefinition of cultural rituals by sharing images, narratives, and personal experiences related to cultural occasions.

Finally, Anthony Giddens's perspective on the transformation of social relations in modernity is also important for understanding these changes. Giddens argues that modernity and the expansion of new media have transformed the experience of time, space, and social relations, and that these transformations also affect the formation of identity and cultural relationships (Giddens, 1991, p. 64). From this perspective, changes in the experience and representation of traditional rituals on social networking platforms may be understood as part of broader cultural transformations in the digital age.

Overall, the integration of these theoretical perspectives makes it possible to analyze the transformation of cultural rituals in the age of social media in a multidimensional manner. Ritual theory contributes to understanding the social functions and meanings of rituals; cultural representation theory explains the role of media in the production of meaning; and network society theory, participatory culture, and Giddens's account of modernity together illuminate the social and technological context of these transformations. These five lenses form an analytical matrix through which each Instagram post or interview segment can be coded simultaneously in terms of changes in ritual function (Turner), changes in representation (Hall), changes in communicative context (Castells), changes in user agency (Jenkins), and changes in the meaning and selective reconstruction of tradition (Giddens).

## **4. Methodology and Research Approach**

### **4.1. Research Approach**

In terms of purpose, this study is classified as applied research; in terms of its nature and the methods used for data collection and analysis, it falls within the category of qualitative research. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for the study of ritual transformations and their representation in virtual space because it emphasizes the understanding of meanings, lived experiences, and the interpretation of social and cultural practices. This approach makes it possible to investigate in depth users' experiences and perceptions regarding the impact of social networking platforms on the performance and representation of traditional rituals.

## **4.2. Data Collection Method**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviewing is a widely used qualitative research method that allows the researcher to follow a set of predetermined questions while also exploring participants' responses in greater depth and eliciting their personal experiences. This method facilitates a more nuanced understanding of individuals' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations concerning the representation and experience of traditional rituals on social networking platforms.

The interview questions were organized around four main themes: (1) users' experiences of posting or viewing ritual-related content on Instagram; (2) the platform's influence on how traditional occasions are performed; (3) participants' perceptions of changes in modes of cultural participation; and (4) users' awareness of the influence of the platform's algorithmic logic on their ritual practices. Each interview lasted approximately 35–45 minutes. With the participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

## **4.3. Population and Sampling**

The study population comprised Iranian users of Instagram who had experience posting, viewing, or interacting with content related to traditional occasions such as Nowruz, Yalda Night, and the rituals of Muharram. These occasions constitute some of the most significant cultural rituals in Iranian society and, in recent years, have been extensively represented on Instagram.

This study employed purposive sampling, specifically the maximum variation strategy (Patton, 2002, p. 234). In this approach, the researcher selects individuals who possess relevant experience or knowledge of the research topic and are able to provide meaningful information about the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2014, p. 189). The inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) being an active Instagram user with at least one year of continuous activity; (b) having experience posting or interacting with ritual-related content; and (c) willingness to participate in the study on an informed basis.

Accordingly, 15 Instagram users (8 women and 7 men, aged 22 to 54) were selected as research participants. Diversity within the sample was

considered in terms of gender, age, educational background (ranging from high school diploma to doctoral degree), and type of Instagram activity (ordinary user, content creator, and micro-influencer), in order to examine a range of perspectives on the representation of cultural rituals in this space. Participant selection continued until theoretical saturation was reached; that is, when newly generated data no longer contributed any substantially new themes or concepts to the analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136).

#### **4.4. Data Analysis Method**

The data in this study were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework. Thematic analysis is one of the most widely used methods in qualitative research for identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within data, and it enables the researcher to extract the principal themes associated with the phenomenon under investigation (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The six phases consisted of: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts; (2) generating initial codes from the data; (3) searching for themes by grouping similar codes together; (4) reviewing the themes and ensuring their internal coherence and external distinctiveness; (5) defining and naming the final themes; and (6) producing the analytical report (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

In this process, coding was conducted through a hybrid approach, combining deductive and inductive strategies. In other words, some codes were derived from the theoretical literature and conceptual framework (deductive approach), while others emerged directly from the data themselves (inductive approach). Through this method, patterns related to users' experiences of representing traditional rituals on Instagram, changes in the ways occasions are performed, and new forms of cultural participation in virtual space were identified and analyzed.

#### **4.5. Strategies for Enhancing Trustworthiness**

To ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation and to address concerns regarding neutrality, this study employed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

**Credibility:** To ensure that the research findings constituted an accurate and faithful representation of the participants' experiences and perspectives, the following strategies were employed: prolonged engagement with the research topic (six months of sustained, non-participant observation of ritual-related content on Instagram), member checking (participants reviewed a summary of key points and preliminary interpretations), and peer debriefing (findings were discussed with two peer researchers in related fields).

**Transferability:** To meet this criterion, the strategy of thick description (Geertz, 1973) was employed. Accordingly, the findings section presents detailed information on the participants' socio-cultural background, demographic characteristics, type and level of activity on Instagram, and the situational context of the interviews.

**Dependability:** To ensure this criterion, an audit trail was maintained. All stages of the research, including methodological decisions, the step-by-step coding process, changes made during analysis, and documentation of member checks and peer review, were recorded and preserved in written form. In addition, a researcher reflexive journal was prepared.

**Confirmability:** To meet this criterion, the following strategies were employed: researcher reflexivity (using the reflexive journal to record and examine assumptions, beliefs, and value positions), external audit (an independent researcher reviewed a random selection of codes, subthemes, and related quotations), and documentation with data references (all themes were supported by multiple direct quotations from participants).

#### 4.6. Ethical Considerations

In this study, the following ethical principles were observed: (1) obtaining informed consent from all participants through the provision of a research information sheet and the collection of signed consent forms; (2) ensuring anonymity and confidentiality by removing identifying information and using substitute codes (e.g., P-1, P-2, and so forth); (3) guaranteeing participants' right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences; and (4) storing the data in a secure environment and deleting the audio files after transcription.

#### **4.7. Participants' Demographic Characteristics**

In this study, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of users' experiences regarding the representation and transformation of cultural rituals on Instagram, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 users of this social networking platform. The sample consisted of 8 women and 7 men, reflecting a relatively balanced participation of the two groups. The participants ranged from 20 to 41 years old, with a considerable proportion consisting of young users in their twenties. In terms of educational background, most participants had higher education experience and included university students as well as holders of bachelor's and master's degrees. Considerable variation was also observed in participants' type of activity on Instagram; some were ordinary users, others were content creators, and some were directly involved in the organization of cultural or religious ceremonies. The duration of Instagram use among participants ranged from 4 to 10 years, indicating that most had relatively long-term experience with the platform.

### **5. Analysis and Discussion**

#### **5.1. Presentation of Findings**

Analysis of the interview data led to the identification of six main themes that reflect different dimensions of this cultural transformation. These themes are: (1) Mediatization of traditional rituals; (2) Aestheticization of cultural occasions; (3) Changing patterns of social participation; (4) Individualization of ritual experience; (5) Transformation of the symbolic meaning of rituals; and (6) The role of influencers in redefining cultural rituals. Table 1 presents the final coding structure and the organization of the extracted codes into subthemes and main themes.

*Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Interview Participants and Their Type of Activity on Instagram*

| <b>Participant Code</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Education</b> | <b>Type of Activity on Instagram</b>              | <b>Duration of Instagram Use</b> |
|-------------------------|---------------|------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Interviewee 1           | Female        | 23         | B.A.             | Ordinary user; posts occasion-related content     | 6 years                          |
| Interviewee 2           | Male          | 27         | B.A.             | Ordinary user; shares images of family ceremonies | 7 years                          |

| Participant Code | Gender | Age | Education          | Type of Activity on Instagram                                          | Duration of Instagram Use |
|------------------|--------|-----|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Interviewee 3    | Female | 22  | University student | Active user of occasion-related stories                                | 5 years                   |
| Interviewee 4    | Male   | 30  | M.A.               | Ordinary user; shares experiences of traditional ceremonies            | 8 years                   |
| Interviewee 5    | Female | 26  | B.A.               | Lifestyle content creator                                              | 6 years                   |
| Interviewee 6    | Male   | 29  | B.A.               | Content creator focusing on rituals and traditions                     | 7 years                   |
| Interviewee 7    | Female | 24  | B.A.               | Content creator focusing on Yalda and Nowruz table arrangements        | 5 years                   |
| Interviewee 8    | Male   | 35  | M.A.               | Cultural activist; involved in organizing religious ceremonies         | 9 years                   |
| Interviewee 9    | Female | 33  | B.A.               | Cultural activist in ritual-related programs                           | 8 years                   |
| Interviewee 10   | Male   | 38  | B.A.               | Involved in organizing Muharram ceremonies                             | 9 years                   |
| Interviewee 11   | Female | 21  | University student | Young user active in posting occasion-related stories                  | 4 years                   |
| Interviewee 12   | Male   | 20  | University student | Young user; reposts ritual-related content                             | 4 years                   |
| Interviewee 13   | Female | 25  | B.A.               | Active user sharing family ceremonies                                  | 6 years                   |
| Interviewee 14   | Male   | 41  | M.A.               | Adult user; mainly views and occasionally posts ritual-related content | 10 years                  |
| Interviewee 15   | Female | 37  | B.A.               | Adult user; posts images of family ceremonies                          | 9 years                   |

#### 5.1.1. Theme 1: The Mediatization of Traditional Rituals

One of the most important changes in how traditional occasions are experienced and performed is the mediatization of rituals within the Instagram environment. Many cultural rituals and occasions that were previously experienced mainly in family settings and face-to-face interactions are now represented through images, videos, and digital narratives on social media. In this context, Instagram has become a platform for displaying and circulating ritual experiences, and users share their personal experiences of these occasions with a broader audience by documenting and publishing ritual moments.

Based on the interview analysis, the mediatization of rituals is not limited to the publication of images and videos; rather, it has gradually become part of the very process of celebrating occasions. In other words,

in many cases, the experience of rituals now takes shape simultaneously with their online representation, and part of the meaning and significance of the ceremony is defined through the process of sharing it with others on social media.

This intertwining of "performance" and "representation" is clearly reflected in the participants' statements. One interviewee explains:

"Now, when an occasion like Yalda Night or Nowruz is celebrated, many people think from the very beginning about what photo to take or what story to post. In fact, part of the ceremony has become showing it on Instagram as well" (M-1, female, 23).

This statement reveals two simultaneous transformations: first, a change in the temporal sequencing of ritual experience, meaning that the media act of recording and publishing no longer occurs at the end of the ceremony, but from the outset becomes an organizing element that affects the arrangement, dress, and even timing of the event. Second, it redefines the "ceremony itself." The participant makes clear that Instagram display is no longer something external or additional to the ritual, but has "become part of the ceremony." In other words, the ritual now consists of two inseparable components: "physical performance" and "digital representation," neither of which is complete without the other.

As the data also show, this transformation is not limited to the mode of performance; it has also altered the audience of rituals. Another participant states:

"Before, ceremonies were mostly among family members, but now many people like to share moments from the occasion with others too. For example, they post a picture of the Yalda table or a video of the celebration on Instagram so that their friends can see it" (M-5, male, 26).

This quotation raises three analytical layers. At the first level, there has been a change in the "scale of the audience" – from "family members" (a limited, defined group with emotional ties) to "friends" and "others" (a broader, more heterogeneous network characterized mainly by weak ties). At the second level, a shift has occurred in the "motivation for participation": the phrase "like to share ... with others too" suggests that sharing is no longer a supplementary action, but has itself become an

independent desire and motive within ritual experience. At the third level, the quotation shows that being seen by the social network, and not only being physically together, has become one of the meaning-making elements of traditional occasions; it is as if the ritual remains incomplete without networked feedback.

Overall, these findings indicate that social media have redefined the boundary between the private and public dimensions of rituals. Rituals that were previously experienced within the framework of limited family relations are now, through digital representation, exposed to the observation and interaction of a much broader audience. As a result, traditional occasions have acquired a media function in addition to their earlier cultural and social functions.

### **5.1.2. Theme 2: The Aestheticization of Cultural Occasions**

A significant transformation in the conduct of traditional occasions is the increased emphasis on the aesthetic dimensions of these rituals within the Instagram environment. Participants in this study noted that the publication of photos and videos related to occasions such as Nowruz, Yalda Night, or family ceremonies on this social network has caused users to pay more attention than ever to the arrangement, color schemes, and visual appeal of ritual elements. In this context, traditional rituals are considered not only as cultural experiences but also as "visual stages" for representation in the digital sphere.

Based on the interview analysis, this aesthetic turn is not limited to a heightened sensitivity toward arrangement; it has gradually altered the operational priorities of the rituals themselves. In other words, Instagram's visual logic—with its emphasis on pictorial attractiveness, color harmony, and "shareability"—has now become a primary criterion in the preparation and performance of traditional occasions; a criterion that sometimes takes precedence over symbolic and spiritual aspects.

This shift in performative priorities is clearly reflected in the participants' statements. One interviewee explains:

"Now, many people try to arrange their Yalda or Haft-sin tables in a very special and beautiful way because they know they are going to take a photo of it and post it on Instagram. Sometimes, even before the ceremony starts, more time is spent on the arrangement just so the photos turn out better" (P-3, female, 22).

This statement reveals two simultaneous transformations: first, a shift in the logic of ritual arrangement, meaning that the criterion of "how the photo turns out" has become a decisive factor in how traditional tables are prepared. Consequently, the placement of ritual elements is no longer determined solely by their symbolic significance but by their visual impact within the camera frame. Second, there is a change in the "temporal economy" of the ceremony: the participant specifies that "more time is spent on the arrangement"—implying that the visual preparation phase consumes an increasing portion of the ritual's time, potentially detracting from the collective and spiritual interactions of the event.

As the data suggest, this evolution is not restricted to the individual level; a competitive social dynamic is also at play. Another participant narrates:

"When we see different photos of Yalda or Haft-sin tables on Instagram, we subconsciously try to make ours like them. It's as if a kind of competition for being more beautiful has been created" (P-9, female, 33).

This quotation presents three analytical layers: At the first level, a subconscious emulation occurs—users do not necessarily make a conscious decision, but "subconsciously" accept and reproduce the published visual styles as aesthetic benchmarks, indicating a deep internalization of Instagram's visual norms. At the second level, a homogenization of ritual styles emerges: the phrase "we try to make ours like them" suggests that local and familial diversity in ritual performance is declining, as a limited set of visual patterns that succeed on the platform gradually become universal standards. At the third level, the logic of competition replaces the logic of collective participation: the participant speaks of "a kind of competition for being more beautiful"—a dynamic in which the value of the ritual is measured not by the depth of the shared experience, but by the degree of its visual appeal compared to others.

In summary, these findings indicate that Instagram is not merely a platform for representing rituals but, by shaping aesthetic patterns, it actively intervenes in the performative nature of the occasions. By observing published images, users receive new ideas and templates for ritual design, which are then reproduced in the everyday experience of cultural occasions. Consequently, certain rituals have become more spectacular and visual than in the past.

### 5.1.3. Theme 3: Changes in Patterns of Social Participation in Cultural Rituals

The analysis of the interview data shows that the expansion of Instagram use has altered patterns of social participation in traditional occasions. Participants in this study noted that social media have enabled a form of symbolic and virtual participation that exists alongside face-to-face participation, extending the experience of cultural occasions beyond a purely physical framework. In such a context, the experience of rituals is no longer confined to bodily presence at the ceremony; rather, it continues through online interactions and adds a new dimension to social participation.

Based on the interview analysis, this transformation is not limited to the addition of a digital layer to traditional participation; it has also redefined the very concept of "presence" in ritual contexts. In other words, participation in rituals no longer requires physical co-location, and users can take part in the collective experience of occasions through digital acts such as sending congratulatory messages, reacting to stories, or sharing images. As a result, the boundary between being "present" and "absent" in cultural rituals has become increasingly blurred.

This redefinition of presence is clearly reflected in the participants' statements. One interviewee explains:

"Sometimes it happens that we cannot attend a ceremony or a family gathering, but when we see its photos and stories on Instagram, we feel that we are somehow present in that space. Even by sending a message or reacting to the stories, we participate in it" (M-6, male, 29).

This statement reveals two simultaneous transformations: first, the emergence of an "emotional presence" alongside physical absence. The participant explicitly states that despite not being physically present, he "feels" present in the space. This "sense of presence" suggests that the digital representation of rituals can substantially fill the gap created by physical absence and create a form of emotional closeness for the user. Second, there is an expansion in the scope of participatory action: the participant refers to "sending a message or reacting to stories" as forms of "participation," indicating that seemingly minor and low-effort digital actions—such as liking or commenting—are now accepted and legitimized in users' minds as genuine forms of ritual participation.

As the data show, this transformation is not limited to individual experience; it has also altered the social structure of participation. Another participant states:

"Now, when a ceremony is held, it is not only those who are physically there who are involved. Friends and acquaintances who are in other cities can also see it and react to it through Instagram" (P-11, female, 21).

This quotation raises three analytical layers: at the first level, a rupture has occurred in the traditional link between place and participation; participation in rituals no longer requires co-location, and "friends and acquaintances who are in other cities" can also join the circle of participants. At the second level, the circle of participation has expanded from "those present" to "observers": by stressing that "it is not only those who are physically there who are involved," the participant points to the fact that rituals now have two categories of audience—physical attendees and digital observers—and both have the right to be "involved" in the ceremony. At the third level, a redefinition of the notion of "collective gathering" is evident: the ritual "gathering" is no longer limited to individuals assembled in one place, but includes a broader network of people connected through the platform, each participating in the ceremony in their own way.

Overall, these findings indicate that Instagram, by enabling online interaction and participation, has expanded the scope of social participation in cultural rituals and transformed the experience of traditional occasions from a purely face-to-face framework into a hybrid experience of physical and digital interaction. While participation in rituals in the past was largely limited to physical presence within the group, digital interactions have now become a legitimate and meaningful part of the collective experience of occasions. This shift has expanded the audience of rituals and made it possible for more people—regardless of geographic constraints—to take part in their symbolic experience.

#### **5.1.4. Theme 4: Individualization of the Experience of Cultural Rituals**

The analysis of the interview data indicates that the extensive use of Instagram has led to a form of individualization in the experience of cultural rituals. Participants in this study noted that within the space of social networks, individuals often strive to represent their personal experience of these occasions in a distinct and unique manner. In such a

context, the experience of rituals—which was previously shaped primarily as a collective and shared experience within the framework of the family or the local community—has transformed, to some extent, into a more personalized experience, rooted in individual representation in the virtual sphere.

Based on the interview analysis, this individualization is not limited to selecting different visual styles; it has also extended to the logic of attributing meaning to rituals. In other words, the users in this study do not merely represent the ritual; rather, through choices regarding camera angles, content type, captions, and even the narrative style of the ceremony, they construct a personal narrative that reflects their individual identity, taste, and lifestyle. Consequently, beyond their long-standing cultural and social functions, traditional rituals have also become a platform for the performance of individual identity.

This shift from a "shared collective experience" to a "distinct personal narrative" is clearly reflected in the participants' remarks. One interviewee explains:

"I think everyone tries to show on Instagram that they have celebrated the ritual in their own style. For example, the photos they post are more indicative of their own personal taste and lifestyle" (M-4, male, 30).

This statement reveals two simultaneous transformations: First, the transition from "conducting a ritual" to "performing a ritual." The participant uses the phrase "celebrated in their own style," implying that the ritual is no longer a predetermined, repetitive pattern, but a stage for individual creativity and distinctiveness. Second, the redefinition of the ritual's function as an identity showcase: the participant asserts that the posted photos are "more indicative of... personal taste and lifestyle." This implies that rituals on Instagram have acquired a dual function: on the one hand, they reproduce cultural tradition, and on the other, they serve to showcase the user's distinct "self."

As the data illustrate, this transformation is not limited to the level of individual action but is intertwined with an awareness of impression management in the networked space. Another participant explains:

"When we post photos of these occasions on Instagram, we are actually showing what kind of lifestyle we prefer or how we want to be perceived" (M-12, male, 20).

This quote suggests three analytical layers: At the first level, representation occurs as a conscious identity-based action; by using the phrase "we are actually showing," the participant moves beyond mere description to the level of the agent's intent – posting ritual images is not a neutral act but a conscious choice to convey a specific identity message. At the second level, identity aspiration emerges: the phrase "what kind of lifestyle we prefer" indicates that Instagram representation is not necessarily a reflection of "who we are," but can be a projection of "what we want to be" – a gap between the actual self and the ideal self that the platform cultivates. At the third level, the logic of "being seen" as identity validation becomes apparent; the participant speaks of "how we want to be perceived" – an expression suggesting that in the age of social networks, individual identity is realized not just through "being," but through the process of "being seen," where the gaze of the other (the Instagram audience) plays a fundamental role in its stabilization.

In summary, these findings indicate that Instagram has provided a space where users can represent the experience of cultural rituals in the form of individual narratives. In such a context, rituals, in addition to being part of the society's collective memory and identity, also become instruments for the expression and performance of the users' individual identity. This trend represents a fundamental change in how traditional occasions are experienced and represented in contemporary Iranian society: from the collective "we" of the ritual to the represented personal "I."

#### **5.1.5. Theme 5: Changes in the Meanings and Symbols of Cultural Rituals**

The analysis of the interview data indicates that the expansion of Instagram use has not only affected the way cultural rituals are performed, but in some cases has also led to changes in, or reinterpretations of, the meanings and symbols associated with these rituals. Participants in this study noted that representing rituals on social media can cause certain symbolic elements to become more prominent while some of their traditional meanings become less visible. As a result, the ways in which cultural occasions are understood and interpreted among users are, to some extent, shaped by how those occasions are represented in virtual space.

Based on the interview analysis, this semantic shift is not limited to a mere redistribution of emphasis; it has also led to a redefinition of the

symbolic hierarchy within rituals. In other words, Instagram's visual and performative logic—centered on visual appeal and shareability—has gradually become a criterion for determining the "value" of ritual elements: what "looks good" in the frame or "gets more likes" becomes a prominent symbol, while meaningful but visually understated elements may be pushed to the margins.

This redefinition of symbolic hierarchy is clearly reflected in the participants' remarks. One interviewee explains:

"Sometimes I feel that on Instagram the appearance of the ceremony has become more important than its real meaning. For example, for Yalda Night, most of the photos are about the table arrangement or decoration, and there is less discussion about its meaning or background" (M-7, female, 24).

This statement reveals two simultaneous transformations: first, a shift from "meaning" to "appearance"—by contrasting the "appearance of the ceremony" with its "real meaning," the participant points to a gap in which the performative aspects of the ritual have come to outweigh its semantic dimensions. Second, it shows a redefinition of ritual content: by using the example of Yalda Night, the participant illustrates that in Instagram representation, "table arrangement or decoration" (visual and decorative elements) become the main focus, while "meaning or background" (historical and philosophical dimensions) are pushed aside—indicating a change in the discursive priorities surrounding the ritual.

As the data show, this transformation is not limited to the content that is published; it also includes the internalization of such representations. Another participant describes this process as follows:

"When we are exposed more and more to Instagram images and posts about occasions, gradually the same images we see become our understanding of that ceremony" (M-10, male, 38).

This quotation suggests three analytical layers: at the first level, a process of naturalization of representations occurs—the participant's use of "gradually" points to a slow process in which Instagram images are internalized in the user's mind not as partial and selective representations, but as the "reality" of the ritual. At the second level, direct experience is replaced by mediated experience: the phrase "become our understanding of that ceremony" indicates that for many users—especially younger generations—the ritual is no longer known through participation in the

actual ceremony, but through exposure to its digital images. At the third level, homogenization of perception becomes visible: because Instagram images often follow limited visual patterns, "our understanding" gradually becomes standardized and uniform, reducing the traditional diversity of interpretations surrounding rituals.

In sum, these findings indicate that Instagram has not only provided a platform for representing cultural rituals, but has also played an active role in the formation and redefinition of their meanings and symbols. While traditional rituals have historically carried specific historical, social, and symbolic meanings, their representation within social media may alter the way those meanings are foregrounded. As a result, some symbolic elements of rituals become more prominent in virtual space, while some of their deeper meanings receive less attention.

#### **5.1.6. Theme 6: The Role of Influencers in the Representation and Promotion of Cultural Rituals**

The analysis of the interview data indicates that another important factor in the transformation of the representation and experience of cultural rituals on Instagram is the role of influencers and high-reach users in this space. Participants in this study noted that many users, when exposed to content posted by influencers about cultural occasions, become inspired by the patterns presented by them and, in some cases, attempt to adopt similar styles in the performance or representation of rituals.

Based on the interview analysis, the influence of influencers is not limited to superficial imitation; rather, it has also led to a redefinition of the aesthetic and performative standards of rituals. In other words, by posting images and videos of occasions such as Nowruz, Yalda Night, and other cultural rituals, influencers not only create new patterns for displaying these occasions in virtual space, but also gradually institutionalize criteria in users' minds for what counts as a "proper" or "beautiful" way of performing a ritual. These criteria include the arrangement of ritual elements, the style of photography, the narrative form of the ceremony, and even the way content is presented in the form of posts or stories.

This redefinition of standards is clearly reflected in the participants' remarks. One interviewee explains:

"Many times, when influencers post pictures of the Haft-Sin table or Yalda Night, others get ideas from those models as well. Some even try to carry out exactly the same arrangement in their own ceremony" (M-8, male, 35).

This statement reveals two simultaneous transformations: first, a shift from inspiration to precise imitation – by saying that some people "try to carry out exactly the same arrangement," the participant indicates that the influence of influencers sometimes goes beyond simple idea generation and extends to the concrete reproduction of the models presented. Second, there is a change in the logic of ritual creativity: traditionally, rituals were often performed within a flexible framework that allowed for local innovation, but the precise imitation of influencer-based models suggests that a logic of standardization is increasingly replacing local diversity.

As the data show, this influence is not limited to the level of individual action; it also helps shape the dominant discourse surrounding the representation of rituals. Another participant states:

"I think influencers largely determine what kind of images of occasions become common on Instagram. Many users also follow the same style of photographing or displaying the ceremony" (M-14, male, 41).

This quotation raises three analytical layers: at the first level, the discursive power of influencers becomes visible – by using the term "determine," the participant points to the active and directive role of influencers in shaping what becomes "common"; that is, they are not merely reflecting existing trends, but producing new ones. At the second level, a process of stylistic homogenization emerges: the phrase "follow the same style" shows that ordinary users, rather than creating their own styles, tend to adopt the patterns already defined by influencers – a tendency that reduces diversity in the representation of rituals. At the third level, the redefinition of criteria for "desirability" becomes apparent: what influencers publish gradually becomes a standard for what counts as a "good" representation of a ritual, and users, in pursuit of social approval (likes, comments), unconsciously move toward those standards.

In sum, these findings show that influencers on Instagram function as an important factor in shaping how cultural rituals are represented and experienced in virtual space, and that through the presentation of specific visual and narrative models, they influence the way these occasions are displayed and interpreted among users. The process of representing rituals

on Instagram is not merely the result of individual user action, but is to some extent shaped by the models presented by high-reach users as well.

## **5.2. Interpretation and Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study indicate that Instagram functions as more than a simple communication tool; it acts as a cultural mediator that has redefined the nature, form, and meaning of traditional rituals in contemporary Iran. The analysis of the six themes extracted from the interview's points to the emergence of a form of "digital rituality," in which the boundary between physical and virtual space, as well as between the private and the public, has become significantly blurred.

The findings related to the mediatization and aestheticization of rituals (Themes 1 and 2) indicate that media logic has come to dominate ritual logic. As participants noted, users are "thinking about photos and stories from the very beginning" (M-1), and the main criterion in arranging ritual tables is that "it should turn out well in a photo" (M-3). These data suggest that rituals, which previously had inward-looking and collective functions within relatively closed settings, have now been transformed into "visual events" designed to be seen. This finding is consistent with Hall's theory of representation: media representation is not merely a reflection of reality, but itself becomes part of the ritual reality. More precisely, a ritual is considered "complete" when its digital representation is realized in the form of a post or story—an observation also acknowledged by the participants in this study. By privileging visual dimensions, Instagram has pushed users toward a kind of staged ceremonialism in which arrangement and aesthetic appeal take precedence over symbolic depth. In this regard, participants explicitly referred to the unconscious imitation of images shared on Instagram and to a "competition to be more beautiful" (M-9), pointing to the gradual internalization of this visual logic in users' minds.

The changes observed in patterns of participation (Theme 3) support Castells's view of the "network society." The findings showed that participation in rituals has shifted from a form of "fixed physical presence" to a more fluid "networked presence." Participants described sending messages, viewing stories, and reacting to them as "a kind of participation" (M-6), and emphasized that "by watching the stories of a ceremony, it feels as if you have been present there" (M-11). These

statements clearly demonstrate that Instagram, by enabling symbolic participation through likes, comments, and shared stories, has removed the temporal and spatial limitations traditionally associated with rituals. As a result, local or family-based rituals have acquired translocal and even global dimensions: participants are no longer limited to those physically present at the ceremony; rather, anyone connected to the digital network can share in the ritual through digital acts. At the same time, however, as some interviewees implicitly suggested, this form of participation is based less on deep face-to-face interaction than on short-lived visual exchanges, which may contribute to a certain superficiality in social ties during ritual occasions.

The findings associated with the individualization of the ritual experience (Theme 4) indicate that traditional rituals have been transformed into instruments for "identity reflexivity." According to Giddens's theory of late modernity, personal identity is conceived as a reflexive project that the individual must continuously construct and maintain. The empirical data from this study substantiate this perspective within the context of contemporary Iranian rituals. Participants observed that "everyone tries to show that they have held the ceremony in their own style," and that the shared images "mostly reflect their own taste and lifestyle" (M-4). Crucially, one interviewee explicitly pointed to the underlying logic of visibility, stating that by publishing these images, users "show what kind of lifestyle they like or how they want to be seen" (M-12). These findings suggest that Iranian users employ national rituals—such as Nowruz and Yalda—as symbolic resources to construct their "personal narrative" and showcase their "lifestyle" on Instagram. Consequently, the ritual is no longer merely a collective obligation to preserve tradition; rather, it becomes an opportunity for expressing individual distinction and taste. This dynamic often highlights the tension between the "actual self" and the "idealized self" as staged in the digital performance.

The findings regarding the shifting meanings of rituals and the role of influencers (Themes 5 and 6) reveal the emergence of a new form of "cultural authority." Whereas family elders or historical texts historically held semantic authority over rituals, today digital influencers act as opinion leaders, defining new standards for how rituals should be performed and what they signify. As participant M-14 remarked:

"Influencers largely determine what kind of images of occasions become common," and ordinary users "follow the same style of photographing or displaying the ceremony." This phenomenon can be analyzed through the lens of Jenkins's "convergence culture," wherein user-generated content and influencer curation shift the boundaries of tradition, transforming the ritual into a commodified cultural and media product. Furthermore, drawing on Turner's ritual theory, while rituals are inherently processual and subject to transition, the transformation observed on Instagram is not merely a gradual shift, but a rapid, homogenized reinvention of ritual symbols. Importantly, the participants themselves demonstrated an acute awareness of this shift: "Gradually, the very images we see become our perception of that ceremony" (M-10). This reflection clearly illustrates the internalization of representations and the replacement of direct, lived experience with mediated experience.

### **5.3. Conclusion of the Discussion: Digital Detraditionalization and Reconfiguration**

Taken together, this study demonstrates that the transformation of cultural rituals in contemporary Iran is a complex process of digital "detraditionalization." While Instagram has contributed to the visibility and preservation of certain rituals, it has simultaneously commodified and aestheticized them, altering the sacred and historical essence of the ritual in favor of media appeal.

However, contrary to pessimistic discourses that lament the "decline of tradition," our findings suggest that what is occurring is not the destruction of rituals, but rather their reconfiguration into a new format aligned with the digital lifeworld. These rituals remain meaningful to participants, but their meaning is now actively negotiated through interaction with social media logic.

These insights are highly relevant for cultural policymakers and social scientists. They demonstrate that the continuity of traditional culture in Iran is now deeply intertwined with the mediation of digital platforms. Consequently, any strategic planning aimed at preserving or promoting cultural heritage must place this new digital reality at the center of its analysis.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1. Summary of Findings

The thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 active Instagram users revealed six primary themes concerning the transformation of Iranian cultural rituals. Collectively, these findings point to the emergence of "digital rituality" as a new paradigm in the contemporary experience of traditional occasions. The research findings can be synthesized across three distinct analytical levels:

**Transformation in the Form and Performance of Rituals:** The theme of the "mediatization of rituals" demonstrates that the inherent logic of Instagram—characterized by its emphasis on visuality, aesthetic presentation, and attention economy—directly shapes how traditional occasions are performed. Users do not celebrate rituals merely for their own sake, but rather for their "mediatized representation." This shift is further reflected in the "aestheticization of cultural occasions." Within this process, the performative priorities of rituals have shifted; visual criteria suitable for digital dissemination (lighting, composition, visual cohesion) frequently overshadow traditional symbolic and spiritual dimensions.

**Transformation in Patterns of Participation and Experience:** The themes of "changing patterns of social participation" and the "individualization of the ritual experience" collectively indicate that rituals have transitioned from "spatially bound collective events" to "individual-centered networked experiences." On the one hand, Instagram expands the scope of participation beyond the immediate family and neighborhood to an unlimited audience (symbolic networked participation). On the other hand, this networked form of participation leads to the individualization of experience, as users personalize rituals to align with their digital identities. This duality exemplifies what Castells conceptualizes as "networked individualism."

**Transformation in Meaning and Cultural Authority:** The theme of "the transformation of symbolic meaning" indicates that ritual symbols acquire new semantic layers as they transition into the digital space. For instance, elements of the Haft-Sin table that possess higher visual appeal are foregrounded, while less photogenic elements may be marginalized. This process of the "mediatized redefinition of meaning" (Hall, 2013) is

reinforced by "the role of influencers in redefining rituals." By creating new patterns for celebrating these occasions, influencers act as newly emerged cultural authorities. Consequently, ordinary users appropriate these models, actively reproducing and reconstructing rituals through a collaborative process of convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006).

## **6.2. Theoretical and Policy Implications**

Taken together, these findings suggest that the transformation of cultural rituals in contemporary Iran should not be interpreted simply as the "decline of tradition," but rather as a process of "digital reconfiguration." Digital rituality represents a paradoxical condition: while rituals undergo "detraditionalization" under the influence of social media logic, they simultaneously experience "re-traditionalization" (continuity and expansion) in new formats. This dynamic aligns with Giddens's (1991) concept of "reflexivity of tradition" under the conditions of late modernity.

This study demonstrates that to understand cultural shifts in contemporary Iran, digital platforms—particularly Instagram—must be viewed not as neutral tools, but as active agents in the cultural field. Through its specific architecture (algorithms, follower counts, likes), Instagram shapes tastes, norms, and even the core meanings of traditional rituals. From a cultural policy perspective, these findings warn that cultural institutions cannot remain indifferent to platform-mediated transformations. The younger generation increasingly acquires and reproduces traditions through these digital platforms rather than through formal, state-led institutions.

## **6.3. Limitations of the Study**

Despite efforts to conduct a rigorous and systematic study, this research faced several limitations:

1. The number of participants was limited to 15, which, although appropriate for qualitative research, restricts the generalizability of the findings to the broader population.
2. The study focused exclusively on Instagram, while other influential platforms such as Telegram and TikTok were not examined.
3. The sample primarily consisted of urban and educated users, which may not fully represent the experiences of other social groups.

4. The data were based on participants' self-reports, which may involve a degree of narrative bias.

Nevertheless, the aim of the study was not statistical generalization, but rather to provide a deeper understanding of users' lived experiences in relation to digital rituals.

#### **6.4. Suggestions for Future Research**

Based on the findings of this study, the following directions are proposed for future research:

1. **Comparative Platform Analysis:** Future studies should conduct comparative analyses across various social media platforms (e.g., Telegram, TikTok, YouTube) to explore how differing platform architectures and algorithms uniquely shape the transformation of rituals.

2. **Mixed-Methods and Large-Scale Quantitative Studies:** Utilizing large-scale survey designs would allow researchers to measure the extent of public attitude shifts toward traditional rituals and statistically generalize these behavioral trends.

3. **Cross-Cultural Studies:** Comparative, cross-cultural research is recommended to examine the digital transformation of rituals in Iran alongside other transitional societies experiencing rapid digital modernization.

4. **Intergenerational Analysis:** Research focusing on cohort-specific dynamics (e.g., Generation Z, Millennials, and older generations) would help identify and analyze generational divergence in the reception, performance, and experience of digital rituals.

5. **Political Economy of Digital Rituals:** Future inquiries should independently investigate the digital economy, exploring the commercialization, monetization, and brand sponsorship of traditional cultural events on platforms like Instagram.

**Conflict of Interest**

The author declare no potential conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work.

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## Original Research Paper

# Semantic sovereignty in large language models: Auditing the representation of persianate and Shi'i meanings across languages

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## Abstract

Large language models increasingly translate, summarize, and explain traditions they have not inherited. This study develops semantic sovereignty as a framework for testing whether multilingual models preserve Persianate and Shi'i meanings or relocate them into dominant Anglophone interpretive regimes. A bounded cross-lingual mixed-method audit examined 120 purposively selected units from Rumi, Hafez, Ferdowsi, and Shi'i hermeneutics. Four model systems, blinded during expert scoring, were tested under Persian-only, English-only, cultural-context, and expert-context conditions, with two runs per prompt, yielding 3,840 outputs. A three-member disciplinary panel applied a 0–4 Semantic Preservation Scale and a multi-label error taxonomy; mutually exclusive percentages summarize each output's adjudicated dominant error. Across 16 model-by-domain cells, the mean score was 2.53/4.00 (SD = 0.38). Rumi was frequently psychologized into global spirituality, Hafez was over-clarified, Ferdowsi was depoliticized into leadership language, and Shi'i concepts were flattened into generic religious vocabulary. Expert-context prompts produced the strongest descriptive means, but displacement persisted. Because product identities, exact access dates, complete raw transcripts, and output-level scores were not retained, the analysis is descriptive and bounded rather than inferential or product-reproducible. Multilingual AI should therefore be evaluated not only for linguistic performance or cultural bias, but for hermeneutic accountability: preserving metaphor, doctrine, ambiguity, register, authority, and civilizational memory. The study contributes a culturally grounded audit framework for identifying subtle semantic loss across languages.

**Keywords:** semantic sovereignty, Persianate studies, large language models, Shi'i hermeneutics, cultural AI audit

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## مقاله پژوهشی

# حاکمیت معنایی در مدل‌های زبانی بزرگ: ممیزی معنای ایرانی-اسلامی و شیعی در میان زبان‌ها

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دریافت: ۱۴۰۴/۰۶/۰۵؛ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۴/۰۹/۱۶

## چکیده:

مدل‌های زبانی بزرگ سنت‌هایی را ترجمه و تبیین می‌کنند که وارث تاریخی آن‌ها نیستند. این پژوهش «حاکمیت معنایی» را چارچوبی برای سنجش حفظ معنای ایرانی-اسلامی و شیعی یا انتقال آن‌ها به تفسیر مسلط انگلیسی می‌داند. یک ممیزی ترکیبی و میان‌زبانی، ۱۲۰ واحد هدفمند از مولانا، حافظ، فردوسی و هرمنوتیک شیعی را بررسی کرد. چهار سامانه ناشناس برای ارزیابان، در وضعیت‌های فارسی، انگلیسی، فرهنگی و تخصصی آزموده شدند؛ اجرای دوگانه دستورها ۳۸۴۰ خروجی ایجاد کرد. هیئتی سه‌نفره، مقیاس صفر تا چهار حفظ معنایی و رده‌بندی چندبرچسبی خطاها را به کار برد؛ درصد‌های متقابلاً انحصاری نیز خطای غالب دآوری شده هر خروجی را خلاصه می‌کنند. میانگین ۱۶ سلول مدل-حوزه ۲،۵۳ از ۴،۰۰ بود (انحراف معیار = ۰،۳۸). مولانا غالباً به معنویت جهانی و روان‌شناختی تقلیل یافت، حافظ بیش از حد توضیح داده شد، فردوسی در زبان رهبری مدرن سیاست‌زدایی شد و مفاهیم شیعی به واژگان عمومی دینی فروکاسته شدند. زمینه تخصصی بالاترین میانگین‌های توصیفی را ایجاد کرد، اما جابه‌جایی باقی ماند. چون هویت محصولات، تاریخ‌های دقیق دسترسی، متن کامل خروجی‌ها و امتیازهای سطح خروجی حفظ نشده‌اند، تحلیل توصیفی و محدود است و ادعای استنباط آماری یا بازتولیدپذیری محصول محور ندارد. بنابراین، هوش مصنوعی چندزبانه باید افزون بر عملکرد زبانی و سوگیری فرهنگی، از منظر پاسخ‌گویی هرمنوتیکی، حفظ استعاره، آموزه، ابهام، لحن، اقتدار و حافظه تمدنی، ارزیابی شود. مطالعه چارچوبی فرهنگی برای شناسایی فقدان معنا میان زبان‌ها ارائه می‌کند.

واژه‌های کلیدی: آیین‌های فرهنگی، اینستاگرام، آیین‌مندی دیجیتال، جامعه شبکه‌ای، تحلیل مضمون

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## Original-Forschungsarbeit

# Semantische souveränität in großen Sprachmodellen: Prüfung persianischer und schiitischer Bedeutungen über Sprachgrenzen hinweg

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### Zusammenfassung:

Große Sprachmodelle übersetzen, verdichten und erläutern zunehmend Traditionen, deren historische Träger oder Erben sie nicht sind. Diese Studie entwickelt semantische Souveränität als Rahmen, um zu prüfen, ob multilinguale Modelle persianische und schiitische Bedeutungen bewahren oder in dominante anglophone Interpretationsordnungen verlagern. Ein begrenztes, sprachübergreifendes Mixed-Methods-Audit untersuchte 120 gezielt ausgewählte Einheiten aus Rumi, Hafis, Ferdowsi und der schiitischen Hermeneutik. Vier während der Expertenbewertung verblindete Modellsysteme wurden unter vier Bedingungen getestet: nur Persisch, nur Englisch, kultureller Kontext und Expertenkontext. Jeder Prompt wurde zweimal ausgeführt, wodurch 3.840 Ausgaben entstanden. Ein dreiköpfiges Fachgremium verwendete eine Skala der semantischen Bewahrung von 0 bis 4 sowie eine mehrdimensionale Fehlertaxonomie; die sich gegenseitig ausschließenden Prozentwerte fassen den jeweils adjudizierten dominanten Fehler zusammen. Über 16 Modell-Domänen-Zellen betrug der Mittelwert 2,53 von 4,00 Punkten (SD = 0,38). Rumi wurde häufig zu globaler, psychologisierter Spiritualität verengt, Hafis übermäßig vereindeutigt, Ferdowsi in moderne Führungssprache entpolitisiert und schiitische Begriffe auf allgemeines religiöses Vokabular reduziert. Expertenkontext erzeugte die höchsten deskriptiven Mittelwerte, doch semantische Verschiebung blieb bestehen. Da Produktidentitäten, genaue Zugriffsdaten, vollständige Rohprotokolle und Bewertungen auf Ausgabenebene nicht aufbewahrt wurden, ist die Analyse deskriptiv und begrenzt; sie beansprucht weder statistische Inferenz noch produktspezifische Reproduzierbarkeit. Multilinguale KI sollte daher nicht nur nach sprachlicher Leistung oder kultureller Verzerrung, sondern auch nach hermeneutischer Verantwortlichkeit beurteilt werden: nach der Bewahrung von Metapher, Doktrin, Mehrdeutigkeit, Register, Autorität und zivilisatorischem Gedächtnis. Die Studie bietet damit einen kultursensiblen Audit-Rahmen zur Erkennung subtiler Bedeutungsverluste zwischen Sprachen.

**Schlüsselwörter:** kulturelle rituale, Instagram, digitale ritualität, Netzwerkgesellschaft, thematische Analyse

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## 1. Introduction

Large language models increasingly act as unofficial translators of civilization, yet fluent paraphrase can conceal the relocation of culturally saturated meaning. Terms such as ‘erfān, velāyat, ta’wīl, rindī, farrah, and ‘adl are not detachable lexical units; they carry poetic, sacred, juridical, and political histories. The question is therefore not only whether LLMs translate Persian correctly, but whether they preserve the interpretive conditions through which Persianate and Shi’i meanings remain intelligible (Bender & Koller, 2020; Tao et al., 2024).

Transformer-based systems were designed for sequence modelling rather than adjudicating inherited layers of meaning (Vaswani et al., 2017; Devlin et al., 2019). Although multilingual models show strong cross-lingual performance, training data, tokenization, alignment resources, and evaluation remain unequal (Qin et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025). Persian is especially revealing: it is civilizationally dense but computationally uneven, and its benchmarks expose variable performance across reasoning, knowledge, and language-specific tasks (Abaskohi et al., 2024; Farahani et al., 2021). Research also places culturally unspecified LLM outputs near dominant Western or Anglophone value regions, so linguistic fluency cannot establish cultural adequacy (Durmus et al., 2023; Tao et al., 2024). Figure 1 visualizes this problem.

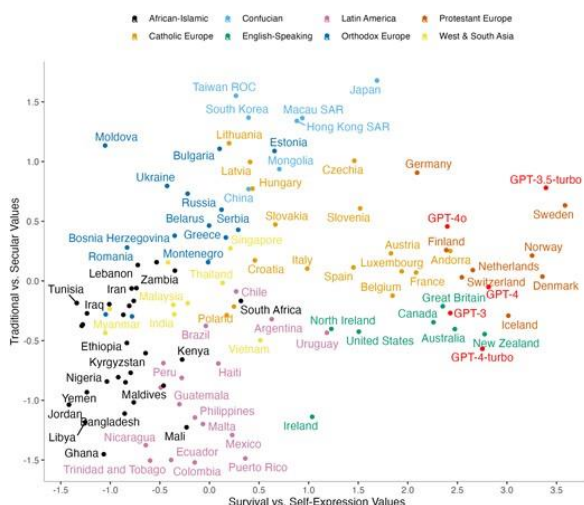


Figure 1. Mapping Cultural Bias and Semantic Alignment in Large Language Model Outputs

Opinion and value audits show that model responses privilege particular demographic and geopolitical distributions rather than a neutral human standpoint (Santurkar et al., 2023; Zhao, W., et al., 2024). For Persianate materials, this can become computational Orientalism: surface exoticism survives while doctrinal, ritual, and ethical grammars disappear (Noble, 2018; Said, 1978). The reception of Rumi already documents omission and domestication in English circulation (Azadibougar & Patton, 2015; Naghmeh-Abbaspour et al., 2021), while Shi'i concepts require attention to authorized interpretation and communal memory (Alak, 2023; Bender & Friedman, 2018). Semantic sovereignty names a tradition's claim not merely to appear in model outputs, but to remain interpretable on its own historical and normative terms.

This study audits four domains – Rumi's mystical semantics, Hafez's lyric ambiguity, Ferdowsi's epic-political vocabulary, and Shi'i hermeneutic concepts – across model and prompt conditions. It combines expert scoring with a culturally specific taxonomy of metaphor loss, doctrinal flattening, register shift, domestication, universalization, ambiguity closure, depoliticization, and authority erasure. Its contribution is to extend AI evaluation from bias and task accuracy to the preservation of civilizational meaning.

## **2. Review of the Related Literature**

### **2.1. Technical Foundations, Accountability, and Evaluation**

Self-attention enabled Transformers to model long-range token relations and supported BERT-style pre-training, autoregressive generation, and instruction-tuned systems (Vaswani et al., 2017; Devlin et al., 2019; Brown et al., 2020; Ouyang et al., 2022). Scale and fluency, however, do not establish grounded understanding. Bender and Koller (2020) distinguish linguistic form from meaning produced through communicative, social, embodied, and historical conditions. That distinction is decisive for Persianate and Shi'i materials, where a fluent explanation may detach 'erfān, velāyat, ta'wīl, rindī, farrah, or shahādāt from the disciplines that authorize their interpretation.

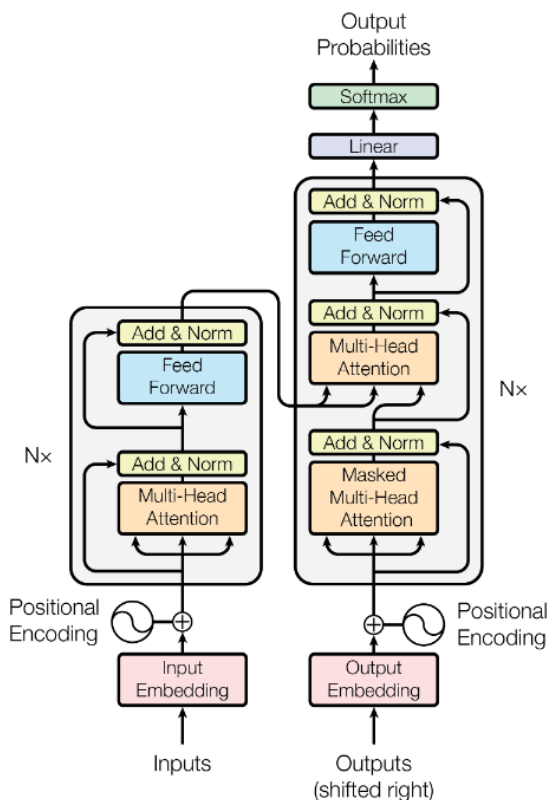


Figure 2. The Transformer Model Architecture (Vaswani et al., 2017)

Figure 2 anchors this distinction: attention-based sequence modelling does not itself supply sacred authority, poetic indeterminacy, doctrinal hierarchy, or civilizational memory.

LLMs are therefore treated here as civilizational mediators rather than neutral translation tools. They can preserve communicative surface while relocating meaning across cultural regimes, a risk that ordinary measures of grammaticality or lexical similarity do not capture (Bender & Koller, 2020).

## 2.2. Documentation, Bias, and Semantic Harm

Responsible-AI scholarship rejects datasets and models as neutral artifacts. Data statements, model cards, and datasheets document collection, intended use, exclusion, demographic imbalance, and

institutional power (Bender & Friedman, 2018; Mitchell et al., 2019; Gebru et al., 2021). Such documentation is necessary but insufficient: recording Persian data does not show whether outputs distinguish mystical love from therapeutic self-love, ta'wil from generic interpretation, Hafezian ambiguity from confusion, or Ferdowsian kingship from modern leadership.

Figure 3 illustrates why assumptions acquired during pre-training may persist through fine-tuning and shape later translation, explanation, and summarization.

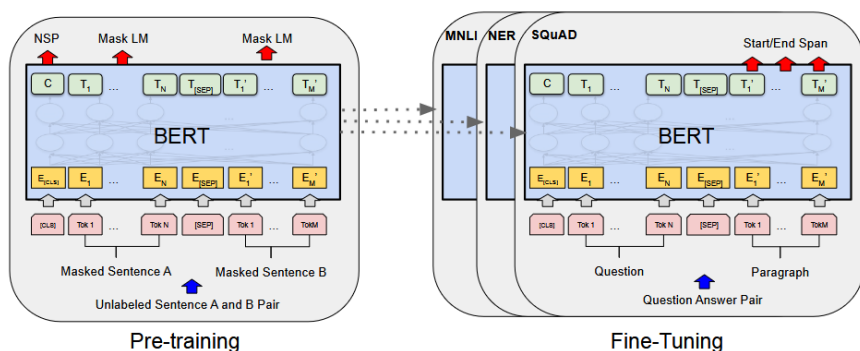


Figure 3. Overall Pre-Training and Fine-Tuning Procedures for BERT (Devlin et al., 2019)

Bias research demonstrates that computational systems reproduce asymmetries of race, gender, religion, geography, class, and language (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; Noble, 2018; Blodgett et al., 2020; Mehrabi et al., 2021). Persianate displacement is often harder to detect because the output may be polite, elegant, and superficially accurate. Replacing a dense poetic or juridical term with a generic modern equivalent can weaken interpretive sovereignty without producing an obvious stereotype or hallucination.

Semantic displacement is thus a distinct harm: competent linguistic mediation systematically thins the interpretive conditions of a tradition.

### 2.3. Evaluation Beyond Accuracy

LLM evaluation now includes robustness, calibration, fairness, reasoning, factuality, safety, and alignment (Srivastava et al., 2023; Liang et al., 2023; Chang et al., 2024), but these frameworks rarely test sacred

register, literary ambiguity, doctrinal hierarchy, or civilizational memory. A system may succeed on Persian reading comprehension yet close Hafez's ambiguity, summarize the *Shāhnāme* while erasing its political theology, present a de-Islamized Rumi, or translate Shi'i terminology without authority relations. Semantic audit therefore asks not simply whether an output matches a reference, but whether metaphor, doctrine, register, ambiguity, and cultural difference survive cross-lingual mediation.

## **2.4. Multilingual LLMs and Persian NLP**

Multilingual support remains uneven across corpora, tokenization, alignment, benchmarks, safety testing, and downstream performance (Qin et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025; Zhu et al., 2024). A model may generate fluent Persian while organizing its explanations through English-centered concepts. Persian exposes the weakness of a simple high-resource/low-resource distinction: historically it is a transregional literary, philosophical, bureaucratic, and religious language, yet computationally it remains unevenly represented.

Persian-specific resources such as ParsBERT and ParsiNLU address script, morphology, orthographic variation, clitics, informal registers, and reasoning tasks (Farahani et al., 2021; Khashabi et al., 2021). These foundations measure functional competence, but not whether culturally dense concepts retain their poetic, theological, or political architecture across languages.

## **2.5. Persian Benchmarking and Civilizational Competence**

Persian LLM benchmarking finds substantial task variation and reports that English prompts can sometimes outperform Persian prompts (Abaskohi et al., 2024). This creates a central paradox: English mediation may improve procedural structure while increasing semantic domestication. Figure 4 accordingly supports a domain-specific audit rather than a global claim that a model is simply good or bad at Persian.

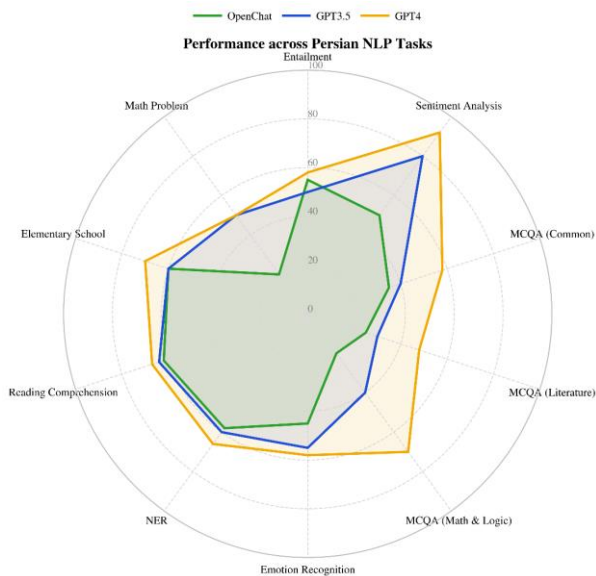


Figure 4. Performance of GPT-3.5, GPT-4, and OpenChat-3.5 across Persian NLP Tasks (Abaskohi et al., 2024)

A model may answer factual questions in Persian while failing to preserve a Hafezian metaphor, a Qur'anic allusion, or the doctrinal field of a Shi'i term. Current benchmarks are therefore a foundation for, not a substitute for, semantic accountability.

Persian should also be understood as a civilizational testbed. Across empire, court, mysticism, epic, philosophy, devotion, and transregional circulation, its archive repeatedly tests the limits of translation (Lewis, 2015; Ingenito, 2018; Kia, 2020). Semantic sovereignty does not claim that Persianate meaning is ineffable; it requires evaluation criteria appropriate to the tradition's own semantic structures.

## 2.6. Persianate Literature and Hermeneutic Loss

### 2.6.1. Rumi and Domestication

Rumi's global reception shows how translation can detach poetry from Islamic, Qur'anic, Persian, and Sufi matrices while retaining attractive themes of love and healing (Azadibougar & Patton, 2015; Naghmeh-Abbaspour et al., 2021). LLMs may automate this domesticated archive, substituting self-discovery and inner peace for prophetic inheritance, Sufi

discipline, annihilation, and subsistence. Reading Rumi as ethical and pedagogical tradition rather than inspirational content clarifies what such outputs lose (Akbari, 2025).

### **2.6.2. Hafez and Ambiguity**

Hafez places a different pressure on models: his ghazals depend on double address, irony, allusion, and unresolved plurality. Terms such as *mey*, *rind*, *sāqī*, *pīr-e moghān*, and *kharābāt* move among erotic, mystical, social, and anti-hypocritical readings (Yarshater, 1988; Ingenito, 2018). Because LLM helpfulness rewards clear explanation, a confident single reading may be less faithful than an explicit preservation of uncertainty.

Technical explainability often treats clarity as a virtue (Zhao, H., et al., 2024), whereas hermeneutics understands meaning as historically situated and contested (Ricoeur, 1981; Gadamer, 2004). A Hafez audit must therefore test whether ambiguity is preserved as meaning rather than solved as noise.

### **2.6.3. Ferdowsi and Civilizational Memory**

The *Shāhnāme* is an archive of kingship, justice, fate, legitimacy, tragedy, and Iranian memory, not merely heroic narrative (Davidson, 1994; Davis, 2006; Lewis, 2015). Summaries may retain characters and events while weakening the political and moral architecture through which *farrah*, sovereignty, rebellion, and catastrophe become intelligible.

Ferdowsi therefore tests whether LLMs can distinguish epic-political ontology from modern leadership or nationalist abstraction. Scholarship emphasizing the ethical and civilizational force of Rumi and Ferdowsi supports this wider frame (Sazmand & Mozaffari Falarti, 2024).

### **2.7. Shi'i Hermeneutics and Digital Interpretation**

Shi'i concepts intensify the problem because *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, *velāyat*, *'ismah*, *ijtihād*, *marja'iyah*, *'adl*, and *shahādat* belong to layered traditions of Qur'anic interpretation, Imami theology, jurisprudence, philosophy, devotion, and political thought (Nasr, 2006; Mavani, 2013; Alak, 2023). Dictionary equivalents can conceal doctrinal hierarchy, transmission, and authorized interpretation.

Digital hermeneutics shows that AI reorganizes religious meaning through data, prompts, rankings, and summaries (Abdollahpour Sangchi et al., 2025). The present audit operationalizes that risk through doctrinal flattening, authority erasure, register shift, and universalization rather than treating Shi'i terms as isolated vocabulary.

## **2.8. Iranian AI Research and Cultural Alignment**

Recent Iranian cultural research treats AI as a site of meaning construction, affect, identity, gender, and geopolitical power. Akhavan et al. (2025) theorize AI's socialization in meaning construction; Havsson and Sajjadi (2025) examine Iranian digital discourse and geopolitics; Totaro et al. (2025) identify affective asymmetries between English and Persian; and Meraji Oskuie (2025) studies gendered anthropomorphism. This work establishes technological mediation as an Iranian-studies problem.

The unresolved question is whether canonical Persianate and Shi'i meanings remain intelligible on their own terms when global computational systems mediate them.

## **2.9. Cultural Alignment and the Western Default**

Opinion and value studies show that LLMs approximate particular demographic, linguistic, and geopolitical distributions rather than humanity in general (Santurkar et al., 2023; Durmus et al., 2023; Tao et al., 2024; Zhao, W., et al., 2024). Fluent inclusiveness can therefore mask a default cultural position.

For Persianate and Shi'i materials, the default often appears as personal growth, universal spirituality, ethical leadership, tolerance, or symbolic heritage. Such domestication is subtle because it is readable and respectful rather than overtly hostile.

Cultural prompting can shift value alignment without eliminating deeper bias (Tao et al., 2024). Naming an Iranian, Islamic, or Persianate context may improve surface framing but cannot by itself preserve metaphor, doctrinal authority, poetic ambiguity, or sacred register. Figure 5 motivates comparison of Persian-only, English-only, cultural, and expert-guided prompts.

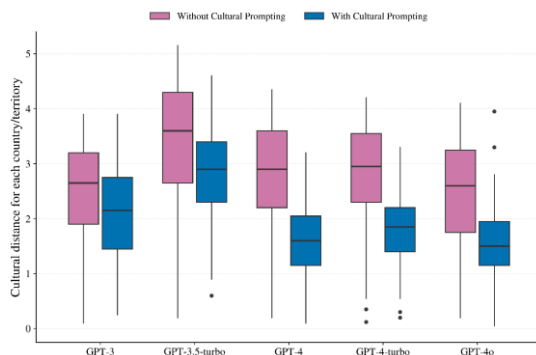


Figure 5. Country-Level Cultural Bias Across GPT Models and the Effect of Cultural Prompting

Literary and religious materials extend cultural-alignment research from opinions to semantic worlds: their meanings depend on genre, doctrine, ritual, authority, affect, and civilizational memory, and therefore require expert rather than purely benchmark-based evaluation.

The literature establishes that LLMs are not inherently grounded in meaning; multilingual resources remain unequal; Persian NLP provides necessary benchmarks; translation studies documents domestication; Shi'i studies emphasizes authorized interpretation; and cultural-alignment research identifies Anglophone defaults. These fields have rarely been integrated into a cross-lingual audit of Persianate semantic preservation.

The gap is therefore methodological and theoretical: existing benchmarks do not test whether models preserve Rumi's mystical semantics, Hafez's ambiguity, Ferdowsi's political memory, or Shi'i authority. This study addresses that gap through three questions:

RQ1. How do major LLMs translate and explain culturally dense materials from Rumi, Hafez, Ferdowsi, and Shi'i hermeneutic discourse across Persian-English translation chains?

RQ2. What recurrent forms of metaphor loss, doctrinal flattening, domestication, register shift, false universalization, ambiguity closure, depoliticization, and authority erasure appear?

RQ3. How do model class, prompt language, cultural prompting, and expert context descriptively affect semantic preservation in the bounded corpus?

### 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1. Research Design

This bounded, mixed-method cross-lingual audit combines standardized prompting, expert hermeneutic evaluation, qualitative error coding, and descriptive comparison across model classes, prompt conditions, and four domains. Translation is treated as semantic mediation rather than lexical equivalence because Persianate meanings depend on intertextuality, genre, metaphor, authority, historical memory, and register.

The retained record contains blinded labels, model-class descriptions, prompt-condition labels, aggregate scores, error distributions, and selected fragments. It does not contain product names or versions, exact access dates, full transcripts, output-level scores, or individual panel biographies. Nothing missing was inferred; claims are restricted to the corpus and descriptive comparisons, and product-specific replication is not asserted.

The domains impose distinct pressures: Rumi tests Islamic-Sufi metaphysical density; Hafez tests ambiguity; Ferdowsi tests epic sovereignty, justice, and memory; and Shi'i concepts test doctrine, sacred authority, and interpretive hierarchy.

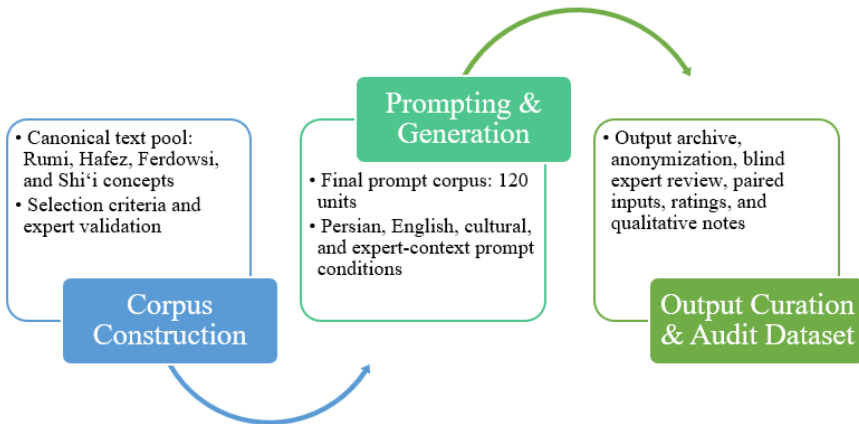


Figure 6. Data Collection Workflow for Cross-Lingual Semantic Sovereignty Audit

### 3.2. Data Sources and Sampling

The corpus contains 120 purposively selected units, 30 per domain. Literary units are couplets or short passages with dense metaphors, allusions, or historically charged concepts; Shi'i units include tafsīr, ta'wīl, velāyat, 'ismah, ijtihād, marja'īyyah, 'adl, and shahādat. Balanced allocation produced 960 outputs per domain and 3,840 overall (30 units × 4 systems × 4 conditions × 2 runs). The theory-driven sample was large enough to expose recurrent pathways while keeping expert coding feasible, but it was not designed for population inference.

A three-member panel represented Persian literature, Islamic/Shi'i studies, and translation or applied linguistics. Members evaluated semantic density, interpretive difficulty, cultural specificity, and cross-lingual vulnerability. The record preserves disciplinary roles but not names, affiliations, qualifications, experience, or recruitment documentation; this is reported as a transparency limitation.

*Table 1. Corpus Composition and Semantic Pressure across the Four Audit Domains*

| Domain             | Data type                             | Number of units | Main semantic pressure                                     |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rumi               | Mystical couplets/passages            | 30              | Sufi metaphysics, Qur'anic resonance, spiritual discipline |
| Hafez              | Lyric couplets/passages               | 30              | Ambiguity, irony, symbolic instability                     |
| Ferdowsi           | Epic passages/concepts                | 30              | Kingship, justice, sovereignty, civilizational memory      |
| Shi'i hermeneutics | Concepts and short doctrinal passages | 30              | Authority, doctrine, sacred interpretation                 |

Four systems—two globally dominant commercial, one open-source multilingual, and one Persian-capable or regionally relevant—were blinded as Models A–D during scoring. Their product identities, versions, and access dates were not retained and are not reconstructed. Each received identical units under Persian-only, English-only, cultural-context, and expert-context conditions.

*Table 2. Prompt Conditions for Cross-Lingual Semantic Sovereignty Testing*

| Prompt condition      | Description                                           | Purpose                                                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Persian-only          | Task instructions written in Persian                  | Tests direct Persian interpretive capacity                  |
| English-only          | Task instructions written in English                  | Tests English-mediated handling of Persian materials        |
| Cultural prompt       | Prompt specifies Persianate or Shi'i cultural context | Tests whether cultural framing reduces displacement         |
| Expert-context prompt | Prompt includes brief scholarly context               | Tests whether guided context improves semantic preservation |

### 3.3. Data Collection Procedure

Collection followed five stages: corpus construction with source, transliteration, genre, semantic tensions, and interpretive notes; panel validation and risk classification; standardized prompts requesting translation, explanation, and rationale; repeated model execution; and blinded organization by item, model, condition, domain, run, and evaluation fields.

Prompts used the lowest-variability setting available: temperature 0.0 wherever numerical control was exposed. Each was run twice, and refusals, hallucinations, and incomplete responses were retained as possible evidence of interpretive limits. Complete platform logs and product-level provenance were not preserved; Appendix A distinguishes retained evidence from standardized replication materials.

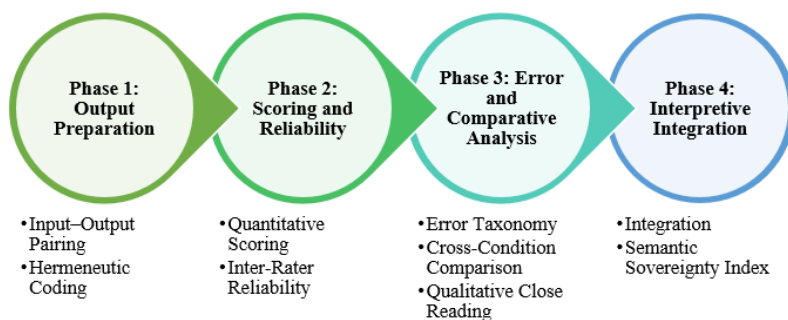


Figure 7. Data Analysis Workflow for Semantic Displacement and Sovereignty Scoring

### 3.4. Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Experts applied a 0–4 Semantic Preservation Scale: 0, severe distortion; 1, partial recognition with major displacement; 2, moderate preservation with important omissions; 3, strong preservation with minor limitations; and 4, high preservation of density, context, and nuance. Translation, explanation, register, fidelity, and rationale were assessed so that lexical competence could be distinguished from interpretive adequacy.

Table 3. Semantic Preservation Scale for Evaluating LLM Outputs

| Score | Interpretation            | Output profile                                 |
|-------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | Severe displacement       | Core meaning lost or misleading                |
| 2     | Weak preservation         | Some recognition but major flattening          |
| 3     | Moderate preservation     | Meaning partly retained with serious omissions |
| 4     | Strong preservation       | Mostly faithful with limited loss              |
| 5     | High semantic sovereignty | Nuance, context, and register preserved        |

Outputs could receive multiple qualitative codes because failures co-occurred. For Table 7 and Figure 10 only, coders adjudicated one dominant error per coded output, producing mutually exclusive within-domain percentages that sum to 100%. Multi-label codes were retained for close reading and co-occurrence analysis.

Table 4. Taxonomy of Semantic Displacement Errors in Persianate and Shi'i Materials

| Error category         | Definition                                        | Example risk                                |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Metaphor loss          | Symbolic density becomes literal or generic       | Sufi wine becomes ordinary emotion          |
| Doctrinal flattening   | Theological hierarchy is simplified               | Velāyat becomes mere friendship             |
| Register shift         | Sacred or poetic tone becomes informal or neutral | Devotional language becomes textbook prose  |
| False universalization | Specific meaning becomes vague global wisdom      | Rumi becomes self-help spirituality         |
| Ambiguity closure      | Productive uncertainty is over-explained          | Hafez becomes morally univocal              |
| Authority erasure      | Interpretive lineage disappears                   | Shi'i concepts become generic Islamic terms |

Panelists independently rated a subset, then adjudicated disagreements

without treating interpretive plurality as error. Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  assessed agreement; comparisons were made across domains and conditions; and aggregate patterns were integrated with preserved fragments. The tables report cross-cell standard deviations as descriptive dispersion, not uncertainty around population parameters. Because the sample was purposive and the retained archive lacks output-level scores and their dependence structure, mixed-effects models, repeated-measures ANOVA, effect sizes, confidence intervals, and significance tests cannot be validly reconstructed from the published means. Any such calculation would introduce unsupported pseudo-precision. Results therefore remain descriptive, no difference is interpreted as statistically significant, and future replication should retain item-level ratings, run identifiers, model versions, and timestamps to support hierarchical inference.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Semantic Preservation Across Models and Domains

The audit generated 3,840 outputs. Across the 16 model-by-domain cells, the mean Semantic Preservation Score was 2.53/4.00 (SD = 0.38), correcting the earlier headline discrepancy. Agreement was strong: Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  = .81 for preservation scoring and  $\alpha$  = .78 for error coding. Rumi had the largest descriptive domain mean and Shi'i concepts the smallest; these bounded comparisons are not inferential. Model D had the largest descriptive mean, followed by A, B, and C, but this is not a tested ranking. Model A combined literary fluency with universalization; B better preserved epic narrative but weakened doctrine; C was most uneven; and D was strongest under expert context while still struggling with Hafezian ambiguity and Shi'i authority.

Table 5. Mean Semantic Preservation Scores by Model and Domain

| Domain         | Model A | Model B | Model C     | Model D     | Domain mean (SD) |
|----------------|---------|---------|-------------|-------------|------------------|
| Rumi           | 3.12    | 2.96    | 2.71        | 3.24        | 3.01 (0.23)      |
| Hafez          | 2.74    | 2.38    | 2.18        | 2.57        | 2.47 (0.24)      |
| Ferdowsi       | 2.43    | 2.61    | 2.36        | 2.78        | 2.55 (0.19)      |
| Shi'i concepts | 2.21    | 2.04    | 1.88        | 2.31        | 2.11 (0.19)      |
| Model mean     | 2.63    | 2.50    | 2.28 (0.35) | 2.73 (0.39) | 2.53 (0.38)      |

Note. Parenthetical values are descriptive standard deviations: domain rows use dispersion across the four systems; the model-mean row uses dispersion across the four domains; the overall SD is calculated across the 16 model-by-domain cells.

Figure 8 shows domain asymmetry rather than a simple Persian-language deficit. Even strong cells did not consistently reach high semantic sovereignty; Hafez and Shi'i concepts remained vulnerable. Genre, authority, translation history, and cultural framing therefore matter alongside language support (Bender & Koller, 2020; Abaskohi et al., 2024).

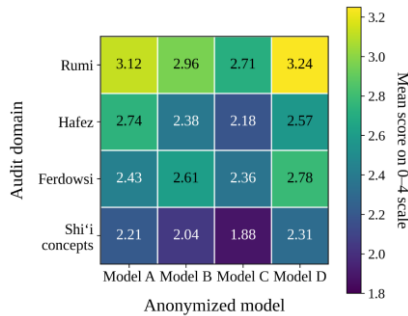


Figure 8. Mean Semantic Preservation Scores by Domain and Model

4.2. Prompt Conditions and Cultural Context

Descriptive means increased from Persian-only to English-only, cultural-context, and expert-context prompts. This does not imply Persian inferiority: English often improved organization while increasing domestication, whereas Persian retained lexical proximity and register with less elaboration. Expert prompts supplied domain-specific constraints; Table 6 reports dispersion without significance claims.

Table 6. Prompt-Condition Effects on Semantic Preservation

| Prompt condition      | Rumi        | Hafez       | Ferdowsi    | Shi'i concepts | Overall mean (SD) |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Persian-only          | 2.68        | 2.11        | 2.34        | 1.74           | 2.22 (0.40)       |
| English-only          | 2.81        | 2.26        | 2.47        | 1.93           | 2.37 (0.37)       |
| Cultural prompt       | 3.05        | 2.43        | 2.66        | 2.12           | 2.57 (0.39)       |
| Expert-context prompt | 3.31        | 2.67        | 2.89        | 2.54           | 2.85 (0.34)       |
| Domain mean (SD)      | 2.96 (0.28) | 2.37 (0.24) | 2.59 (0.24) | 2.08 (0.34)    | 2.50 (0.41)       |

Note. Parenthetical values are descriptive standard deviations. Prompt-condition rows use dispersion across the four domains; the domain-mean row uses dispersion across the four prompt conditions; the overall SD is calculated across the 16 prompt-by-domain cells.

Figure 9 shows the largest expert-context gains for Shi'i concepts and Hafez, the weakest baselines. General cultural prompts often added phrases such as “in Iranian culture” while still rendering *velāyat* as friendship, *rindī* as rebelliousness, or sovereignty as ethical leadership. Broad identity labels were therefore weaker than precise interpretive constraints.

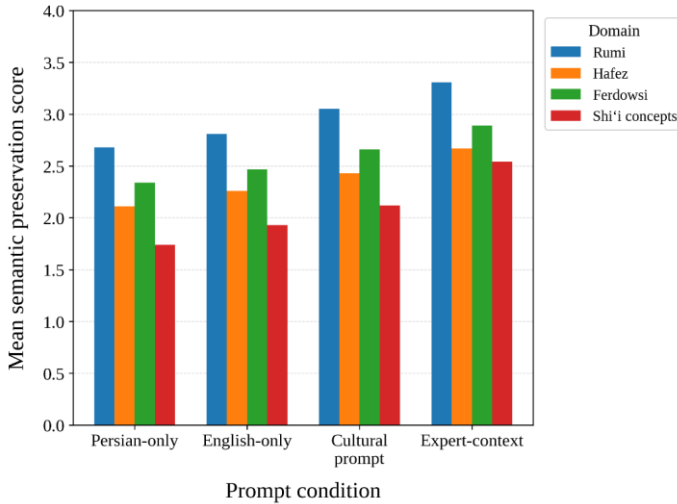


Figure 9. Prompt-Condition Effects on Semantic Preservation

Prompt engineering alone did not solve cultural misalignment. Models responded to context, but semantic sovereignty improved most when prompts specified what must be preserved. This qualifies claims that cultural prompting can overcome deeper alignment patterns (Tao et al., 2024; Santurkar et al., 2023).

#### 4.3. Dominant Error Patterns

Multi-label coding captured layered failures, while Table 7 and Figure 10 summarize one adjudicated dominant category per coded output. These mutually exclusive percentages sum to 100% within each domain. The main patterns were ambiguity closure, false universalization, authority erasure, metaphor loss, and doctrinal flattening.

*Table 7. Distribution of Dominant Semantic Displacement Errors by Domain*

| Error category         | Rumi | Hafez | Ferdowsi | Shi'i concepts | Dominant interpretive effect                                     |
|------------------------|------|-------|----------|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Metaphor loss          | 24%  | 16%   | 11%      | 8%             | Symbolic density becomes literal or generic                      |
| Doctrinal flattening   | 12%  | 5%    | 8%       | 31%            | Theological hierarchy becomes simplified                         |
| Register shift         | 13%  | 11%   | 12%      | 10%            | Sacred, poetic, or epic tone becomes neutralized                 |
| Cultural domestication | 18%  | 12%   | 14%      | 9%             | Persianate meaning is translated into familiar global categories |
| False universalization | 21%  | 10%   | 13%      | 11%            | Specific meaning becomes abstract moral wisdom                   |
| Ambiguity closure      | 6%   | 39%   | 5%       | 4%             | Productive uncertainty is over-explained                         |
| Authority erasure      | 6%   | 7%    | 37%      | 27%            | Interpretive, political, or doctrinal authority disappears       |

Note. Percentages represent one adjudicated dominant error per coded output within each domain. The separate multi-label coding layer was used for co-occurring errors and qualitative interpretation.

Figure 10 shows distinct profiles. Rumi most often lost metaphor or became universalized; Hafez underwent ambiguity closure; Ferdowsi lost political authority; and Shi'i concepts showed doctrinal flattening and authority erasure. Because the percentages represent one adjudicated dominant error, they describe the relative distribution of primary failures and are not prevalence estimates for the separate multi-label layer. That layer showed that metaphor loss, register shift, universalization, and authority erasure could coexist in one response. The pattern was therefore not simple factual error: fluent outputs could preserve affect or narrative while simultaneously weakening metaphysics, poetic plurality, sovereignty, and Imami specificity.

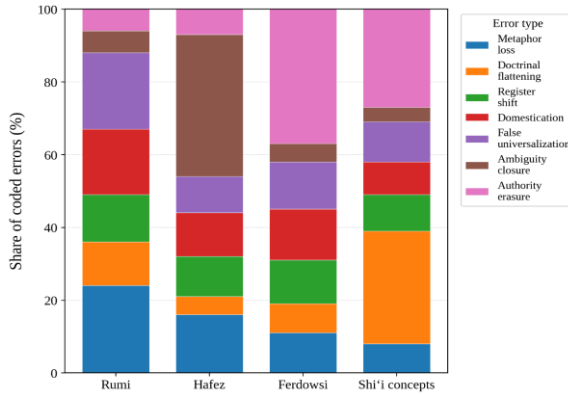


Figure 10. Distribution of Dominant Semantic Displacement Error Types by Domain

In Rumi cases, models recognized love but detached it from discipline, ontology, and Qur'anic resonance. "Letting go of ego to find inner peace" made fanā accessible by translating the movement from nafs to divine proximity into psychological self-optimization.

Hafez outputs repeatedly selected one mystical, romantic, or social reading without preserving their possible simultaneity. Because Hafezian ambiguity is a disciplined surplus rather than an absence of meaning, confident helpfulness could reduce fidelity.

Ferdowsi outputs retained characters and events but rendered kingship as leadership, farrah as charisma or generic blessing, and tragic legitimacy as moral responsibility. The result was readable narrative separated from Iranian political ontology.

Shi'i outputs provided competent encyclopedia-style definitions yet often detached ijtihād, ta'wīl, and velāyat from Imamate, law, esoteric interpretation, spiritual hierarchy, and communal memory. Meaning was most fragile where it depended on authorized tradition.

#### 4.4. Cross-Lingual and Model-Specific Failure Signatures

Loss intensified when Persian units were translated into English, explained there, and returned to Persian. Rumi's metaphysics became a Persianized spiritual humanism; velāyat stabilized around administrative authority rather than recovering doctrinal specificity. The chain therefore exposed conceptual replacement, not only omitted words.

*Table 8. Representative Cross-Lingual Failure Signatures*

| Domain         | Source pressure                                    | Typical English-mediated shift                         | Back-translation effect                                                 | Semantic risk         |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Rumi           | Sufi annihilation, divine love, Qur'anic resonance | Self-growth, emotional healing, universal spirituality | Persian output returns as روان‌شناسی معنوی rather than Sufi metaphysics | Metaphysical thinning |
| Hafez          | Ambiguity, irony, symbolic instability             | Single symbolic explanation; moralized reading         | Persian output becomes clearer but less multivalent                     | Ambiguity closure     |
| Ferdowsi       | Kingship, justice, glory, tragic legitimacy        | Leadership, ethics, national heritage                  | Epic-political terms become civic values                                | Epic depoliticization |
| Shi'i concepts | Authority, doctrine, esoteric interpretation       | General Islamic or philosophical explanation           | Theological specificity becomes administrative or abstract              | Authority erasure     |

Table 8 confirms four replacements: metaphysics by psychology, ambiguity by clarification, sovereignty by leadership ethics, and doctrinal authority by generic religion.

Models also differed in style. A was fluent but domesticated; B preserved Ferdowsian narrative yet thinned theology; C had the lowest mean and greatest descriptive instability; and D was most robust with expert context but still needed explicit instructions to preserve ambiguity and hierarchy.

Repeated-run instability was itself a risk. Hafez could shift among mystical, romantic, and social readings without acknowledging plurality, while Shi'i terms alternated between generic and political-theological accounts. Such variation suggests fragments of relevant discourse without a stable interpretive hierarchy.

## 5. Discussion

The results challenge the equation of multilingual fluency with civilizational understanding. Models produced coherent translations and plausible explanations, yet repeatedly reorganized Persianate and Shi'i meanings through globally familiar Anglophone categories. The problem was not lexical failure alone but the preservation of surface intelligibility

alongside deeper displacement. This distinction matters because general users are more likely to trust polished explanations than visibly broken translations. Semantic loss can therefore circulate as knowledge: the output looks complete, while the interpretive framework that would reveal its omissions has already been removed. The audit makes this quiet form of mediation empirically visible without claiming that every simplification is intentional or that all cross-cultural translation is inherently reductive.

This extends the form/meaning distinction (Bender & Koller, 2020). Persianate meaning is sustained through genre, sacred register, doctrinal authority, metaphor, historical memory, and ambiguity. Rendering *velāyat* as guardianship, *rindī* as rebelliousness, or *fanā* as ego release may be partly intelligible yet semantically thin. Semantic sovereignty identifies this loss where ordinary fluency, accuracy, or bias metrics do not: a tradition may appear in an output while being separated from its own conditions of interpretation. The framework is not a demand for one authorized translation or an insulated cultural essence. It asks evaluators to record unresolved plurality, explain authority relations, preserve genre-specific pressure, and disclose when no simple equivalent exists. Cross-lingual accessibility and fidelity are therefore treated as negotiable responsibilities rather than mutually exclusive goals.

Domain differences clarify the mechanism. Rumi's comparatively high mean likely reflects extensive English circulation, but the same archive encouraged de-Islamized spirituality (Azadibougar & Patton, 2015; Naghmeh-Abbaspour et al., 2021). Hafez exposed a conflict between helpfulness and productive ambiguity: choosing one reading improved apparent clarity while narrowing the poem. Ferdowsi showed that narrative competence can coexist with depoliticized kingship and *farrah*, so plot preservation is not equivalent to civilizational interpretation. Shi'i concepts scored lowest because doctrine, transmission, jurisprudence, devotion, and authority cannot be recovered from lexical equivalents alone. These differences also validate the domain-specific taxonomy: metaphor loss, ambiguity closure, epic depoliticization, and doctrinal flattening are related but not interchangeable. Semantic displacement is therefore a family of transformations whose detection depends on the interpretive pressure of the source material.

Expert-context prompts had larger descriptive means than broad cultural prompts. Naming a culture can change tone without preserving its metaphor, doctrine, register, or authority. Expert notes were more effective because they converted a general identity cue into operational constraints: distinguish translation from interpretation, preserve competing readings, identify doctrinal stakes, and flag terms without simple equivalents. This extends evidence that LLMs reflect particular demographic and geopolitical distributions (Santurkar et al., 2023; Tao et al., 2024) from values and opinions to semantic worlds. It also cautions against presenting prompt engineering as remediation in itself. Context can improve outputs, but the burden of supplying that context remains with users and institutions, and improvement does not remove the need for culturally competent evaluation.

The resulting danger is normalization rather than only hallucination: self-growth, leadership, tolerance, or universal spirituality are presented as transparent interpretations of historically dense materials. Hermeneutic accountability therefore requires expert-informed benchmarks, preserved ambiguity, explicit provenance, culturally grounded error taxonomies, and clear limits on generalization. It also requires documentation at the level required for rigorous reproducibility—model name and version, access date, decoding parameters, exact prompts, raw outputs, item-level ratings, panel qualifications, and adjudication records—so that cultural claims can be audited rather than accepted on fluency alone. The missing provenance in the present archive prevents that stronger form of replication and is a substantive limitation, not a minor reporting omission. This requirement directly connects methodological transparency with substantive cultural accountability across future multilingual audits and comparative evaluations. More Persian data or higher benchmark scores alone cannot establish semantic sovereignty if evaluation does not test what the added data enable models to preserve.

## **6. Conclusion**

The bounded audit indicates moderate surface competence alongside recurrent loss of the structures that make Persianate and Shi'i materials poetically, theologically, and politically meaningful. Semantic sovereignty

requires AI-mediated traditions to remain interpretable through their own historical, symbolic, doctrinal, and literary conditions. Rumi, Hafez, Ferdowsi, and Shi'i concepts exposed domestication, ambiguity closure, epic depoliticization, and doctrinal flattening. Expert context improved descriptive preservation but did not eliminate displacement, confirming that culturally responsible mediation depends on evaluation, documentation, and interpretive expertise as well as prompting.

The purposive corpus, four blinded systems, expert-dependent interpretation, and incomplete record limit the audit. Product names, versions, access dates, complete transcripts, output-level scores, and panel biographies were unavailable; consequently, the study makes no product-specific, inferential, or population-level claim. Cross-cell standard deviations describe variation among aggregates but cannot substitute for confidence intervals based on item-level observations. The standardized prompts and representative fragments in Appendix A improve conceptual reproducibility, yet they are not presented as verbatim historical logs. By separating retained evidence from prospective templates, the manuscript addresses the reviewers' transparency concerns as far as the surviving record permits without inventing metadata, model identities, raw outputs, or statistical evidence. Caution applies. Future work should use larger public corpora, preserved product provenance and output-level scores, additional Persian and regional models, human-translation baselines, and other Persianate languages. It should also test fine-tuning, retrieval augmentation, and expert-curated resources. Computational mediators must be accountable not only for what they state, but for meanings they quietly make less available.

#### **Author Contributions**

The study's conceptualization, design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and writing are solely the author's responsibility.

#### **Acknowledgments**

The author acknowledges the disciplinary expertise contributed during corpus validation, interpretive coding, and adjudication. Names are omitted to preserve double-blind review.

#### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

#### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies**

Generative AI-assisted tools were used for language editing, organizational

refinement, and document formatting. They were not used to create or alter aggregate scores, error percentages, or preserved qualitative evidence. The author critically reviewed all changes and remains fully responsible for the manuscript's originality, accuracy, and integrity.

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#### **Data Availability and Reproducibility**

The retained archive contains aggregate tables, coding definitions, prompt-condition descriptions, and selected fragments, but not product identities, exact dates, complete transcripts, output-level scores, or individual panel biographies. Appendix A reports only information supported by that record and supplies standardized templates for future replication.

## Appendix A. Reproducibility Materials

### Preserved Provenance and Execution Settings

Table 9. Preserved Provenance and Execution Settings

| Item                           | Preserved information                                                                                          | Status / value              |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Model comparison               | Four blinded systems; two commercial, one open-source multilingual, one Persian-capable or regionally relevant | Preserved at category level |
| Product names and versions     | Not retained in available analytical record                                                                    | Not reconstructed           |
| Access / data-collection dates | Not retained in available analytical record                                                                    | Not reconstructed           |
| Temperature                    | Lowest-variability configuration; 0.0 where numerical control was exposed                                      | Reported                    |
| Repeated runs                  | Two runs per prompt                                                                                            | Reported                    |
| Output archive                 | Aggregate tables and selected fragments; complete raw transcripts not retained                                 | Partially preserved         |

### Standardized Prompt Templates for Future Replication

Table 10. Standardized Prompt Templates for Future Replication

| Condition    | Standardized template                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Persian-only | «متن یا مفهوم فارسی» را به انگلیسی ترجمه کنید. سپس معنای آن را با توجه به بافت ادبی یا الهیاتی توضیح دهید و در ۲ تا ۴ جمله دلیل انتخاب‌های تفسیری خود را بیان کنید. ابهام، استعاره، لحن، اقتدار، تفسیری و اصطلاحات تخصصی را حفظ کنید و عناصر فاقد معادل ساده را صریحاً مشخص کنید.                                                                                             |
| English-only | Translate the following Persian text or concept into English: “[SOURCE ITEM].” Explain its meaning in the relevant literary or theological context and justify the principal interpretive choices in 2–4 sentences. Preserve ambiguity, metaphor, register, authority relations, and technical terminology; explicitly identify elements without a simple English equivalent. |

| Condition        | Standardized template                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cultural-context | Complete the translation and explanation task while interpreting the item within its Persianate or Shi'i historical context. Do not replace culturally specific meanings with generic spirituality, self-help language, modern leadership discourse, or undifferentiated religious vocabulary. State any unresolved ambiguity. |
| Expert-context   | Complete the translation and explanation task using this domain note: "[DOMAIN-SPECIFIC NOTE]." Preserve the item's metaphorical, doctrinal, political, poetic, and authority-bearing structures. Distinguish literal translation from interpretive explanation and identify plausible competing readings where relevant.      |

## Representative Audit Specifications and Preserved Output Fragments

*Table 11. Representative Audit Specifications and Preserved Output Fragments*

| Domain             | Representative audit target                      | Semantic pressure                                                                     | Preserved fragment or reported pattern                                                            | Dominant risk                            |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Rumi               | Fanā, nafs, and divine proximity                 | Sufi ontology, Qur'anic resonance, discipline                                         | Exact fragment: letting go of ego to find inner peace                                             | False universalization; metaphor loss    |
| Hafez              | mey, rind, sāqī, and wine-house imagery          | Intentional plurality across mystical, erotic, social, and anti-hypocritical readings | A single stable symbolic explanation was repeatedly reported; no complete transcript was retained | Ambiguity closure                        |
| Ferdowsi           | farrah, kingship, justice, and tragic legitimacy | Epic-political ontology and civilizational memory                                     | Exact fragments: leadership; charisma; divine blessing; moral responsibility                      | Epic depoliticization; authority erasure |
| Shi'i hermeneutics | ijtihād, ta'wīl, velāyat, and 'ismah             | Imamate, authorized interpretation, law, and sacred hierarchy                         | Exact fragments: independent reasoning; allegorical interpretation; guardianship or friendship    | Doctrinal flattening; authority erasure  |

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## Original Research Paper

# Human dignity and humanitarian law in Islam

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## Abstract

Human dignity is a foundational principle of Islamic thought and provides a normative framework for humanitarian principles during armed conflicts. Although international humanitarian law has received extensive scholarly attention, the relationship between human dignity and humanitarian norms within the Islamic intellectual tradition has not yet been systematically examined. This study investigates the conceptual foundations of human dignity, identifies the principal humanitarian norms found in Islamic sources, and analyzes the relationship between these two domains. Employing qualitative content analysis and historical analysis, the study draws upon the Qur'an, Prophetic Sunnah, Nahj al-Balāghah, and authenticated historical sources to examine both the normative and historical dimensions of humanitarian conduct. The concepts and analytical categories were inductively derived from these texts and used to explain broader conceptual relationships. The findings demonstrate that human dignity in Islam is an inherent and universal attribute shared by all human beings, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or political affiliation. This conception serves as the normative foundation for humanitarian principles governing armed conflicts. Accordingly, prioritizing peaceful settlement, refraining from initiating hostilities, protecting civilians, respecting the wounded, prisoners of war, and those hors de combat, prohibiting treachery and mutilation, and maintaining negotiations throughout hostilities are not merely ethical recommendations but practical manifestations of human dignity. The study further argues that these principles apply equally to domestic and international armed conflicts and are not limited to relations among Muslims. It concludes that human dignity functions as the philosophical and normative foundation of humanitarian law in Islam and provides a valuable basis for constructive dialogue with contemporary international humanitarian law.

**Keywords:** Human dignity, international humanitarian law, Islamic thought, Qur'an, Prophetic Sunnah, Imam Ali

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## مقاله پژوهشی

# کرامت انسانی و حقوق بشردوستانه در اسلام

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## چکیده:

کرامت انسانی یکی از اصول بنیادین اندیشه اسلامی است و چارچوبی هنجاری برای اصول بشردوستانه در دوران مخاصمات مسلحانه فراهم می‌کند. اگرچه حقوق بشردوستانه بین‌المللی توجه گسترده‌ای را در پژوهش‌های علمی به خود اختصاص داده است، رابطه میان کرامت انسانی و هنجارهای بشردوستانه در سنت فکری اسلامی تاکنون به‌صورت نظام‌مند بررسی نشده است. این پژوهش به بررسی مبانی مفهومی کرامت انسانی، شناسایی مهم‌ترین هنجارهای بشردوستانه در منابع اسلامی و تحلیل رابطه متقابل میان آن‌ها می‌پردازد. این مطالعه با بهره‌گیری از روش تحلیل محتوای کیفی و تحلیل تاریخی، قرآن کریم، سنت نبوی، نهج‌البلاغه و منابع تاریخی معتبر را برای بررسی ابعاد هنجاری و تاریخی رفتار بشردوستانه مورد مطالعه قرار می‌دهد. مفاهیم و مقوله‌های تحلیلی به‌صورت استقرایی از متون استخراج شده و برای تبیین روابط مفهومی گسترده‌تر مورد استفاده قرار گرفته‌اند. یافته‌های پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که کرامت انسانی در اسلام، ویژگی ذاتی و جهان‌شمولی است که همه انسان‌ها، صرف‌نظر از دین، قومیت یا وابستگی سیاسی، از آن برخوردارند. این برداشت از کرامت، مبنای هنجاری اصول بشردوستانه حاکم بر مخاصمات مسلحانه را تشکیل می‌دهد. بر این اساس، اولویت دادن به حل‌وفصل مسالمت‌آمیز، خودداری از آغاز درگیری، حمایت از غیرنظامیان، احترام به مجروحان، اسیران جنگی و افراد خارج از وضعیت مشارکت در مخاصمه، ممنوعیت خیانت و مثله کردن، و تداوم مذاکرات در طول جنگ، نه صرفاً توصیه‌هایی اخلاقی، بلکه نمودهای عملی کرامت انسانی به شمار می‌آیند. این پژوهش همچنین استدلال می‌کند که این اصول به‌طور یکسان در مخاصمات مسلحانه داخلی و بین‌المللی کاربرد دارند و محدود به روابط میان مسلمانان نیستند. در نهایت، پژوهش نتیجه می‌گیرد که کرامت انسانی در اسلام، بنیاد فلسفی و هنجاری حقوق بشردوستانه را تشکیل می‌دهد و می‌تواند مبنایی ارزشمند برای گفت‌وگوی سازنده با حقوق بشردوستانه بین‌المللی معاصر فراهم آورد.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** کرامت انسانی، حقوق بشردوستانه بین‌المللی، اسلام، قرآن، سنت نبوی، امام علی (ع)

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## Original-Forschungsarbeit

# Menschenwürde und humanitäres Recht im islamischen Denken

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### Zusammenfassung:

Die Menschenwürde bildet ein grundlegendes Prinzip des islamischen Denkens und einen normativen Rahmen für humanitäre Prinzipien in bewaffneten Konflikten. Obwohl das internationale humanitäre Völkerrecht umfassend erforscht wurde, ist die Verbindung zwischen Menschenwürde und humanitären Normen innerhalb der islamischen Denktradition bislang nicht systematisch untersucht worden. Diese Studie analysiert die konzeptionellen Grundlagen der Menschenwürde, identifiziert zentrale humanitäre Normen in islamischen Quellen und untersucht ihre gegenseitige Beziehung. Methodisch verwendet die Untersuchung eine qualitative Inhaltsanalyse und eine historische Analyse des Korans, der prophetischen Sunnah, Nahdsch al-Balāghas sowie ausgewählter historischer Quellen, um normative und historische Dimensionen humanitären Handelns herauszuarbeiten. Die analytischen Kategorien wurden induktiv aus den untersuchten Texten entwickelt. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Menschenwürde im Islam als inhärente und universelle Eigenschaft aller Menschen verstanden wird, unabhängig von Religion, Ethnie oder politischer Zugehörigkeit. Dieses Verständnis bildet die Grundlage für humanitäre Prinzipien wie die Bevorzugung friedlicher Konfliktlösungen, das Verbot der Aggression, den Schutz von Zivilpersonen, die Achtung von Verwundeten, Kriegsgefangenen und Personen außerhalb der Kampfhandlungen (hors de combat) sowie das Verbot von Verrat und Verstümmelung. Diese Prinzipien gelten sowohl für innerstaatliche als auch internationale bewaffnete Konflikte und sind nicht auf Beziehungen zwischen Muslimen beschränkt. Die Studie kommt zu dem Schluss, dass die Menschenwürde im islamischen Denken eine philosophische und normative Grundlage humanitären Rechts darstellt und eine wichtige Grundlage für den Dialog mit dem modernen internationalen humanitären Völkerrecht bietet.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Menschenwürde, internationales humanitäres Völkerrecht, Islam, Koran, prophetische Sunnah, Imam Ali

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## **1. Introduction**

Although international humanitarian law<sup>1</sup> is a modern legal concept, historical evidence suggests that the underlying principles of both human rights and humanitarian norms in Iran can be traced back to the era of Cyrus the Great. Likewise, from the very emergence of Islam, many of the principles now recognized as international humanitarian law occupied a central place within Islamic teachings. One of the primary foundations of both human rights and humanitarian law is the intrinsic dignity of the human person.

This article examines the concept of human dignity, the principal manifestations and components of humanitarian principles, and the relationship between the two from an Islamic perspective. Given the persistence of violent conflicts in various parts of the world – particularly in regions with predominantly Muslim populations – revisiting this subject may contribute to fostering more humane and ethically grounded approaches to armed conflict. Contemporary scholarship affirms that human dignity serves as the central core of international human rights law, playing a decisive role in promoting justice, ensuring peace, and preventing violations of fundamental human rights (Feiz & Zamani, 2026, p. 2). This recognition has also provided a common basis for judicial interpretation across different legal procedures and international tribunals (Feiz & Zamani, 2026, p. 12).

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1. The modern development of international humanitarian law is generally traced to the initiatives of the Swiss businessman *Henry Dunant*, whose book *A Memory of Solferino* inspired the convening of a diplomatic conference in Geneva in 1864. The conference led to the establishment of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), whose mission was to provide impartial assistance to victims of armed conflict regardless of political affiliation, military status, or nationality.

The scope of humanitarian protection was subsequently expanded through the 1899 Hague Convention, extending legal safeguards to naval forces, the wounded and sick, as well as shipwrecked personnel. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the international community adopted the Four Geneva Conventions of 1949, which established comprehensive legal protections concerning: 1) the wounded and sick in armed forces in the field; 2) the wounded, sick, and shipwrecked members of armed forces at sea; 3) prisoners of war; and 4) civilians during times of armed conflict.

Although these conventions did not initially regulate non-international armed conflicts, this gap was addressed in 1977 with the adoption of Additional Protocols I and II to the Geneva Conventions. These protocols sought to strengthen the protection of civilians by, first, providing clearer legal criteria for distinguishing combatants from civilians, and second, extending many of the humanitarian protections recognized in the four Geneva Conventions to certain forms of internal armed conflict.

Taken together, the four Geneva Conventions and their two Additional Protocols comprise approximately six hundred articles that establish the body of rules and legal principles collectively known today as international humanitarian law.

Despite the growing body of literature on international humanitarian law and Islamic jurisprudence, the specific relationship between the concept of human dignity (*karāmah*) and humanitarian norms within the Islamic tradition remains underexplored. While several studies have examined Islamic humanitarian principles (e.g., Mohaqqueq Damad, 2004; Hashmi, 2012; Khadduri, 1955), few have systematically analyzed how the notion of inherent human dignity serves as the normative foundation for these principles. Most existing scholarship either treats human dignity as a separate ethical value or focuses exclusively on the legal aspects of humanitarian rules without exploring their philosophical underpinnings. This study addresses this gap by investigating the conceptual linkage between human dignity and Islamic humanitarian law as a legal system, drawing on primary Islamic sources – the Qur'an, the Prophetic Sunnah, and the practice of Imam Ali – and offering a systematic analysis of how dignity informs humanitarian conduct during armed conflicts.

Accordingly, the central question addressed in this study is: How does Islam conceptualize human dignity and humanitarian principles, and what is the nature of the relationship between them? To answer this question, the article first explores the Islamic understanding of human dignity, drawing primarily on the Qur'an as its principal source. It then identifies and analyzes the humanitarian principles reflected in the formative period of Islam through a historical examination of the practices (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and Imam Ali (peace be upon him). Clarifying these two discussions provides the basis for understanding the relationship between human dignity and humanitarian principles. The final section therefore examines the point at which these two concepts converge, offering a more systematic account of their interrelationship within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

This study is limited to primary Islamic sources – the Qur'an, the Prophetic Sunnah, and the practice of Imam Ali – and does not engage extensively with contemporary Islamic legal debates or comparative analysis with Western humanitarian law. The study also does not examine the practical application of these principles in modern Muslim-majority states or their compatibility with the Geneva Conventions. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study means that the findings are interpretive and may not capture the full diversity of opinions within Islamic legal schools.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

This study employed two complementary methodological approaches: qualitative content analysis and historical analysis. Qualitative content analysis served as the primary analytical framework, while historical analysis provided the contextual foundation for examining how humanitarian principles were manifested in practice.

The corpus of primary texts was selected purposively, based on both their normative authority and their direct relevance to the research questions. The primary sources included: Qur'anic verses addressing human dignity, armed conflict, justice, mercy, and civilian protection; authenticated Prophetic Sunnah concerning the ethics of warfare; *Nahj al-Balāghah* as the preeminent collection of Imam Ali's sermons, letters, and sayings; and the most authoritative historical sources documenting the conduct of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali during armed hostilities. Secondary scholarly sources were consulted only for contextualization, explanation, and interpretation of these primary materials.

Qualitative content analysis was employed to develop a conceptual understanding of the relationship between human dignity and humanitarian principles through systematic description, interpretation, and classification of textual data. Rather than focusing exclusively on explicit meaning, the analysis sought to uncover both manifest and latent themes embedded within the selected sources. Concepts and analytical categories were derived inductively from the texts and subsequently deployed to illuminate broader conceptual relationships (Khanifar & Moslemi, 2023, pp. 77-94).

The data analysis followed an inductive process. Relevant passages were first identified across the textual corpus and examined through the lens of recurring ethical concepts – such as human dignity, justice, mercy, proportionality, civilian protection, humane treatment of prisoners, and the prohibition of unnecessary harm. These initial analytical observations were then organized into broader conceptual categories, from which an analytical framework explaining the relationship between human dignity and humanitarian law was constructed.

Historical analysis was employed to examine the historical manifestations of humanitarian principles in the conduct, sermons, letters, and political practices of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali during situations of armed conflict. This method reconstructs historical events through critical examination and synthesis of evidence, while remaining attentive to their temporal and contextual settings (Khanifar & Moslemi, 2023, pp. 231-246).

Given that this research draws on both hadith collections and historical reports, particular attention was paid to the authority and reliability of the sources cited. Prophetic Sunnah were selected from well-established and recognized hadith collections within both Sunni and Shi'i traditions, while historical reports were drawn from classical and reputable works of Islamic historiography. Rather than undertaking independent hadith authentication (*rijāl* criticism), the study relied on the evaluations provided by recognized hadith scholars and the general acceptance of these traditions within the Islamic scholarly community. Wherever possible, historical accounts were cross-referenced against multiple independent sources to enhance the credibility and dependability of the analysis.

Drawing on the Qur'an, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, authenticated Prophetic Sunnah, and relevant historical sources, this study integrates its findings through a normative-conceptual interpretation. The sources are not treated merely as historical records; rather, they are interpreted as normative texts articulating ethical and legal principles that govern human conduct during armed conflict. This interpretive stance allows the study to move beyond descriptive historical reconstruction toward a philosophically grounded understanding of the relationship between human dignity and humanitarian norms in Islam.

### **3. Human Dignity in the Qur'anic Worldview**

#### **3.1. Nature of human dignity**

Human dignity appears to be a straightforward concept, but this is not entirely the case. It is difficult to formulate a precise and scientific definition of this concept. Such a definition will likely be easier once the various dimensions of the issue have been clarified. Human dignity can

be divided into two broad categories: (1) intrinsic dignity related to this world, and (2) acquired dignity related to the Afterworld.

Intrinsic dignity in this world has been bestowed upon humans by God and is part of their human nature, which cannot be taken away from them as long as they are alive. This intrinsic dignity, as contemporary Islamic scholarship explains, encompasses reason, free will, the divine breath, and the right of choice – qualities shared equally among all humans (Mukhlis & Al-Mesilini, 2026, p. 1). In addition to this intrinsic dignity, Islam also recognizes acquired dignity, which is primarily based on piety and faith (Mukhlis & Al-Mesilini, 2026, p. 1). Such dignity has nothing to do with race, religion, skin color, or gender and belongs to all human beings. Regarding intrinsic dignity in this world, the Almighty God has clearly asserted in the Qur'an that He has given superiority to humans over all other creatures (Qur'an, al-Isrā', 17:70).<sup>1</sup> Other verses of the Qur'an have pointed to this dignity. Breathing God's spirit into the human body (Qur'an, al-Hijr, 15:29),<sup>2</sup> making man God's vicegerent on Earth (Qur'an, al-Baqarah, 2:30),<sup>3</sup> and creating everything that exists on earth for human beings (Qur'an, al-Baqarah, 2:29)<sup>4</sup> all attest to human dignity in this world. Perhaps the most important outcome of that dignity in society is the negation of violence and bloodshed. At the same time, the negation of violence is another reason for respecting human dignity (Qur'an, al-Mā'idah, 5:32).<sup>5</sup> The most important feature of that dignity is that its quality and degree are similar in all human beings because it belongs to all of humanity.

The acquired dignity of the Afterworld emanates from the dignity that human beings acquire in this world and gives them superiority over other human beings. Although the dignity is acquired in this world, it becomes manifest in the Afterworld because no one but the Almighty God can recognize and measure that dignity. Basically, this type of dignity cannot be measured, and the Qur'an stipulates that it can only be measured by

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1. ولقد كرمنا بني آدم وحملناهم في البر والبحر ورزقناهم من الطيبات وفضلناهم على كثير ممن خلقنا تفضيلاً.

2. ونفخت فيه من روحي. حجر (١٥): ٢٩.

3. وإذا قال ربك للملائكة إني جاعل في الأرض خليفة.

4. خلق لكم ما في الأرض جميعاً.

5. من قتل نفساً بغير نفس أو فساد في الأرض فكأنما قتل الناس جميعاً.

God (Qur'an, al-Hujurāt, 49:13; al-Ya'qubi, 1968, p. 504). The most important feature of this type of dignity is that its quality and degree differ across individuals, and its degree depends on the knowledge, piety, and status of each person with God.

Since the first type of dignity is shared equally by all of humanity, it cannot be taken as a basis for political or social Privileges and, therefore, serves as a basis for laws. This conception of dignity as an inherent and universal attribute reflects what contemporary scholars describe as the theocentric nature of Islamic human rights, which emphasizes a balance between individual rights and obligations grounded in principles of monotheism, justice, and public welfare (*maslahah*)—in contrast to the anthropocentric Western approach that prioritizes absolute individual freedom (Zulkifli, 2025, p. 1). The second type of dignity does not lead to any kind of superiority for its holder in political and social fields. As Imam Ali (AS) stated, the piety of the faithful does not lead to any superiority or privilege in social and political fields; rather, they will receive their reward from God in the Hereafter (Abelhadid, 1967, p. 37; Al-Reishahri, 2000, pp. 160-167). If obeying divine decrees and piety cause superiority for humanity, only God is able to recognize it, and its results will be seen in the Afterworld, just as the result of disobeying divine decrees and leading a sinful life will be evident in the next world. If the Qur'an has rebuked unbelievers and sinners, it is to distinguish the correct path from the incorrect path and to encourage people to take the correct path. For this reason, sin and disobedience do not interfere with the worldly dignity of humanity. For example, likening unbelievers to animals (Qur'an, Muhammad, 47:12; al-A'rāf, 7:179) aims to show their state in the Afterworld and the punishment that awaits them. However, this does not amount to depriving them of the requirements of human dignity.

Ibn al-Arabi explains the behavior of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who rose to pay homage to the corpse of a Jew. He argues that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) believed that the Jew contained the divine soul (Al-Bukhari, 1999, Vol. 1, p. 310) and that the dignity of the human soul is due to its divine spirit. Therefore, even those who go to Hell do not lose their given dignity, and the Prophet (PBUH) rose to respect the corpse that had been the home of the divine soul. This indicates that all human souls are equal (Ibn al-Arabi, n.d., Vol. 1, pp. 527-528). Ibn al-Arabi drew an analogy between those who are in Hell and people who are suffering in this world

due to the loss of a loved one or their home and concludes that those sufferings have nothing to do with their human dignity. Therefore, if we consider all human souls to be equal, the dignity of a sinner is no different from that of other people. Ibn al-Arabi quotes from the Qushairi treatise that "he who considers his soul to be superior to Pharaoh does not understand a thing" (Al-Qushairi, 1995, p. 70). Repentance, as a major principle in Islam, allows human beings to return to their Creator even when they have sinned because divine favors are always open to humanity. This shows that their human dignity is preserved and they can be restored to their lofty human status.

Considering human dignity as natural makes it a perennial characteristic of all people. Of course, Mohammad Taqi Jafari maintains that if a human being commits a crime of his own free will, his human dignity will decline (Jafari, 1991, pp. 279, 196, 306). Also, Article 1 of the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990) affirms that all human beings are equal in terms of basic human dignity without any discrimination, recognizing dignity as a perpetual right for every person (Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, 1990, Art. 1). Mesbah Yazdi also believes that committing sin will diminish human dignity (Misbah Yazdi, 2001, pp. 284-286) and maintains that human dignity is not natural or related to human creation but is acquired, and one of its criteria is submission to the principles of the Islamic system. Therefore, in his opinion, only those who accept the Islamic system can enjoy equal social rights. He believes that being a human being is another condition for enjoying that dignity (Misbah Yazdi, 2001, p. 300).

Despite these differing views, this paper adopts the position that intrinsic dignity is inalienable, as it is rooted in the divine spirit (Qur'an, al-Hijr, 15:29) and the honor bestowed on all humanity (Qur'an, al-Isrā', 17:70). The views of Jafari and Misbah Yazdi pertain to acquired dignity, not intrinsic dignity, which is the foundation of humanitarian law.

### **3.2. Human dignity; right or virtue?**

Building on the inalienable character of intrinsic dignity established above, this section examines its implications for rights and obligations. An important question is whether human dignity is merely a right or a virtue bestowed on humanity by God. The right to exist is one of the most important rights recognized for humans by God. When arguing about the

legality of *qisas* (retributive punishment), it is said that God can retake the right He has given to human beings. Also, freedom, as a right, is limited, and in some instances, people can be stripped of their freedom. However, human dignity is not only a right but is different from the rights that have been bestowed on humanity by God. Human dignity is a right that cannot be taken away from human beings in this world, and even one's body is respected after death. The intrinsic nature of human dignity does not mean that God created humanity and then gave them their dignity; rather, human beings were created dignified. Consequently, stripping them of their dignity would not simply remove an external attribute but would deny a fundamental aspect of their humanity (Nobahar, 2005, p. 620). Javadi Amoli maintains that human dignity is not merely a credit but is a reality, like the nobility of angels and the Qur'an (Javadi Amoli, 1996, pp. 161-162). Therefore, any kind of sin, crime, thought, or conviction cannot deprive a person of his dignity and does not permit others to ignore his dignity. Even if someone has been condemned to death, one may kill him, but one cannot ignore his human dignity.

Therefore, if we considered human dignity to be a virtue, it would be subject to conditions and could decline as a result of those conditions. However, if we considered it to be a right, firstly, it would give rise to obligations, and secondly, it would be related to power and government because it would be a political and social entity. Therefore, the phrase "human dignity is a natural right that cannot be taken away from human beings" leads to three further premises:

1. Human beings should accept the requirements of their own human dignity.
2. Human beings are obliged to respect the human dignity requirements of other human beings.
3. Governments are obliged to respect the human dignity requirements of all people.

What are the requirements of human dignity? This is a detailed discussion that should be deferred, but the following points denote the minimum level of human dignity:

1. **Awareness of human dignity:** Human beings should be aware of the loftiness of their souls and recognize the necessity of protecting their

human dignity. Every person is required to recognize his dignity, and others should help him recognize that dignity. Governments should also take steps in this regard.

2. **Spiritual elevation:** There should be no obstacles on the path of human perfection. Secondly, a suitable foundation should exist for promoting human growth and perfection. The individual, others, and governments should strive in that direction.

3. **Education:** Everyone should be able to take steps to learn sciences at various levels.

4. **Freedom:** Human beings should avail themselves of all necessary freedoms within the framework of the laws and norms of the societies in which they live.

5. **Justice:** The regulations, laws, and systems governing human beings should be fair.

6. **Respect:** No human being should be subjected to insult or disrespect.

7. **Welfare:** All human beings should enjoy the minimum level of material welfare and social status.

Human dignity requires that all human beings, regardless of their religion, race, or place of residence, equally enjoy the above values. The responsibility for this lies with governments.

### **3.3. Fundaments of Human Dignity**

It is difficult to consider fundaments for human dignity. The fundament of human dignity is the lofty being of every human soul. In other words, the dignity belongs to the very being of humans with all their specifications. For a scientific discussion, it is required to analyze this issue more painstakingly. Perhaps, the fundaments of human dignity can be enumerated as follows:

**Wisdom:** Human wisdom is the first and more basic fundament of his dignity. Many features differentiate human beings from other creatures, but the most important of those features is human wisdom. When interpreting the Quranic verse about God having respected human beings

(Qur'an, al-Isrā', 17:70)<sup>1</sup>, some commentators of Quran have opined that the God has respected man by bestowing wisdom on him (Tabatabaei, 1973, p. 156; Al-Qartabi, 1966, p. 294).

**Divine aspect of human beings:** The second basis for human dignity is the divine spirit blown into him by the Almighty God (Qur'an, al-Hijr, 15:29).<sup>2</sup> Some Muslim scientists believe that humans are a combination of two "material and spiritual," or "worldly and heavenly," or "animal and human" aspects. The material, worldly, and animal dimension of human beings is related to his mundane body while his spiritual dimension is attributed to the Almighty God which also differentiates him from other creatures (al-Farabi, 2003, p. 17; Ikhwan al-Safa, 1991, p. 383). The same divine and spiritual dimension of human beings is considered as the main basis for his dignity. What makes this dimension more important is the ability of man to grow in spiritual and divine dimensions.

**Understanding and perception:** The third basis for human dignity is language (both in the sense of speech and an orderly system of concepts to make one's ideas heard). No other creature enjoys this advantage. In other words, humanity of human beings is based on the understanding and perception that is special to them and can be studied within frame of a complex combination of concepts, premises, languages and cultures.

**The uniform essence of humanity:** The fourth basis for human dignity is the "external uniformity of human beings." It does not mean that all human beings are similar in creation, but it means that humanity is like a single body and all human beings are its members and that single and unified body should have outward manifestations. Every "person" is as valuable as other "persons" and other "persons" are as valuable as one "person." The Quranic verse that says killing a single person is like killing everybody (Qur'an, al-Mā'idah, 5:32)<sup>3</sup> points to the same fact. Mohammad Taqi Jafari has discussed that verse saying that it is like a mathematical equation in which one is equal to all and all is equal to one. He maintains that this formula is a supernatural fact not an ordinary legal principle (Jafari, 1991 p. 406).

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1. لقد كرّمنا بني آدم

2. ونفخت فيه من روحي

3. من قتل نفساً بغير نفس أو فساد في الأرض فكأنما قتل الناس جميعاً

#### **4. Humanitarian Principles in the Prophetic Sunnah and the Practice of Imam Ali**

What is currently called the humanitarian law and aims at protecting lives, properties and dignity of civilians, the wounded, prisoners of war and those who have not taken part in war, has been a focus of attention for Islam since its advent. Perhaps the most important basis for the humanitarian law in Islam is that if a war should inevitably happen, it should be fair (Qur'an, al-Isrā', 17:33; al-Baqarah, 2:178; al-Baqarah, 2:190).<sup>1</sup> The manners of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) in avoiding war and violence is beyond doubt. The abovementioned hadith pertains to a time that the war is inevitable. Attention to such humanitarian law at the beginning of Islam can be analyzed through three processes and eleven stages. The first process is before establishment of grounds for violence and war. The second process evolves after good grounds are laid for war and violence and the third process covers everything that happens after initiation of an armed conflict. Here, we will briefly explain every one of those processes.

##### **4.1. The process before establishment of grounds for armed conflicts**

The most important step to be taken at this stage is to prevent violence and war. Wars usually follow a period of escalation of tensions. The most important task of people and organizations including political players is to prevent war by resorting to any means. The Almighty God orders Muslims to accept peace if their enemy was inclined toward it (Qur'an, al-Anfāl, 8:61).<sup>2</sup> "If your enemy stopped fighting you and proposed peace, in that case, you are not permitted to go on fighting" (Qur'an, al-Nisā', 4:90).<sup>3</sup> The first thing that Imam Ali (AS) did to prevent war was to accept his enemies' requests. The second option was dialogue to reduce tension. When Imam Ali (AS) was caliph, he did not limit political freedoms of his opponents and did not force dignitaries to swear allegiance to him.<sup>4</sup> Even Imam Ali (AS) asked one of them to find somebody to guarantee that he

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1. فلا يُسرف في القتل. أسراء (١٧): ٣٣. / كتب عليكم القصاص ... فمن اعتدى بعد ذلك فله عذاب اليم. بقره (٢): ١٧٨. / و قاتلوا في سبيل الله الذين يقاتلونكم ولا تعتدوا. بقره (٢): ١٩٠.

2. وإن جنحوا للسلم فاجنح لها وتوكل على الله

3. فإن اعتزلوكم فلم يقاتلوكم وألقوا إليكم السلم فما جعل الله لكم عليهم سبيلا

4. It was customary at that time that if influential people swore allegiance to a ruler, the remaining dignitaries could be forced into obedience.

would not cause unrest. He said that he did not know such a person. When people wanted to kill him, Imam Ali (AS) said that he would guarantee that the man will not cause unrest Ibn al-Athir, 1965, Vol. 2, p. 320; al-Shaykh al-Mufid, 1992, pp. 94, 111-114). Imam Ali (AS) also opted for dialogue in the face of other opponents including Marwan bin Hakam and some influential figures of Umayyad family to convince them do not wage war and also to dispel their delusion of feeling insecure (al-Balādhuri, 1996, p. 387). Also the political and social rights of opponents should be realized to prevent breakout of war and violence, as Imam Ali (AS) did about Khawarij (Sallām, n.d., p. 321; Naviri, 1985, Vol. 5, p. 213; Ibn Kathir al-Dimashqi, 1994, Vol. 7, pp. 295-300). All such measures by Imam Ali (AS) aimed to prevent violence and armed conflict.

#### **4.2. The process after establishment of grounds for armed conflicts and before such conflicts begin**

If reconciliatory measures taken in the first stage fail and one or both parties to a conflict reach the conclusion that there is no way but war, the second process will be triggered. The process starts with intention to wage war and ends in violent acts at the battlefield. This process will include four stages as follows:

##### **4.2.1. No assault on environment as well as civilian places and persons**

When both sides are bent on war, they would gather forces and equipment and prepare all their resources and will probably start moving toward the location of conflict. In the meantime, they will meet people who have nothing to do with the conflict, but since they are unwillingly located on the path of the troops, they may be exposed to intentional or unintentional assault by either side to hostilities. Especially in old times, it was customary that when troops started to move toward the battlefield, cities and villages on their way had to provide them with wherewithal without being paid for it. If they refused to do so, they would have been punished with sword and their farms as well as residence would have been plundered. When Imam Ali (AS) was moving toward the battlefield, he wrote letter to governors of cities and their inhabitants, telling them that his troops were not permitted to do the least harm to them and called on them to report any offense, so that, the offenders could be put to punishment (Nahj al-Balāghah, 1992, Letter 60, p. 345; Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 1967, Vol. 3, pp. 203-204; Naviri, 1985, Vol. 5, p. 169; Al-Minqari, 1991, pp.

205, 209; al-Tabari, 1979, Vol. 3, p. 563). Also, any assault to businessperson, farmers, preachers and religious leaders has been forbidden (Mohaqqeq Damad, 2004, pp. 116–122). Religious leaders, as defined in Islamic texts, covers religious leaders of Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and followers of John the Baptist, who are collectively known as “People of the Book.” Of course, all those groups are not presence in theater of war and have nothing to do with the damage to environment as well as nonmilitary install and buildings. Nor they are involved in military action. The main issue is that the military is not permitted to damage civilians and religious leaders or to destroy the environment, both during its march toward war, and after victory and conquering new land. Those bans also apply to armed conflicts, but insisting on those bans even before an armed conflict takes place is aimed at preventing war or convincing the belligerent party to change its mind. Abusing environment, assaulting people and seizing their property will made an army more powerful and increase its willingness to go on war.

#### **4.2.2. Negotiation to prevent armed conflict**

When efforts made to prevent violence prove inefficient and the battle is inevitable with belligerent parties deploying their troops and armament, serious talks should be aimed at preventing war. Imam Ali (AS) fought three wars during four years of his rule. In all of them when early efforts at preventing war failed, influential people were sent to dissuade the enemies. In those negotiations, they stressed on points that were accepted by both sides. Imam Ali (AS) did not suffice to sending few emissaries and sent many people to mediate through negotiations (Al-Jawzi, n.d., p. 69; Nahj al-Balāghah, 1992, Sermon 122, p. 120) though he was a belligerent party.

#### **4.2.3. Not starting war under any conditions**

Imam Ali (AS) (whose behavior is taken to reflect viewpoint of Islam) never started a war. When negotiations proved unsuccessful, Imam Ali (AS) ordered his troops not to start the war (Al-Mas‘udi, 1991, Vol. 1, pp. 763, 718; al-Ya‘qubi, 1968, Vol. 2, pp. 94, 184; Al-Minqari, 1991, pp. 75, 270, 277, 432, 530; al-Shaykh al-Mufid, 1992, p. 399; Al-Tabari, 1979, Vol. 3, pp. 517–520; Al-Dinawari, 1960, p. 147; Al-Iskāfi al-Mu‘tazili, 1995, p. 140; Al-Majlisi, 1988, Vol. 32, p. 213). Therefore, if the opposing party did not start the war, no war would have happened. He told his son, Imam Hassan

(AS), "Never challenge anybody because it is wrong to start a fight" (Al-Majlisi, 1983, Vol. 100, p. 39; Al-'Aqqād, 1967, p. 18).

### **4.3. Process after initiation of armed conflicts**

Conflicts enter into their main phase after the first violent measure is taken by a belligerent party or after the first bullet is fired. As said before, the political thought of Islam has prohibited Muslims from starting a war until the other party has done so. Even in conflicts, Islam has recognized humanitarian laws that are explained as follows:

#### **4.3.1. Not depriving the enemy from primary human needs**

No belligerent side is entitled to curtail the other side's access to water, food, medicine and similar requirements or render them unusable by poisoning them, even if the affect side does not believe in God (Al-Kulayni, 1983, Vol. 5, p. 28).<sup>1</sup> During the war of Seffin, first Muawiyah commanded his troops to prevent Imam Ali's (AS) army to have access to water. Imam (AS) sent a message to him, reminding Muawiyah that water was a bounty from God for people and their animals and nobody is allowed to prevent them from consuming water. But Muawiyah refused. Imam's (AS) soldiers attacked the enemy and gained control of water. Imam (AS) ordered them to take whatever water they needed and allow Muawiyah's soldiers to take water. Again, Muawiyah army regained control of water and prevented Imam's (AS) army to drink water. Imam's (AS) soldiers pushed them back again, but this time, Imam (AS) ordered his men not to prevent access to water by the enemy. This also happened for a third time and Imam Ali's (AS) friends and commanders vehemently objected to him why he did not behave like Muawiyah. Imam Ali (AS), however, said Muawiyah's conduct was immoral and did not accept to act like him (Al-Minqari, 1991, pp. 219-222; Al-Jawzi, n.d., pp. 88-90). Also, when Imam Ali (AS) was assassinated by Ibn Muljam, he ordered that his assassin should not be kept thirsty or hungry (Ibn al-Athir, 1965, Vol. 2, pp. 197-198; Al-Majlisi, 1983, Vol. 42, p. 288).

#### **4.3.2. Minimizing own and enemy's casualties**

If, for any reason, people decide to kill each other, Islam has tried to reduce casualties to a minimum. It is acceptable for both parties to try to

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قال علي (علي): نهى رسول الله (ص) أن يلقى السّم في بلاد المشركين.

minimize casualties, but it seems contradictory if only one side tries to reduce the casualties of its enemies. Isn't war aimed at killing the enemy? So, why should one try to reduce enemy casualties? This conforms to the logic of Islam and Imam Ali (AS). Since war is usually launched after all efforts to prevent it have failed, it is also carried out reluctantly. Now that the war has broken out despite all endeavors, every effort should be made to reduce casualties, even those of the enemies. This is a reason for prohibition of weapons of mass destruction which kill a great number of people. The Holy Quran orders Muslims to fight those who fight them, but do not go beyond acceptable limits (Qur'an, al-Baqarah, 2:190).<sup>1</sup> Also, the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) has stipulated that the army who abuses its victory will be stricken by the wrath of God (Al-Shaybāni, 1958, Vol. 2, p. 85). During War of Seffin, Imam Ali (AS) told his army to pray to God to reduce their casualties that those of their enemies and establish peace between them (Nahj al-Balāghah, 1992, Sermon 206, p. 240).

#### **4.3.3. Direct confrontation between leaders to reduce casualties**

Every conflict comprises of leaders who are commanders, decisions makers and the masterminds of the conflict surrounded by those who support them. Usually, as we distance from the ringleaders, the surrounding supporters are innocents who are victims and have the least interest in war. Imam Ali (AS) believed that the war should be as close to masterminds as possible, so that, surrounding supporters will suffer less. During War of Seffin, Imam Ali (AS) sent many messages to Muawiyah calling on him to face Imam Ali (AS) personally to prevent bloodshed, but the latter refused (Naviri, 1985, Vol. 5, p. 193; Al-Minqari, 1991, pp. 57, 432, 530).

#### **4.3.4. Not harming the wounded, prisoners of war, deserters and dead bodies**

From Imam Ali's (AS) viewpoint there is no doubt that the war wounded should not be molested, captives should not be killed and those who have escaped should not be prosecuted. This is aimed at reducing violence and respecting human rights. In every war, Imam Ali (AS) ordered his soldiers that no dead body should be mutilated, no tent should be taken down, and no house should be broken into (Naviri, 1985, Vol. 5,

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وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُفْتَالُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ.

pp. 152, 154–155, 178; Al-Dinawari, 1960, p. 151; al-Tabari, 1979, Vol. 3, p. 518; Nahj al-Balāghah, 1992, Letter 14, p. 280; Al-Majlisi, 1988, Vol. 32, p. 213). Also, killing slaves is immoral. During Jamal War, a number of enemy leaders such as Marwan and Walid were arrested and taken to Imam Ali (AS). They had been fighting until they were taken into captivity and it was evident that they would fight again if they were offered a good opportunity in the future. However, Imam Ali (AS) released them (al-Shaykh al-Mufid, 1992, p. 339; Nahj al-Balāghah, 1992, Sermon 73, p. 55; Al-'Aqqād, 1967, p. 200). Also, dead bodies of enemies should not be dismembered. As said before, even lifeless bodies should be respected from the viewpoint of Islam, and should be buried through a special ceremony. For this reason, enemies' dead bodies should not be disfigured (Nahj al-Balāghah, 1992, Letter 47, p. 321; Letter 14, p. 280).

#### **4.3.5. Not harming women, children and the aged**

The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) prohibited his men from killing women and children (Ibn Hishām, n.d., p. 992). Imam Ali (AS) also strictly commanded his troops to avoid of molesting women even if they insulted them or their commander (Nahj al-Balāghah, 1992, Letter 14, p. 280). After the War of Jamal, Saffiyeh, the mother of Talheh, frequently insulted Imam Ali (AS), but he did not insult her and prevented his men from doing so (al-Tabari, 1979, Vol. 3, p. 544). A number of children were killed in a conflict and when Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) heard about it, he was very angry and asked why some people are so belligerent that they killed children (Ibn Hanbal, 1993, Vol. 8, p. 41). There are many instances in the life of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) where he has forbidden killing women and children (Ibn Mājah, 1974, Vol. 2, pp. 101, 947; Abu Dāwud, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 52; al-Tusi, 1985, Vol. 6, p. 138). Many commentators of Quran argue that killing women and children is wrong and maintain that when Quran warned Muslims against extreme actions when fighting enemies (Qur'an, al-Baqarah, 2:190)<sup>1</sup>, it alluded to killing women and children (Tabatabaei, 1973, Vol. 2, p. 61; Qutb, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 188; al-Tabrisi, 1983, Vol. 1, p. 285). Although some jurists believe that killing women and children who help enemies, most Shia jurists have absolutely forbidden killing women and children, even if they have

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1. ولا تعتدوا إن الله يحب المعتدين.

taken part in war (Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, 1969, Vol. 1, p. 312; Al-Najafi, 1981, Vol. 21, p. 70). Also, killing the aged is forbidden provided that they have not taken part in war against Muslims (Abu Dāwud, n.d., p. 52; Al-Hurr al-Āmili, 1983, Vol. 11, p. 43; Al-Najafi, 1981, p. 75).

#### **4.3.6. Not resorting to cheating and treason**

The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) discouraged any type of treason in war and ordered his men to fight, but not to cheat. He also exhorted them against breaching their word and behaving in a treacherous manner toward anybody (Ibn Hishām, n.d., p. 992). War tactics which are allowed are quite different from treason and cheating, which is not prescribed against enemy in war (Mohaqqeq Damad, 2004, pp. 94-97).

#### **4.3.7. Continuation of negotiations during conflicts**

In the course of war and conflicts, no effort should be spared to put an end to hostilities. Although Imam Ali (AS) was a party to conflicts, he always sent messengers and mediators throughout the war and always looked for a way to terminate conflicts (Hassani, 1994, p. 416; Jafarian, 1997, p. 267).

### **4.4. Domestic and International Conflicts**

Basically, Islam takes a universal and humane approach to various issues. There are differences between Muslims and non-Muslims in terms of rituals and some legal rules, but there is no difference between the two groups with regard to humane issues such as respecting human dignity, justice, as well as adherence to moral principles and humanitarian law. This finding aligns with recent comparative scholarship, which confirms that both Islam and international humanitarian law share a fundamental commitment to equal rights, justice, and respect for human dignity, and that both systems strongly oppose discrimination in all its forms (Mohmand, 2025, p. 1179). Although, the above discussions are mostly based on historical evidence related to wars between Muslims, but those principles were also observed during wars with non-Muslims and Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) had banned Muslims from spreading poison in non-Muslim cities (al-Kulayni, 1983, Vol. 5, p. 28). The most important argument is based on a Quranic verses which orders Muslims to defend themselves in proportion to the aggression that they have undergone and does not allow them to take extreme measures (Qur'an, al-

Baqarah, 2:194; Qur'an, al-Baqarah, 2:190).<sup>1</sup> Based on the Islamic law and taking into account three principles of limitations in using arms, compliance with moral values in war, and humane treatment of prisoners of war; Mohaqqeq Damad believes that the following groups should be immune to any form of violence and assault in any international conflict: 1. women and children; 2. the aged; 3. businesspeople and farmers; 4. civilian passers-by; and 5. the clergy. He also maintains that the following measures have been totally prohibited by Islam regardless of religious tendencies of parties to the conflict (Mohaqqeq Damad, 2004, pp. 55-57): 1. massacre of enemy forces; 2. ignoring the right to surrender (killing prisoners of war); 3. any act of retribution; 4. assault on the wounded; 5. denying enemy's access to food and water; 6. demolition of buildings and installations; and 7. destruction of the environment and cutting trees. Recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of engaging with Islamic legal principles in a multicultural and diverse interpretative framework, particularly in international judicial contexts, arguing that traditional systems of justice should not be dismissed in their entirety but rather considered within their proper legal and cultural contexts (Badar, Altuntas & Amin, 2026, p. 1).

## **5. The Relationship between Human Dignity and Humanitarian Law in Islam**

### **5.1. Intrinsic Dignity as the Foundation of Humanitarian Law**

In Islamic thought, human dignity can be understood through two interconnected dimensions: intrinsic dignity and acquired dignity. Intrinsic dignity is a universal and equal gift granted to all human beings, rooted in their creation and human nature. This understanding is based on several Qur'anic foundations, including human beings' appointment as God's vicegerents on earth (Qur'an, al-Baqarah, 2:30), the divine spirit breathed into humanity (Qur'an, al-Hijr, 15:29), and the honor bestowed upon the children of Adam (Qur'an, al-Isrā', 17:70). These foundations establish human beings' unique moral status and provide the basis for their equal worth (Al-Rāzi, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 45; Al-Tabari, 2001, Vol. 1, p. 89).

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1. فمن اعتدى عليكم فاعتدوا عليه بمثل ما إعتدى عليكم وتقوا الله و اعلموا ان الله مع المتقين، بقره (٢): ١٩٤ / و . قاتلوا في سبيل الله الذين يقاتلونكم و لا تعتدوا، ان الله لا يحب المعتدين، بقره (٢): ١٩٠.

The concept of intrinsic dignity is further associated with three fundamental human capacities: rational understanding, the divine dimension of human existence, and the ability to communicate and acquire knowledge through language. These characteristics distinguish human beings from other creatures and explain why dignity belongs to all members of the human family regardless of their religious, ethnic, or social identity (Ibn 'Āshur, 1984, Vol. 1, p. 9; Izutsu, 2002, p. 45).

By contrast, acquired dignity is associated with moral excellence, faith, and piety. Unlike intrinsic dignity, which is universal and unconditional, acquired dignity represents an ethical and spiritual status evaluated ultimately by God rather than by human institutions. The Qur'an identifies piety as the true criterion of spiritual superiority (Qur'an, al-Hujurāt, 49:13)<sup>1</sup>. However, this form of dignity cannot establish social or political hierarchy among human beings. As emphasized by Imam Ali, differences in piety do not provide a basis for discrimination in social relations, since all human beings share a common origin and creation (Nahj al-Balāghah, Letter 53).

Accordingly, the principles of humanitarian law examined in the previous section are founded exclusively on intrinsic dignity rather than acquired dignity. This is because humanitarian norms require a universal and equal foundation applicable to all individuals, including both combatants and non-combatants, regardless of their religious or moral status. Acquired dignity, due to its unequal and ultimately immeasurable nature, cannot provide the basis for universal and legally binding obligations. Therefore, intrinsic human dignity constitutes the philosophical foundation upon which humanitarian principles are constructed (Donnelly, 2013, p. 127; Waldron, 2012, p. 15).

## **5.2. The Application of Human Dignity to Humanitarian Law**

The relationship between human dignity and humanitarian law can be examined in two interconnected areas: the prevention and justification of war, the regulation of conduct during armed conflict, and the treatment of individuals and communities after the cessation of hostilities.

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يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ.

In relation to the prevention of war, the Islamic emphasis on peace and conflict avoidance reflects a fundamental respect for human dignity. The Qur'anic command establishes peace as the preferred condition whenever possible (Qur'an, al-Anfāl, 8:61).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Imam Ali's repeated attempts to negotiate with opponents before and during conflict demonstrate that war is considered a last resort rather than a desirable objective (al-Shaykh al-Mufid, 1992, p. 56; al-Tabari, 1979, Vol. 3, p. 518). This approach is rooted in the understanding that human life possesses sacred value and that the unnecessary shedding of blood constitutes a violation of divinely granted dignity.

The prohibition against aggression further reflects this principle. The Qur'anic instruction establishes limits on the use of force and prohibits excessive violence (Qur'an, al-Baqarah, 2:190).<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Prophetic Sunnah explicitly prohibit the killing of women, children, and other non-combatants during warfare, demonstrating that the dignity of individuals remains protected even in situations of armed conflict (Sahih al-Bukhāri, Book of Jihād; Abu Dāwud, Book of Jihād). Recent studies of Islamic legal thought have further shown that these ethical limitations on warfare were developed within the jurisprudential traditions of early Muslim scholars, who sought to regulate the use of force and establish normative principles for the conduct of war. In this regard, Rahimi Nejad's study on the ethics of controlling war and the roots of Islamic international law in the thought of second-century jurists highlights the emergence of legal and moral constraints on warfare within Islamic jurisprudence (Rahimi Nejad, 2024).

The continuation of efforts toward reconciliation during war, as reflected in Imam Ali's conduct, further indicates that human dignity preserves the possibility of restoring peace even among enemies. The enemy is not deprived of humanity; rather, conflict does not eliminate the fundamental dignity shared by all human beings.

During armed conflict, humanitarian principles similarly emerge as practical expressions of human dignity. The prohibition against depriving enemies of essential resources, including water, food, and medicine, is illustrated by Imam Ali's conduct during the Battle of Siffin. Despite being

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1. وَإِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلَامِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا

2. عَوَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا

denied access to water, he refused to impose the same deprivation upon his opponents after gaining control of the water source (Al-Mufid, 1993; Al-Tabari, 1997). This conduct reflects the welfare dimension of dignity, according to which even enemies remain entitled to basic human necessities.

Likewise, the effort to minimize casualties and avoid unnecessary direct confrontation between ordinary soldiers demonstrates that human dignity extends beyond one's own community and includes even those on the opposing side. The protection of human life is therefore not limited by political allegiance or religious identity.

Respect for the wounded, prisoners, and the dead also derives from the enduring nature of human dignity. Islamic sources emphasize humane treatment of captives and prohibit mutilation of corpses, reflecting the principle that dignity continues even after death (Al-Māwardi, 1996, p. 48). The Prophet's act of standing in respect when the funeral procession of a Jewish person passed by further confirms that human dignity is not dependent on religious affiliation (Al-Bukhari, 1999, Book of Jihād, Hadith 3050).

The protection of women, children, and elderly persons during warfare similarly reflects the recognition of universal intrinsic dignity and the need to provide additional protection for vulnerable groups (Abu Dawud, n.d., Book of Jihād, Hadith 2613). Furthermore, the prohibition of betrayal and treachery in warfare demonstrates that even military necessity cannot justify violations of moral integrity. The Prophet's distinction between legitimate military strategy and deception that violates trust reflects the ethical limits imposed by human dignity (Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj, n.d., Book of Jihād, Hadith 1911).

Finally, the universal application of humanitarian principles to both Muslims and non-Muslims is grounded in the shared dignity of all human beings. This principle is expressed in Imam Ali's famous statement: *"People are of two kinds: either your brothers in religion or your equals in creation"* (Nahj al-Balāghah, Letter 53). It also corresponds with the Qur'anic declaration which establishes dignity as a universal attribute of humanity (Qur'an, al-Isrā', 17:70).

### **5.3. Humanitarian Law as the Practical Manifestation of Intrinsic Dignity**

The preceding analysis demonstrates that the humanitarian principles discussed above are not derived from acquired dignity but from the universal concept of intrinsic human dignity. The transformation of dignity into concrete humanitarian obligations occurs through three fundamental mechanisms.

First, dignity generates a dual ethical responsibility: the obligation to preserve one's own dignity and to respect the dignity of others. This principle is reflected in Imam Ali's statement that human beings are either religious brothers or equals in creation (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 53). Second, dignity requires the rejection of discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, race, or social status, a principle rooted in the Qur'anic affirmation of the honor granted to all children of Adam (Qur'an, *al-Isrā'*, 17:70). Third, dignity requires the protection of minimum human conditions—including justice, respect, welfare, and recognition of human worth—particularly during situations of armed conflict (Donnelly, 2013; Waldron, 2012).

Accordingly, each humanitarian principle represents the practical application of a specific dimension of human dignity within the context of war. The prohibition of initiating aggression and the pursuit of peace represent justice and respect; the protection of civilians and vulnerable groups reflects recognition of universal dignity; the provision of essential resources embodies the welfare dimension of dignity; humane treatment of prisoners and the dead demonstrates awareness of the continuing value of human beings; and the universal application of humanitarian norms expresses the global character of intrinsic dignity beyond religious and ethnic boundaries.

Therefore, the central argument of this article—that humanitarian law is not merely a set of ethical recommendations but rather the practical manifestation of human dignity—is clearly established. Without human dignity, humanitarian principles would lack their philosophical foundation and normative authority, reducing them to merely strategic rules of warfare. Within the Islamic framework, however, human dignity provides these principles with their moral legitimacy and transforms them into binding obligations for individuals and political authorities alike.

## 6. Conclusion

All man's attitudes shape his behaviors, and every person's behavior is a clue to his attitudes. This is true about religions and schools of thought. Every religion considers man's status in proportion to its attitude toward human beings, and human dignity in every religion matches the status that it considers for man. A fact that has been stipulated by Islam and has never been doubted by all Muslim scholars is that "Almighty God has blown His spirit unto the human soul" (Qur'an, al-Hijr, 15:29).<sup>1</sup> Every human being has two dimensions. One dimension is divine and spiritual, which never dies and is part of his nature. Therefore, it is quite clear how a creature who is half-divine should be treated. Human rights that were accepted by Islam and Imam Ali (AS) are commensurate with the status of a creature that is carrying the spirit of God and half of whose being is divine.

Imam Ali's advice to his governor in Egypt emphasizes that human beings deserve moral concern not only because of shared religious affiliation but also because of their common humanity (Nahj al-Balāghah, 1992, Letter 53, p. 326). However, this principle raises an important question: how can one cultivate love and moral concern for those with whom one has no immediate social or religious connection and whose only commonality is their human nature? Since affection is often developed through personal interaction, shared experiences, and long-term relationships, extending such love to all human beings may appear challenging. Nevertheless, Imam Ali's ethical perspective suggests that recognition of the shared dignity of human beings can serve as the foundation for a broader form of moral responsibility that transcends particular affiliations and encompasses humanity as a whole.

In the past, making handicrafts was part of the schools' curriculum. During that hour, students were told to make handicrafts using all their talent and creativity. Then they took what they had made to school and showed it off to others. In the same way, God has used His entire creativeness to create a creature that is called Man in the best possible form (Qur'an, al-Tin, 95:4).<sup>2</sup> When He looked at him, He appreciated His own

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1. وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رَوْحِي

2. لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ

feat (Qur'an, al-Mu'minun, 23:14).<sup>1</sup> Drawing on the divine hadith (Foruzanfar, 1955, p. 29)<sup>2</sup>, it would be true to claim that God intended to reveal Himself through the creation of mankind. He has also created a universe with complex components. The solar system is but part of the universe, and we are told in religious teachings that an even more complex world exists inside human beings.<sup>3</sup> Man is a combination of divine and material dimensions. The physical aspect of this creature, which can be studied, has greatly amazed scientists, and the more they know about it, the more they become aware of the greatness of its creator. The function of every cell in the human body, up to the brain and nervous system, is so complicated and amazing that it cannot be described. Another part of the human entity, that is, his soul, cannot be appraised through experiment. However, small pieces of information obtained on the human soul denote the existence of another complicated world, which is much more complex than the human body.

Imam Ali's (AS) recommendation for loving all people just because of their humanity is only justifiable if we see humans as God's "handicraft" and see mankind as a mirror of the creator's greatness. In that case, every human being is a noble creature created by the Almighty God. The words of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) are the best manifestation of the concurrence of human dignity with humanitarian law: "If one of you fights another, he should avoid marring his face, because God has created man's face on the model of His own" (Ibn Hanbal, 1993, Vol. 2, p. 251; Qomi, n.d., Vol. 2, pp. 5-52). In this way, even in wars and conflicts, human dignity should be respected. The abovementioned eleven stages that were explained as examples of Islam and Imam Ali's (AS) respect for humanitarian law were all rooted in Islam's approach to human dignity, and both of them stem from Islam's attitude toward mankind, which was discussed above. As contemporary scholarship has demonstrated, human dignity provides not only a theoretical basis for realizing the right to international peace and security but also a framework for reforming unjust structures in the international order and confronting the political

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1. فتبارك الله احسن الخالقين

2. كُنْتُ كَنْزاً مَخْفِيّاً فَأَحْبَبْتُ أَنْ أُعْرَفَ فَخَلَقْتُ الْخَلْقَ لِكَيْ أُعْرَفَ

3. A poem attributed to Imam Ali (AS) says: "You think you are a small thing, but a big universe exists inside you" (Beihaqi Neishabouri, 1996, p. 236).

and economic roots of war, violence, and conflict (Firouzi, 2026, p. 2).

This study is among the first to systematically demonstrate that human dignity functions not merely as a parallel ethical value but as the philosophical and normative foundation of humanitarian law in Islam. Unlike previous scholarship that has treated humanitarian principles in isolation (e.g., Mohaqqueq Damad, 2004; Khadduri, 1955), this study establishes a direct conceptual linkage between the theological conception of dignity (rooted in the divine spirit) and the specific humanitarian norms derived from it. The findings confirm that intrinsic dignity is stable and inalienable, which makes it a robust foundation for universal humanitarian norms applicable to all persons regardless of moral or religious status. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that these principles apply equally to both domestic and international armed conflicts and are not confined to relations among Muslims, challenging the narrow interpretation that restricts Islamic humanitarian norms to intra-Muslim conflicts. The eleven-stage framework for analyzing humanitarian conduct in Islam, as derived from the practices of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali, offers a novel analytical tool for understanding the comprehensive nature of Islamic humanitarian law.

Future research should examine the application of these principles in contemporary armed conflicts involving Muslim-majority states and explore their compatibility with international humanitarian law frameworks. Comparative studies between Islamic humanitarian principles and Western just war theory could further enrich the dialogue between these traditions. Additionally, empirical research on the implementation of these principles in modern Islamic legal systems would provide valuable insights into their practical relevance. Beyond the context of armed conflict, however, the Islamic concept of human dignity may also be examined in broader spheres of human relations, including social, interpersonal, and intimate relationships. Although such dimensions extend beyond the scope of the present study, acknowledging this broader understanding of dignity highlights that its moral significance is not limited to situations of conflict but concerns the entirety of human interaction. Scholars are also encouraged to investigate how the concept of human dignity in Islam can contribute to the ongoing development of international humanitarian law in the context of

contemporary conflicts.

**Conflict of Interest**

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## Original Research Paper

# Intense cultural assimilation in the Iranian diaspora: A sociological explanation

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## Abstract

Migration is not merely geographical relocation but a multi-layered process of redefining identity and rebuilding social relations. This theoretical article examines the sociological tendency toward intense cultural assimilation in parts of the Iranian diaspora. The objective is to move beyond reductionist and normative explanations and present a multi-level explanatory model for understanding this phenomenon. This research is a theoretical article (Conceptual Paper) organized through a systematic literature review and conceptual analysis. Classical and contemporary works related to the sociology of migration, diaspora studies, theories of cultural adaptation, status theory, symbolic capital, and media were critically examined. Key concepts were extracted and organized within three analytical levels: pre-migration contextual factors, post-migration mediating mechanisms, and status and identity consequences. The findings demonstrate that intense cultural assimilation cannot be reduced merely to cultural self-loss or individual preferences. Instead, it results from the interaction of historical, cultural, media, and status-related factors. Pre-migration cultural deposits, transnational media representations, structural ruptures, status pressures in the host society, and the effort to accumulate symbolic capital in transnational social fields interact within a causal-interactive structure. This pattern represents one of several possible cultural adaptation strategies among the Iranian diaspora. Intense cultural assimilation is not a sign of absolute passivity or lack of agency but rather a positionally rational strategy for gaining positive distinction and accumulating symbolic capital in transnational social fields. Alongside this pattern, hybrid, multi-layered, and transnational identities are also observable among different sections of the Iranian diaspora. Understanding this phenomenon requires simultaneous attention to social structures, lived experiences, and the status calculations of social actors.

**Keywords:** Iranian diaspora, intense cultural assimilation, cultural adaptation, status anxiety, positional agency, symbolic capital, hybrid identity

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## مقاله پژوهشی

# همسان سازی فرهنگی شدید در دیاسپورای ایرانی: تبیینی جامعه‌شناختی

رضا غلامی<sup>✉</sup>

دریافت: ۱۴۰۴/۰۸/۱۰؛ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۴/۰۹/۲۹

## چکیده:

مهاجرت صرفاً به معنای جابه‌جایی از یک سرزمین به سرزمینی دیگر نیست، بلکه فرایندی پیچیده و چندلایه است که با بازتعریف هویت و بازسازی روابط اجتماعی همراه می‌شود. این مقاله نظری به بررسی گرایش به همسان‌سازی فرهنگی شدید در بخشی از دیاسپورای ایرانی از منظر جامعه‌شناختی می‌پردازد. هدف آن، عبور از تبیین‌های تقلیل‌گرایانه و هنجاری و ارائه الگویی چندسطحی برای فهم این پدیده است. این پژوهش در قالب یک مقاله نظری (مقاله مفهومی) و بر پایه مرور نظام‌مند ادبیات و تحلیل مفهومی انجام شده است. در این راستا، آثار کلاسیک و معاصر در حوزه‌های جامعه‌شناسی مهاجرت، مطالعات دیاسپورا، نظریه‌های انطباق فرهنگی، نظریه منزلت، سرمایه نمادین و رسانه به‌صورت انتقادی بررسی شدند. سپس مفاهیم کلیدی استخراج و در سه سطح تحلیلی سامان‌دهی شدند: عوامل زمینه‌ساز پیش از مهاجرت، سازوکارهای میانجی پس از مهاجرت، و پیامدهای منزلتی و هویتی. یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد که همسان‌سازی فرهنگی شدید را نمی‌توان صرفاً پیامد از دست رفتن هویت فرهنگی با حاصل ترجیحات فردی دانست. این پدیده در نتیجه تعامل مجموعه‌ای از عوامل تاریخی، فرهنگی، رسانه‌ای و منزلتی شکل می‌گیرد. رسوبات فرهنگی پیش از مهاجرت، بازنمایی‌های رسانه‌ای فراملی، گسست‌های ساختاری، فشارهای منزلتی در جامعه میزبان و تلاش برای انباشت سرمایه نمادین در میدان‌های اجتماعی فراملی، در قالب الگویی علی-تعاملی بر یکدیگر اثر می‌گذارند. از این‌رو، همسان‌سازی فرهنگی شدید را باید یکی از راهبردهای ممکن انطباق فرهنگی در میان دیاسپورای ایرانی دانست، نه تنها راهبرد موجود. در نهایت، این مقاله استدلال می‌کند که همسان‌سازی فرهنگی شدید نه نشانه انفعال مطلق یا فقدان عاملیت، بلکه راهبردی عقلانی و وابسته به موقعیت اجتماعی برای کسب تمایز مثبت و انباشت سرمایه نمادین در میدان‌های اجتماعی فراملی است. در کنار این‌گو، اشکال دیگری از هویت، از جمله هویت‌های ترکیبی، چندلایه و فراملی نیز در میان گروه‌های مختلف دیاسپورای ایرانی مشاهده می‌شود. از این‌رو، فهم این پدیده مستلزم توجه هم‌زمان به ساختارهای اجتماعی، تجربه‌های زیسته و محاسبات منزلتی کنشگران است.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** دیاسپورای ایرانی، همسان‌سازی فرهنگی شدید، انطباق فرهنگی، اضطراب منزلتی، عاملیت

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## Original-Forschungsarbeit

# Intensive kulturelle Assimilation in der iranischen Diaspora: Eine soziologische Erklärung

Reza Gholami <sup>1\*</sup>

Eingegangen: 1. Nov. 2025

Angenommen: 19. Dez. 2025

### Zusammenfassung:

Migration bedeutet weit mehr als eine bloße geografische Verlagerung. Sie ist ein vielschichtiger sozialer Prozess, in dem Identitäten neu ausgehandelt und soziale Beziehungen neu gestaltet werden. Der vorliegende theoretische Beitrag untersucht die Tendenz zu einer intensiven kulturellen Assimilation in Teilen der iranischen Diaspora aus soziologischer Perspektive. Ziel ist es, reduktionistische und normative Deutungen zu überwinden und ein mehrstufiges Erklärungsmodell für dieses Phänomen zu entwickeln. Die Studie ist als theoretischer Beitrag (Conceptual Paper) angelegt und basiert auf einer systematischen Literaturlauswertung sowie einer konzeptionellen Analyse. Hierzu wurden klassische und aktuelle Arbeiten aus der Migrationssoziologie, den Diasporastudien, den Theorien kultureller Anpassung, der Statustheorie, der Theorie des symbolischen Kapitals sowie der Medienforschung kritisch ausgewertet. Die zentralen Konzepte wurden auf drei analytischen Ebenen strukturiert: migrationsvorgelagerte Kontextfaktoren, vermittelnde Mechanismen nach der Migration sowie status- und identitätsbezogene Folgen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass intensive kulturelle Assimilation weder ausschließlich als Verlust kultureller Identität noch als Ausdruck individueller Präferenzen verstanden werden kann. Vielmehr entsteht sie aus dem Zusammenspiel historischer, kultureller, medialer und statusbezogener Faktoren. Kulturelle Prägungen vor der Migration, transnationale Mediendarstellungen, strukturelle Brüche, Statusdruck in der Aufnahmegesellschaft und das Bestreben, symbolisches Kapital in transnationalen sozialen Feldern anzusammeln, greifen in einer kausal-interaktiven Dynamik ineinander. Intensive kulturelle Assimilation stellt somit eine von mehreren möglichen Strategien kultureller Anpassung dar. Sie ist weder Ausdruck vollständiger Passivität noch mangelnder Handlungsfähigkeit, sondern kann als positionsbezogene rationale Strategie zur Erreichung positiver sozialer Distinktion und zur Akkumulation symbolischen Kapitals verstanden werden. Gleichzeitig bestehen hybride, mehrschichtige und transnationale Identitätsformen. Ein angemessenes Verständnis erfordert daher die gleichzeitige Berücksichtigung sozialer Strukturen, individueller Erfahrungen und statusbezogener Kalkulationen sozialer Akteure.

**Schlüsselwörter:** iranische Diaspora, intensive kulturelle Assimilation, kulturelle Anpassung, Statusangst, positionsbezogene Handlungsfähigkeit, symbolisches Kapital, hybride Identität

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1-1. Statement of the Problem and the Growth of the Diaspora**

Migration is not merely the geographical relocation of individuals, but a multi-layered process of redefining identity, rebuilding social relations, and rearranging systems of meaning. In this context, the ways in which migrants engage with the culture of the host society and adapt to it **are** among the most important topics in migration and diaspora studies. A significant part of the classical literature, from linear assimilation theory to multiculturalism models, has tried to explain different patterns of cultural adaptation. However, the experience of some migrant groups shows that these patterns do not always operate uniformly, and historical, status-related, and symbolic factors can produce different configurations of the relationship between migrants and the cultures of origin and destination.

Regarding the Iranian diaspora, although a wide range of cultural adaptation methods is observed, some migrants – especially among the middle and upper-middle classes – adopt strategies in which symbolic distancing from the culture of origin and the effort for maximum assimilation with the culture of the host society play a prominent role. This phenomenon cannot be simply explained with concepts such as cultural self-loss or loss of identity, because such explanations often carry value judgments and ignore the sociological complexities of the issue. Therefore, the mentioned phenomenon requires a deep structural and multi-level analysis that goes beyond ethical judgments and explains the logic of action of this group of migrants. Addressing this gap is theoretically and practically critical, as ignoring the structural drivers of intense assimilation perpetuates reductive stereotypes about the diaspora and obscures the complex mechanisms of identity negotiation under unequal power dynamics.

### **1-2. Research Gap (Literature Gap)**

A review of the existing literature shows that most studies in the field of Iranian migration have focused on demographic, economic, or pathological dimensions. In the few cultural studies as well, the phenomenon of extreme assimilation has either been considered as a natural and inevitable process (within classical assimilation theories) or has been criticized with a normative approach. The main research gap lies

here: few works have simultaneously examined the cultural deposits of the pre-migration period in interaction with post-migration status anxiety within a model of positional rationality. This article tries to fill this theoretical void and show how intense cultural assimilation is an agentic strategy for accumulating transnational symbolic capital.

### **1-3. Research Questions**

To address this issue, the present study raises and pursues the following questions:

1. What factors cause part of the Iranian diaspora to choose intense cultural assimilation as a strategy for adapting to the host society?
2. Is this tendency merely the result of the migration experience, or are its roots hidden in historical processes and pre-migration cultural structures?
3. How do transnational media representations influence this choice by rearranging cultural horizons?
4. What role do status mechanisms, especially the experience of status anxiety in host societies, play in directing middle-class elites toward this strategy?
5. How does transnational symbolic capital function as the goal of this strategy in transnational social fields?

### **1-4. Research Objectives**

- Main objective: Presenting a multi-level explanatory-theoretical model for understanding part of the Iranian diaspora's experience in adopting the strategy of intense cultural assimilation.

- Secondary objectives:

1. Critical analysis of the historical roots of the formation of Iranians' perception of the West and the resulting cultural deposits.
2. Explaining the mechanism of influence of transnational media on the production of migration imagination and status expectations.
3. Analyzing the relationship between symbolic insecurity, micro-aggressions, and status anxiety in the host society with identity management strategies.
4. Explaining the logic of social distinction through the conversion of capitals in transnational fields.

## **1-5. Theoretical Proposition of the Article (Main Argument)**

The theoretical hypothesis of this article is that intense cultural assimilation in part of the Iranian diaspora is the result of the interaction of five categories of factors: pre-migration cultural and educational contexts, transnational media representations, structural ruptures in the origin society, status pressures in the host society, and the effort to acquire and accumulate symbolic capital in transnational social fields. On this basis, intense cultural assimilation is not understandable as a sign of absolute passivity, but as a strategy based on positional rationality – a strategy through which individuals try to redefine their social and status position in the new conditions.

Accordingly, the main innovation of the present article is not merely in proposing the concept of "intense cultural assimilation," but in presenting a multi-level explanatory model that, for the first time, links pre-migration cultural deposits, media representations, status anxiety, positional agency, and transnational symbolic capital within a single theoretical framework. The present article tries to explain the social mechanisms of the formation of this phenomenon at macro, meso, and micro levels by moving beyond reductionist and normative explanations. By doing so, the paper goes beyond synthesizing previous studies; it introduces a new analytical perspective that reframes cultural assimilation from a passive loss of identity to an active, strategic conversion of capitals in response to systemic marginalization.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

This research is a theoretical article (Conceptual Paper) and has been compiled with the aim of presenting an explanatory framework for understanding the phenomenon of "intense cultural assimilation" in part of the Iranian diaspora. Unlike empirical research that is based on collecting field data or testing hypotheses, the goal of this article is to develop a theoretical model through critical rereading of the existing literature and integration of sociological concepts.

Therefore, the research method is based on Critical Literature Review along with Conceptual Analysis. In this approach, the goal is not merely collecting or summarizing previous studies, but comparing, critically

evaluating, and recombining theoretical concepts in order to produce a new analytical framework.

In the study process, classical and contemporary works related to the sociology of migration, diaspora studies, theories of cultural adaptation, status theory, symbolic capital, identity, and media were examined. The selection of sources was based on three main criteria:

1. Direct relevance to the main concepts of the article;
2. Scientific credibility of the sources (books and articles published by university publishers and reputable scientific journals);
3. The theoretical role of the works in explaining the relationship between identity, status, migration, and cultural adaptation.

In the analysis stage, key concepts were extracted and organized within three analytical levels:

1. Pre-migration contextual factors;
2. Post-migration mediating mechanisms;
3. Status and identity consequences.

Then, by integrating these three levels, the theoretical model of the article was formed, which explains the relationship between cultural deposits, media representations, status anxiety, transnational symbolic capital, and intense cultural assimilation as an interactive process.

To strengthen the arguments, secondary data published by reputable international institutions about the demographic and educational characteristics of the Iranian diaspora were also used in relevant sections. However, these data play a complementary role, and the main basis of the article is theoretical argument and conceptual analysis. Therefore, the findings of the article should be considered as theoretical propositions whose empirical validity requires testing in future research.

### **3. Theoretical Framework and Discussion**

#### **3-1. Conceptual Framework and Analytical Model**

##### **a) Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalization**

One of the central topics in migration studies is how migrants face the culture of the host society and how they redefine their identity in new conditions. Berry (Berry, 1997, p. 10) in his famous model distinguishes four main strategies of cultural adaptation: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. In this framework, cultural assimilation refers to a situation in which the individual or group gradually fades their cultural attachments to the society of origin and makes themselves similar to the culture of the host society. However, the experience of some migrant groups shows that cultural assimilation does not always occur gradually and passively. In some cases, the individual consciously and actively turns symbolic distancing from the society of origin into part of their identity strategy. In this article, this situation is formulated under the title "intense cultural assimilation." By this concept is meant not merely learning the language or accepting the norms of the host society, but a type of identity strategy that is accompanied by emphasis on distancing from previous symbols, values, and cultural attachments.

The present article is based on the assumption that such behavior cannot be explained merely with concepts such as cultural self-loss. These concepts often carry value and normative loads and miss the analysis of social and status mechanisms. Therefore, the article draws on the approach of positional agency and tries to explain this behavior as a rational response to specific social and status conditions.

##### **b) Pre-Migration Cultural Deposits**

In this framework, the concept of pre-migration cultural deposits is used as a proposed analytical concept. By this concept is meant a set of assumptions, value judgments, and cultural perceptions that have been formed over historical, educational, and media processes in parts of social groups, in which development, progress, and social status have been largely linked to Western civilizational patterns. These cultural deposits do not necessarily mean the negation of native culture, but represent a kind of value hierarchy that can influence the way individuals face the migration experience.

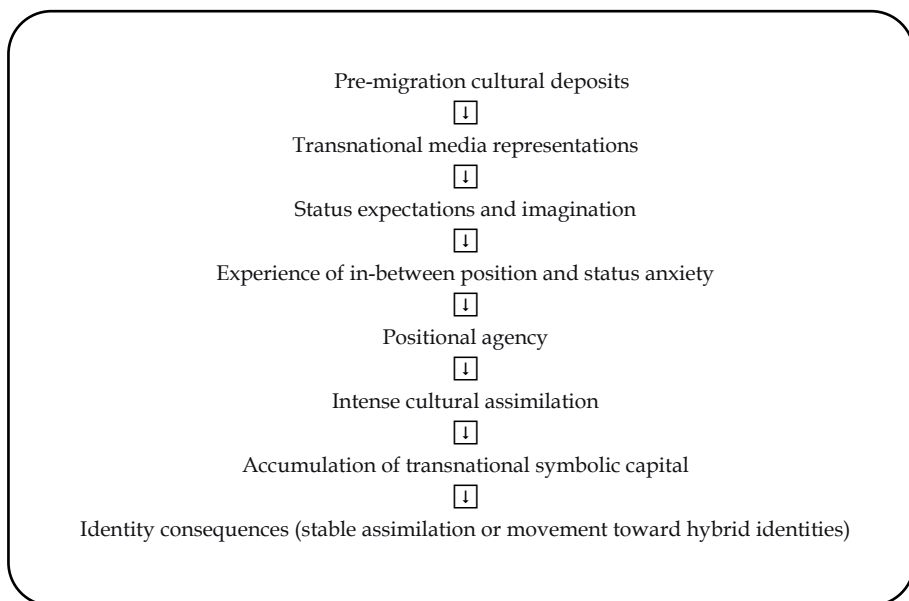
### c) Status Anxiety

The article also uses the concept of status anxiety. This concept refers to individuals' concern about their social position, the degree of acceptance, and others' evaluation of their situation. In migration conditions, especially among individuals with educational and economic capital, the experience of relative status decline or encountering cultural stereotypes can intensify the feeling of status insecurity and affect the choice of identity strategies.

### d) Transnational Symbolic Capital

The concept of transnational symbolic capital is used as an analytical concept. This concept, inspired by Bourdieu's theory of capital, refers to the capacity of some cultural resources, lifestyles, and lived experiences to create distinction and gain credibility in social fields beyond national borders. Accordingly, the experience of living in the West, mastery of foreign languages, or acceptance of specific cultural styles can become a resource for gaining status and reproducing social distinction in some contexts.

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model of the Article (Analytical Framework)



### **3-2. Historical Contexts and Pre-Migration Cultural Deposits**

Understanding some cultural tendencies among sections of the Iranian diaspora is not possible without paying attention to the historical contexts of the formation of Iranians' perception of the "West."

However, reducing this issue to specific events such as Iran's military defeats from Russia or directly attributing today's behaviors to those events would be a simplistic approach. What matters is how the initial encounter with the new civilization turned into a set of intellectual, cultural, and institutional formulations that have been deposited over time in educational structures and social discourses.

From the second half of the Qajar period, simultaneously with the increase in political, economic, and scientific contacts with Europe, the issue of backwardness and Iran's relationship with the new world became one of the main concerns of the elites. The establishment of Dar al-Fonun and the expansion of sending students to Europe opened new horizons for Iranian society; but at the same time, a kind of dualism between "tradition" and "modernity" also emerged in parts of the elites' thought. As Algar (1969, p. 45) and Tavakoli-Targhi (2001, p. 78) have shown, modernity in Iran was experienced more as an asymmetric encounter with Western power and knowledge than as an initially endogenous transformation.

In this process, parts of the intellectuals and political elites sought progress and development mainly in Western patterns. Kachouyan (2005, p. 112) shows that from the late Qajar period and especially after the Constitutional Revolution, new identity discourses were formed in which the West was not considered merely as one of the historical experiences, but as the dominant criterion of development and progress. Of course, this trend was never the only or absolutely dominant one, and alongside it, there have always been diverse interpretations of the relationship between tradition, modernity, and Iranian identity.

**State Modernization and the Redefinition of Cultural Capital:** The modernization project in the Pahlavi period brought these intellectual tendencies into the arena of official institutions. In the words of Atabaki and Zürcher (Atabaki & Zürcher, 2004, p. 12), the Pahlavi government pursued a kind of state and top-down modernization whose goal was to

build a modern nation-state and rearrange the country's social and cultural structures. This process, in addition to economic and administrative changes, also had important cultural and symbolic consequences.

Katouzian (1981, p. 156) considers this development model a kind of authoritarian modernism in which some Western cultural symbols became carriers of the meaning of progress, status, and innovation. As a result, parts of the new urban middle classes defined their cultural capital in connection with modern education, new lifestyles, and closer proximity to Western cultural patterns.

Of course, such a trend did not mean the formation of a uniform Western-oriented culture in Iranian society; Iranian society has always had extensive cultural, religious, and identity diversity, and various patterns of encountering modernity have formed in it. However, it cannot be denied that in some social layers, a kind of symbolic correlation was formed between development, social status, and closeness to Western culture — a correlation whose effects continued in subsequent generations as well.

**Educational System, Cultural Capital, and Reproduction of Distinction:** From the perspective of Bourdieusian sociology, the educational system is not merely an institution for transferring knowledge, but plays an important role in reproducing cultural capital and shaping patterns of social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 98). In contemporary Iran as well, the expansion of higher education, familiarity with foreign languages, and access to global scientific resources gradually shaped part of the cultural capital of the middle classes.

This cultural capital in many cases had positive consequences such as increased social mobility, scientific development, and expansion of intellectual horizons; but in some contexts, it unintentionally reproduced a symbolic hierarchy in which greater closeness to Western lifestyles and cultural patterns was considered a sign of status and distinction.

From this perspective, what is named in this article as pre-migration cultural deposits is not the product of a single policy nor the result of a kind of conscious planning, but the outcome of multiple historical, educational, and cultural processes that have formed over more than a century. These

cultural deposits alone do not cause intense cultural assimilation, but they can provide specific mental contexts that, in interaction with other factors, influence the choice of migrants' adaptation strategies.

**From Historical Contexts to Contemporary Actions:** On this basis, the present article distances itself from any deterministic explanation. The existence of some West-oriented tendencies in layers of Iranian society does not mean determining the behavior of migrants or ignoring the diversity of their lived experiences. What matters is paying attention to the point that today's cultural actions do not form in a vacuum, but gain meaning in connection with historical memory, educational institutions, status structures, and generational experiences.

**Theoretical Proposition 1:** Pre-migration cultural deposits are the most important mental context for producing intense cultural assimilation; however, these deposits are not the complete cause or direct driver of the phenomenon, but act as one of the contextual variables and structural catalysts that direct the actor's interpretive capacity in encountering the host society.

### **3-3. Transnational Media, Cultural Representation, and the Production of Migration Imagination**

**Globalization of Media and Rearrangement of Cultural Horizons:** Technological developments and the expansion of transnational media have been one of the most important factors in transforming the migration experience in recent decades. If migration in the past mainly meant entering an unknown world, in the era of satellite media, the Internet, and social networks, a significant part of the mental experience of migration takes shape before physical relocation. Individuals, before migrating, through continuous consumption of images, narratives, and lifestyles, gain a kind of imaginary familiarity with the destination societies.

Appadurai (1996, p. 56) shows that in the contemporary world, media and visual flows play an important role in shaping imagined landscapes. From this perspective, the decision to migrate is not merely the product of economic or political calculations, but is also influenced by social imagination and cultural perceptions. Transnational media provide the possibility of symbolic experience of distant worlds and present new horizons of desirable life to audiences.

In the case of Iranian society as well, the development of communication technologies and wider access to global media has caused many individuals to form a mental image of life in Europe and North America before migrating. These images, although reflecting part of reality, are not necessarily a complete and unmediated representation of the social complexities of destination societies.

**Cultural Hegemony and Soft Appeal:** Gramsci (1971, p. 234) does not consider hegemony merely the product of political or economic domination, but the result of cultural acceptance and the formation of social consent. In the contemporary world, cultural power and the ability to produce meaning have become one of the most important sources of influence.

Nye also, by proposing the concept of "soft power," shows that countries and civilizations can influence the preferences of others through cultural appeal, lifestyle, education, media, and social values (Nye, 2004, p. 45). From this perspective, the popularity of some Western cultural patterns cannot be reduced merely to media advertisements or domination relations, but attention must also be paid to the capacity of these societies in producing cultural appeal.

On this basis, the present article does not assume that Western media present a completely unrealistic image of Western societies; rather, it argues that media logic naturally tends more toward highlighting successes, individual freedoms, welfare, and available opportunities and pays less attention to the regular representation of complexities, inequalities, and internal tensions of societies. For this reason, the real lived experience of migrants may differ from their initial expectations.

**Media, Identity, and Processes of Cultural Redefinition:** Naficy (1993, p. 89) in his studies on media and migration shows that media images and narratives are not merely tools for transferring information, but play an active role in shaping identities and cultural imagination. Also, Alinejad's studies (Alinejad, 2017, p. 370) on transnational media and diaspora show that migrants are not passive consumers, but actors who, in interaction with media, reconstruct multi-layered and complex identities.

From this perspective, a linear relationship cannot be established between media consumption and cultural assimilation. Individuals,

depending on their cultural capital, class position, lived experience, and social networks, show different reactions to media messages. Some individuals may emphasize their native identity more, some move toward hybrid identities, and some others experience more intense cultural assimilation.

**Migration Imagination and the Formation of Status Expectations:** One of the important consequences of consuming transnational media is the formation of a kind of migration imagination; an imagination in which migration is not just geographical relocation, but a passage to a world with more opportunities, broader freedoms, and higher social status. This imagination, especially among groups with more educational and cultural capital, can be accompanied by specific status expectations.

However, the real experience of migration is not always consistent with these expectations. Entering the destination society confronts individuals with complex class structures, cultural differences, institutional limitations, and various forms of social categorization. In such conditions, the gap between previous expectations and new realities can prepare the ground for redefining identity and adopting different cultural adaptation strategies. Therefore, transnational media should not be considered the direct cause of intense cultural assimilation; their main role is to provide imaginary contexts and specific meaning frameworks that, in interaction with other historical, status-related, and structural factors, can influence the way migrants face the culture of the host society.

**Theoretical Proposition 2:** Transnational media and the global circulation of images continuously reproduce and pre-polarize the status imagination of migrants; this mechanism raises the ceiling of identity expectations before migration and, in encountering the realities of the destination, becomes an accelerator of status crises.

### **3-4. Status Anxiety and the Experience of In-Between Position in the Host Society**

**Migration and the Redefinition of Social Status:** One of the important features of migration is the relative rupture between the previous social position and the individual's place in the destination society. Migration, even in cases accompanied by economic or academic success, can lead to the redefinition of capitals and changes in status evaluation systems.

Capitals that brought credibility and social distinction in the origin society do not necessarily have the same function in the destination society, and the individual is forced to reconstruct their position in the new social fields. In the case of a significant portion of Iranian migrants, especially groups with educational and economic capital, the main issue is often not material poverty or economic deprivation, but the experience of change in status position and encountering new classification systems. Many of these individuals considered themselves part of the middle or upper-middle classes in the origin society and expected that their cultural and educational capitals would also be a source of credibility and acceptance in the destination society to the same degree. However, entering a new environment confronts them with different mechanisms of social evaluation.

**Experience of In-Between Position and Identity Management:** One of the important concepts in this context is Goffman's concept of stigma. Goffman (1963, p. 112) shows that in situations where individuals feel that some of their characteristics may become the basis for judgment or stereotyping, they resort to various ways to manage identity and redefine their social image. Maghbouleh's studies (Maghbouleh, 2017, p. 134) about Iranian Americans show that part of Iranians in the United States are in a complex situation between racial, ethnic, and cultural categories. This situation creates a kind of "in-between" experience; a situation in which the individual is neither fully assimilated into the majority group nor necessarily defines themselves within traditional racial minority categories. In such conditions, some migrants try, through active identity management, to increase their distance from negative stereotypes associated with the Middle East, migration, or existing stereotypical perceptions. This effort can take various forms; from emphasis on professional success and individualism to broader cultural assimilation with the host society.

**Status Anxiety and Symbolic Insecurity:** The concept of status anxiety, which has received attention in contemporary sociological works, refers to individuals' concern about their social position, the degree of social respect, and others' evaluation of their situation. This anxiety does not necessarily mean economic deprivation, but can also exist among successful and privileged individuals. Sue (Sue, 2010, p. 67), by proposing the concept of microaggressions, shows that many forms of discrimination

in contemporary societies appear not in overt and direct forms, but in subtle behaviors, everyday stereotypes, and imperceptible forms of rejection. Such experiences, even in the absence of overt discrimination, can strengthen the feeling of symbolic insecurity and sensitivity to social position. In this framework, the present article argues that intense cultural assimilation in some cases is not merely the product of cultural fascination or passivity, but a response to status anxiety and an effort to increase the degree of acceptance and reduce symbolic distance from the majority group. This process should not be understood merely as purely reactive or unconscious, but can be seen as part of the actors' rational strategies for managing social position.

**Positional Rationality and the Choice of Adaptation Strategies:** The migration experience places individuals against a set of opportunities and limitations. In such conditions, choosing between preserving the identity of origin, forming hybrid identities, or moving toward broader cultural assimilation is the result of interaction between structures and individual agency. On this basis, the present article distances itself from deterministic approaches and assumes that intense cultural assimilation in some cases can be the result of a kind of positional rationality; meaning that the individual, based on their evaluation of opportunities, costs, and status mechanisms of the destination society, chooses a strategy that they believe provides the greatest possibility of acceptance, social mobility, and reduction of symbolic insecurity. Of course, such a strategy is not necessarily successful and is not observed among all Iranian migrants. Many migrants succeed in creating stable bonds with the host society without distancing from the identity of origin, and some others move toward multi-layered and hybrid identities. Therefore, intense cultural assimilation should be considered merely one of the possible responses to the migration experience and the redefinition of social status.

**Intense Cultural Assimilation as a Status Strategy:** Based on the above discussions, it can be argued that some behaviors that are sometimes described with concepts such as "cultural self-loss" must actually be understood within the framework of the sociology of status and identity management. The migrant individual, in facing in-between positions, symbolic pressures, and new classification systems, may choose intense cultural assimilation as a tool for gaining more acceptance, reducing

identity ambiguity, and stabilizing their social position. From this perspective, intense cultural assimilation is not a sign of lack of agency, but one of the forms of strategic action in specific social conditions; an action that, although it can have different consequences, its understanding requires simultaneous attention to social structures, lived experiences, and the status calculations of the actors.

**Theoretical Proposition 3:** Status anxiety is the fundamental mediating and psycho-social mechanism between the experience of devalued symbolic capitals and the adoption of the intense cultural assimilation strategy. Through this mechanism, the actor translates the structural insecurity of the new environment into an active identity management strategy.

**Theoretical Proposition 4:** Intense cultural assimilation is not a reflection of absolute passivity or emptying of agency, but on the contrary, the embodiment of a kind of intense "positional agency" in which the actor tries to accumulate higher status in the destination by paying the cost of distancing from the origin.

### 3-5. Secondary Data and Statistical Evidence on the Diaspora

The data presented in this section have not been collected with the aim of empirically testing the theoretical model of the article, but have been used merely as secondary evidence to describe some structural characteristics of the Iranian diaspora and to strengthen the theoretical arguments. Therefore, the conclusions of the article still have a theoretical nature, and the empirical validity of the proposed causal relationships requires future field studies.

*Table 1. Macro Indicators of the Cultural Capital and Demographic Structure of the Iranian Diaspora (Based on International Secondary Data)*

| Secondary Data Source | Indicator Examined                         | Demographic and Structural Characteristics of the Iranian Diaspora               | Sociological Implications for the Research Model                        |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pew Research Center   | Higher education attainment and employment | More than 55% of first-generation Iranian immigrants hold a bachelor's degree or | Indicates high initial status expectations and increased sensitivity to |

| Secondary Data Source         | Indicator Examined                                                                      | Demographic and Structural Characteristics of the Iranian Diaspora                                                                                                                 | Sociological Implications for the Research Model                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                               |                                                                                         | higher, with a substantial proportion employed in managerial and professional occupations.                                                                                         | microaggressions and symbolic downward social mobility.                                                                                 |
| Eurostat / Statistics Austria | Employment-education match                                                              | A considerable proportion of highly educated Middle Eastern immigrants, including Iranians, experience educational and occupational mismatch during the early years of settlement. | Reinforces the perception of occupying an in-between social position and reproduces status-related anxiety in the host society.         |
| Gallup Inc.                   | Identity orientation and distancing from official institutions of the country of origin | Survey evidence suggests a strong tendency to redefine personal identity independently of official institutions and traditional regional stereotypes.                              | Strengthens situational rationality oriented toward active symbolic distancing as a strategy for achieving positive social distinction. |

**Source:** Compiled by the authors based on secondary data from Pew Research Center, Eurostat/Statistics Austria, and Gallup Inc.

These secondary empirical observations directly support and refine the article's theoretical concepts. Specifically, the data on high educational attainment combined with occupational mismatch substantiates the concept of 'status anxiety' and 'symbolic boundaries.' It demonstrates how the theoretical framework of positional agency is grounded in the tangible reality of migrants attempting to bridge the gap between their pre-migration cultural capital and their post-migration structural limitations.

**Theoretical Proposition 5:** Evidence from international secondary data shows that there is a direct relationship between "the volume of initial cultural capital in the origin" and "the intensity of status anxiety in the

destination." This unique feature of the structure of the Iranian diaspora (high education and class position before migration) increases the tendency to adopt the strategy of intense cultural assimilation as a compensatory mechanism.

### **3-6. Symbolic Capital, Social Distinction, and Redefinition of Status in Transnational Fields**

**Symbolic Capital and the Logic of Social Distinction:** One of the fundamental concepts in Pierre Bourdieu's sociology is the concept of symbolic capital. Bourdieu (1984, p. 102) shows that social actors do not only strive to accumulate economic capital, but gaining credibility, status, and recognition also shapes a significant part of their actions. Cultural, social, and economic capitals have the ability to convert into one another under specific conditions, and individuals compete for distinction in various social fields through these capitals. From this perspective, lifestyle, cultural consumption patterns, language, academic credentials, and even lived experiences can become resources for gaining status. Social distinction is reproduced not merely through wealth, but through possession of symbolic resources and the ability to legitimize them.

**Migration Experience and the Formation of Transnational Symbolic Capital:** In the globalized world, social fields are no longer limited to national borders. Migrants live in spaces where transnational ties, digital communications, and cultural flows have somewhat transformed the boundary between inside and outside. In such conditions, some resources and experiences can be a source of credibility in more than one social field. In this article, the concept of transnational symbolic capital is used as an analytical concept inspired by Bourdieu's theory. By this concept is meant those symbolic resources that arise from the experience of living in advanced societies, access to global networks, language proficiency, cultural consumption styles, or membership in transnational spaces, and can help gain credibility and status in more than one social context. Accordingly, the migration experience is not merely geographical relocation, but can become a resource for producing and reproducing symbolic capital. This capital, depending on the conditions, may have value and credibility in the host society, in diaspora networks, and even in connection with the origin society.

**Lifestyle and Distinction in Transnational Fields:** Based on Bourdieu's theory of distinction, social actors always try to reproduce symbolic boundaries between themselves and others through specific ways of life, tastes, and consumption patterns. In the case of part of the Iranian diaspora, the experience of living in the West, familiarity with new cultures, and possession of global capitals can become part of individuals' status identity. In such conditions, some migrants may represent a Western lifestyle or symbolic distancing from some cultural components of the origin society not merely because of changes in beliefs, but as a tool for social distinction. This process, more than being the product of conscious and explicit calculations, in many cases arises from the logic of symbolic competitions and the effort to gain credibility in various social fields. However, such a pattern should not be generalized to the entire Iranian diaspora; many migrants have achieved economic, scientific, and social successes without denying or distancing from their cultural identity, and even part of their symbolic capital arises from maintaining ties with Iranian cultural heritage and identity.

**Comparison with Other Diasporas:** Comparative studies show that migrants' relationship with the identity of origin depends on the historical contexts, opportunity structures, and status resources of each group, and a single model cannot be presented for all diasporas. Modood's studies (Modood, 1997, p. 56) on South Asian migrants in Britain show that sections of these groups, instead of distancing from ethnic and religious identity, have used it as a resource for social mobilization, political participation, and accumulation of social capital. Here, ethnic identity has not been an obstacle to integration, but one of the sources of collective power. Also, Min and Kim's research (Min & Kim, 1999, p. 78) on Korean migrants in the United States shows that economic success and cohesion of ethnic networks have provided the possibility of achieving social status without the need for symbolic denial of the identity of origin. In such cases, ethnic identity and economic success have not been placed in opposition to each other. From this perspective, differences between diasporas should be analyzed within the framework of differences in opportunity structures, social capitals, migration patterns, and their historical experiences. In the case of the Iranian diaspora as well, intense cultural assimilation is only one of the possible patterns and cannot be considered an inherent or pervasive feature of this diaspora.

**The Paradox of Complete Assimilation and the Emergence of Multi-Layered Identities:** Portes and Rumbaut's segmented assimilation theory and Stuart Hall's reflections (Hall, 1990, p. 224) on the dynamics of cultural identity show that identity is not a fixed and final thing, but a fluid and reproductive process. Therefore, the project of complete assimilation, even with conscious efforts by individuals, often faces structural and cultural limitations. The experience of many migrants shows that over time, more complex and multi-layered forms of identity emerge – identities that are neither based on complete denial of the past nor on maintaining rigid cultural boundaries. This situation can be understood in the form of hybrid, transnational, and in-between identities – identities that make possible the coexistence of various attachments. From this perspective, even in cases where intense cultural assimilation is chosen as a status strategy, this strategy is not necessarily stable or final. Lived experience, generational change, and the expansion of transnational networks can gradually prepare the ground for the formation of more multi-layered and flexible identities. Therefore, the phenomenon of intense cultural assimilation should be understood in the context of the continuous dynamics of identity and status competitions, not as the endpoint of the migration process or an index for normative judgment about the authenticity or inauthenticity of individuals' culture.

**Theoretical Proposition 6:** Unlike the Korean and South Asian diasporas that turn native identity into a resource for intra-group capital accumulation, the network structure of the Iranian diaspora, due to a kind of institutional isolation, shows a greater tendency to redefine status individually and through Bourdieusian "distinction."

**Theoretical Proposition 7:** Transnational symbolic capital resulting from intense cultural assimilation has a dual and parallel function; this capital is consumed both in the field of the host society to escape microaggressions and is used in the field of connection with the origin society as a tool for reproducing class prestige.

**Theoretical Proposition 8:** The project of intense cultural assimilation faces a "structural paradox"; the individual's conscious effort to completely dissolve into the host culture often faces obstacles due to the invisible racial-cultural walls of the destination, and this very rupture becomes the driving force for subsequent shifts toward hybrid and transnational identities.

### **3-7. Theoretical Innovations of the Article**

Based on the restructured framework, the innovations of this research are formulated in a focused and independent manner under the following 5 main axes:

**Presenting the concept of "intense cultural assimilation" as a rational strategy:** Going beyond single-factor psychological or ethical explanations and analyzing the phenomenon within the framework of positional rationality and status structure.

**Introducing the concept of "transnational symbolic capital":** Explaining how migration lived experiences and Western lifestyle are valued as tools for gaining prestige in multiple fields beyond national borders.

**Presenting a multi-level model for diaspora analysis:** Linking macro (historical and media), meso (structural institutions of the destination), and micro (status anxiety and actor's agency) levels of analysis.

**Linking Iranian cultural history with the sociology of migration:** Showing how the continuity and function of "pre-migration cultural deposits" direct post-migration identity choices.

**Critiquing ethical and normative approaches to cultural assimilation:** Replacing biased concepts such as cultural self-loss with sociological concepts of identity management, symbolic insecurity, and status competitions.

In terms of broader implications, this study contributes to Iranian Studies by challenging monolithic narratives of cultural self-loss and highlighting the strategic agency of Iranian migrants. For diaspora and migration research, the proposed model offers a fresh theoretical lens to examine other highly educated migrant groups experiencing similar status discrepancies, emphasizing the need to integrate pre-migration class contexts with post-migration status anxieties.

### **4. Conclusion**

The main question of this research was what mechanisms cause part of the Iranian diaspora to choose intense cultural assimilation as a strategy for adapting to the host society. Based on the presented theoretical framework, the theoretical analysis suggests that this phenomenon is not the result of the influence of a single factor, but takes shape from the

interaction between pre-migration cultural contexts, transnational media representations, status pressures in the host society, and the actors' efforts to accumulate symbolic capital in transnational social fields.

This article tried to explain the tendency toward intense cultural assimilation in part of the Iranian diaspora within a multi-level and non-reductionist framework by using the literature of the sociology of migration, diaspora studies, status theory, and symbolic capital theory.

The main argument of the article was that this phenomenon cannot be attributed merely to individuals' psychological characteristics, cultural fascination, or self-loss, but must be studied in the context of the interaction of historical, cultural, media, status-related, and structural factors.

Based on the presented analytical framework, some pre-migration cultural deposits that have formed during historical and institutional processes can create specific mental contexts in parts of social groups. These contexts, in interaction with transnational media representations and migration imagination, shape specific expectations toward the host society. After migration, the experience of in-between positions, status insecurities, and subtle forms of social classification push some migrants toward adopting strategies in which intense cultural assimilation acts as a tool for increasing social acceptance, reducing identity ambiguity, and gaining symbolic distinction.

On this basis, the present article interprets intense cultural assimilation not as a sign of lack of agency, but as a kind of strategic action based on positional rationality. Of course, this strategy is neither necessarily successful nor the dominant pattern among all Iranian migrants; the experience of the Iranian diaspora, like many other diasporas, is diverse, multi-layered, and influenced by generational, class, gender, and geographical differences.

On the other hand, the theoretical findings of this article show that migrants' identity patterns have a dynamic and processual nature. Therefore, even in cases where intense cultural assimilation is chosen as a status strategy, this situation should not be considered a definite end. Lived experiences, generational transformations, and the expansion of transnational networks can lead to the formation of hybrid, multi-layered,

and flexible identities. Beyond the specific case of the Iranian diaspora, the theoretical model developed in this article carries broader implications for migration and diaspora studies. By reframing assimilation as a strategic pursuit of transnational symbolic capital rather than a passive erasure of identity, this study provides a valuable analytical lens for examining other highly educated, middle-class migrant groups who experience similar structural ruptures and status discrepancies. Furthermore, it contributes to Iranian Studies by challenging monolithic, normative narratives of "cultural self-loss" or "Western fascination," highlighting instead the complex, agentic negotiations of Iranians navigating unequal global power dynamics.

Ultimately, this multi-level perspective shifts the analytical focus from moral judgments about cultural loyalty to sociological inquiries about power, status, and structural inequality. Recognizing intense cultural assimilation as a coping mechanism for symbolic insecurity underscores the profound impact of host-society reception and pre-existing global hierarchies. By viewing these identity strategies through the sociology of status and positional agency, this research not only deepens our comprehension of the Iranian migration experience but also opens new theoretical avenues for exploring the hidden socio-psychological costs of migration in a globalized world.

## **5. Research Limitations**

Since this research has a theoretical and interpretive nature, its results should not be generalized to all members of the Iranian diaspora. The present article is organized based on a critical review of the existing literature and lacks direct empirical data; therefore, many of the proposed hypotheses require empirical testing and field studies.

In addition, the focus of the article has mainly been on parts of the middle and upper-middle classes of the Iranian diaspora. Therefore, adaptation patterns among other groups, including economic migrants, refugees, second and third generations, or Iranian communities in different parts of the world, may have different formulations.

Also, the present article has not addressed gender, religious, ethnic, and generational differences within the Iranian diaspora; while these

variables can play an important role in shaping identity patterns and adaptation strategies.

## **6. Future Research Horizons**

To empirically evaluate the presented theoretical framework, several research paths can be suggested:

1. Conducting longitudinal qualitative studies on Iranian migrants in various European and North American countries with a focus on the relationship between pre-migration cultural capital and cultural adaptation methods.
2. Comparative examination of the first, second, and third generations of the Iranian diaspora and studying how identity patterns transform over time.
3. Studying the role of digital media and social networks in redefining cultural attachments and forming transnational fields.
4. Analyzing the relationship between social class, cultural capital, and status anxiety among different groups of Iranian migrants.
5. Comparative analysis of the Iranian diaspora with other Asian and Middle Eastern diasporas with the aim of examining similarities and differences in cultural adaptation patterns.
6. Studying the role of gender, religion, ethnicity, and generational experiences in redefining identity and status among Iranian migrants.

The present article argues that intense cultural assimilation in part of the Iranian diaspora cannot be explained with essentialist explanations or normative judgments. This phenomenon, if it exists, is more the product of complex interactions of historical structures, cultural expectations, status experiences, and actors' strategies in transnational social fields than a reflection of passivity or lack of identity.

As a result, understanding the Iranian diaspora requires moving away from simplistic dualisms such as "loyalty or self-loss," "East or West," and "authenticity or transformation." The migration experience is a dynamic and multi-dimensional process in which social actors reconstruct their identity, status, and attachments in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways. From this perspective, studying the Iranian diaspora not only helps

to better understand the Iranian migration experience, but can also open a window to understanding the complexities of identity, status, and culture in the contemporary globalized world.

#### **Author Contributions**

The study conceptualization and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript writing are all solely the responsibility of the author.

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#### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares no potential conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work. The author also confirms that the manuscript complies with relevant publication ethics, including standards concerning plagiarism, research misconduct, data fabrication or falsification, duplicate publication or submission, and redundancy.

#### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies**

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## Original Research Paper

# On the influence of the Persian philosopher Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) on Meister Eckhart's Metaphysics

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## Abstract

This study examines the influence of the Persian philosopher Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) on the metaphysical thought of Meister Eckhart, particularly his doctrine of being. From the 11th century onward, numerous Arabic philosophical works were translated into Latin in Western Europe, leading to a profound transformation of medieval scholastic philosophy. Avicenna's works, especially his *Metaphysics* (*Kitāb al-Šifā'*), were translated in the 12th century in Toledo and later received extensive attention from major medieval thinkers such as Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and Meister Eckhart. The paper focuses on Eckhart's concept of being (*esse*) and demonstrates that his metaphysical framework is deeply shaped by Avicenna's distinction between necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*) and contingent beings. Eckhart's central thesis "esse est Deus" (being is God) reflects a radical identification of absolute being with the divine essence. This position is closely connected to Avicenna's idea that all things desire being and that being itself is pure perfection and goodness. Particular attention is given to Eckhart's interpretation of the biblical name of God, "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14), which he reads through a metaphysical lens influenced by Avicenna's ontology. The analysis shows that Eckhart adopts and transforms Avicenna's concepts of existence, essence, and necessary being to construct a speculative theology in which God is understood as pure, absolute, and self-subsistent being. The study concludes that Eckhart's reception of Avicenna is not theological borrowing of Islamic doctrine but a philosophical appropriation of metaphysical concepts. This reception demonstrates how Islamic philosophy contributed fundamentally to the development of medieval European metaphysics, particularly through the mediation of Latin scholasticism.

**Keywords:** Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), Meister Eckhart, Metaphysics of Being, Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*)

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## مقاله پژوهشی

# درباره تأثیر فیلسوف ایرانی، ابن سینا، بر متافیزیک مایستر اکهارت

رولاند پیتش<sup>۱\*</sup>

دریافت: ۱۴۰۴/۰۸/۱۹؛ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۴/۰۹/۲۳

## چکیده:

این پژوهش به بررسی تأثیر اندیشه‌های فیلسوف ایرانی، ابن سینا، بر تفکر متافیزیکی مایستر اکهارت، به‌ویژه آموزه او درباره «وجود»، می‌پردازد. از سده یازدهم میلادی به بعد، آثار متعدد فلسفی غربی در اروپای غربی به زبان لاتین ترجمه شد و این روند، تحولی عمیق در فلسفه مدرسی قرون وسطی پدید آورد. آثار ابن سینا، به‌ویژه بخش الهیات کتاب شفا، در سده دوازدهم در طلیطله (تولد) به لاتین ترجمه شد و سپس مورد توجه گسترده متفکران برجسته‌ای همچون آلبرتوس ماگنوس، توماس آکویناس و مایستر اکهارت قرار گرفت. این مقاله با تمرکز بر مفهوم «وجود» در اندیشه اکهارت نشان می‌دهد که چارچوب متافیزیکی او به‌طور عمیق از تمایز ابن سینا میان «واجب‌الوجود» و «موجودات ممکن» تأثیر پذیرفته است. گزاره محوری اکهارت، یعنی «وجود همان خداست»، بیانگر همسان‌انگاری بنیادین وجود مطلق با ذات الهی است. این دیدگاه ارتباطی نزدیک با نظریه ابن سینا دارد که بر اساس آن، همه موجودات مشتاق وجودند و خود وجود، کمال و خیر محض است. در این پژوهش، توجه ویژه‌ای نیز به تفسیر اکهارت از نام الهی در کتاب مقدس، یعنی عبارت «هستم آن که هستم» معطوف شده است؛ تفسیری که او آن را از منظری متافیزیکی و تحت تأثیر هستی‌شناسی ابن سینا ارائه می‌کند. تحلیل حاضر نشان می‌دهد که اکهارت مفاهیم ابن‌سینایی «وجود»، «ماهیت» و «واجب‌الوجود» را اقتباس و بازتفسیر می‌کند تا الهیاتی تأملی و فلسفی بنا نهد که در آن، خداوند به‌عنوان وجود محض، مطلق و قائم‌به‌ذات فهمیده می‌شود. در نتیجه، بهره‌گیری اکهارت از اندیشه ابن‌سینا، نه اقتباسی الهیاتی از آموزه‌های اسلامی، بلکه تملک و بازآفرینی فلسفی مفاهیم متافیزیکی است. این تأثیرپذیری نشان می‌دهد که فلسفه اسلامی نقشی بنیادین در شکل‌گیری و تحول متافیزیک اروپای قرون وسطی ایفا کرده و این نقش، عمدتاً از رهگذر سنت فلسفه مدرسی لاتینی تحقق یافته است.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** ابن‌سینا، مایستر اکهارت، متافیزیک وجود، واجب‌الوجود

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## Original-Forschungsarbeit

# Über den Einfluss des persischen Philosophen Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) auf Meister Eckharts Metaphysik

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### Zusammenfassung:

Diese Arbeit untersucht den Einfluss des persischen Philosophen Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) auf die Metaphysik Meister Eckharts, insbesondere auf seine Seinslehre. Seit dem 11. Jahrhundert wurden zahlreiche philosophische Werke islamischer Gelehrter aus dem Arabischen ins Lateinische übersetzt, wodurch die mittelalterliche europäische Philosophie tiefgreifend geprägt wurde. Avicennas Metaphysik (Kitāb al-Šifā') spielte dabei eine zentrale Rolle und wurde im 12. Jahrhundert in Toledo ins Lateinische übertragen. Seine Gedanken wurden später von bedeutenden Denkern wie Albertus Magnus, Thomas von Aquin und Meister Eckhart intensiv rezipiert. Im Mittelpunkt der Untersuchung steht Eckharts Verständnis des Seins (esse), das stark von Avicennas Unterscheidung zwischen notwendigem Sein (wāğib al-wuğūd) und kontingentem Seienden geprägt ist. Eckharts These „esse est Deus“ (Das Sein ist Gott) zeigt eine konsequente Identifikation des absoluten Seins mit Gott selbst. Diese Position steht in enger Beziehung zu Avicennas Lehre, dass alles Seiende das Sein als Vollkommenheit begehrt und dass das Sein selbst als reine Güte zu verstehen ist. Besondere Bedeutung erhält Eckharts Auslegung des Gottesnamens „Ich bin, der ich bin“ (Ex 3,14), die er im Lichte der avicennischen Ontologie interpretiert. Dabei übernimmt und transformiert er zentrale Begriffe wie Sein, Wesenheit und notwendiges Sein, um eine spekulative Theologie zu entwickeln, in der Gott als reines, absolutes und sich selbst begründendes Sein verstanden wird. Abschließend zeigt die Arbeit, dass es sich bei der Rezeption Avicennas durch Eckhart nicht um eine Übernahme islamischer Theologie handelt, sondern um eine philosophische Aneignung metaphysischer Konzepte. Diese Rezeption verdeutlicht den maßgeblichen Einfluss der islamischen Philosophie auf die Entwicklung der mittelalterlichen europäischen Metaphysik.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), Meister Eckhart, Seinsmetaphysik, notwendiges Sein (wāğib al-wuğūd)

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## **1. Einleitung**

Seit dem 11. Jahrhundert wurden im Abendland zahlreiche philosophische Werke islamischer Gelehrter aus dem Arabischen in die lateinische Sprache übersetzt. (Monneret de Villard, 1944) Diese Übersetzungen übten einen intensiven Einfluss auf die mittelalterlichen europäischen Philosophen und Theologen aus und bewirkten bei ihnen grundlegende Veränderungen. Im 12. Jahrhundert wurden in Toledo von Dominicus Gundissalinus (1110-1181) mehrere Werke des großen persischen Arztes und Philosophen Avicenna Ibn Sina (um 980-1037) ins Lateinische übersetzt, darunter auch seine Metaphysik, die ein Teil seines Hauptwerks *Buch der Heilung* (*kitāb aš-šifā*) ist. Ein Jahrhundert später wurden diese Werke von Albertus Magnus (um 1200-1280), Thomas von Aquin (1225-1274), Meister Eckhart (um 1260-1328) und anderen intensiv studiert und kommentiert. Im Folgenden wird, ohne Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit, der Einfluss Avicennas auf die Seinslehre Meister Eckharts untersucht (Flasch 2006, Palazzo 2008, S. 71-95). Dazu werden im Folgenden einige seiner lateinischen Werke herangezogen, die der Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift gewidmet sind; in ihnen hat Meister Eckhart seine Aussagen über die Metaphysik des Seins eingeflochten.

## **2. Metaphysik des Seins**

Was das Sein im Allgemeinen betrifft, erklärt Meister Eckhart, dass das Sein an sich (*esse absolute*) deutlich vom Seienden (*esse hoc et hoc*) unterschieden werden muss. Das Sein, das für ihn Gott ist (*Esse est deus*), ist allein das absolute Sein oder das Sein an sich. Dieses „Sein selbst empfängt sein Sein nicht an etwas noch von etwas noch durch etwas noch kommt es (von außen) herbei noch zu etwas hinzu, sondern es geht voraus und ist früher als alles. Deshalb ist das Sein aller Dinge unmittelbar von der ersten Ursache und von der allumfassenden Ursache aller Dinge. ... Denn das Sein als solches verhält sich zu allem anderen wie dessen Verwirklichung und Vollendung, ja es ist die Wirklichkeit aller Dinge, auch der Formen. Deshalb sagt Avicenna im 6. Kapitel des 8. Buches seiner Metaphysik: ‚dass, was jedes Ding verlangt, ist das Sein und die Vollkommenheit des Seins, insofern es Sein ist‘. Und er fügt hinzu: ‚das also, was wahrhaft verlangt wird, ist das Sein (*Ipsium enim esse non*

accipit quod sit in aliquo nec ab aliquo nec per aliquid, nec advenit nec supervenit alieni. Sed praevenit et prius est omnium. Propter quod esse omnium est immediate a causa prima et a causa universali omnium ... Ipsum esse comparator ad omnia sicut actus et perfectio et est ipsa actualitas omnium, etiam formarum. Propter quod Avicenna VIII Metapysicae 6 c. ait: 'id quod desiderat omnis res, est esse et perfectio esse, inquantum est esse': et subdit: 'id ergo quod vere desideratur, est esse'". Allein dieses absolute Sein kann mit Gott gleichgesetzt werden. Für Meister Eckhart gilt grundsätzlich die Aussage, die er in seinem *Liber Parabolarum Genesis* (*Buch der Bildreden in der Genesis*) macht: „Alle Wesen begehren das Sein (omnia esse desiderant)“ (Eckhart, LW 1, S. 153); diesen Satz hat er nahezu wörtlich aus dem 6. Kapitel des 8. Buches der *Philosophia prima* Avicennas entnommen: „'Das, was jedes Ding ersehnt, ist das Sein und die Vollkommenheit des Seins, insofern es Sein ist' und weiter unten: ‚das, was ersehnt wird ist das Sein. (id quod desiderat res est esse et perfectio esse in quantum est esse) et infra: das, was wahrhaft ersehnt wird, ist das Sein. (id quod vere desideratur est esse)‘,“ (Avicenna 8, 6). Und weiter heißt es bei Meister Eckhart: „Ferner aber strebt, sucht und verlangt alles nach dem Sein selbst als dem Guten oder vielmehr nach dem Wesensgrund des Guten (Adhuc autem ipsum esse, utpote bonum aut potius rationem boni)“ (Eckhart, LW 1, S. 289). Diese Stelle gründet sich auf Avicennas *Philosophia prima*: „Necesse esse per se est bonitas pura; et bonitatem desiderat omnino quidquid est. Id autem quod desiderat omnis res est esse et perfectio esse, in quantum est esse ... Id igitur quod vere desideratur est esse, et ideo est bonitas pura et perfectio pura. Et omnino bonitas est id quod desiderat omnis res iuxta modulum suum quoniam per eam perficitur eius esse ... Igitur esse est bonitas, et perfectio essendi est bonitas essendi“ (Avicenna, 8, 6). In diesem Text bedeutet „Necesse esse (wāğib al-wuğūd)“ das „Notwendige Sein“, das bei Avicenna immer für den absoluten Gott steht. Meister Eckhart hat diesen Ausdruck von Avicenna übernommen und verwendet ihn sehr häufig in seinen Schriften.

## 2.1. Das Sein ist Gott (Esse est Deus)

Meister Eckhart stellt im *Prologus Generalis in Opus Tripartitum* (*Allgemeine Vorrede zum dreiteiligen Werk*) die grundlegende These auf: „Das Sein ist Gott (Esse est deus)“ (Eckhart, LW 1, S. 153), die seine eigene

Lehre darstellt und sich von dem in der Scholastik weitbreiteten Satz „Gott ist das Sein (Deus est esse) deutlich unterscheidet (Albert, 1976, S. 38). Übrigens hat auch Martin Heidegger diesen Unterschied 1968 im Seminar in Thor kurz gedeutet. Er geht dabei von dem Satz aus: „Deus est ipsum esse; Gott ist das Sein selbst. Das ist ein *normaler* metaphysischer Satz, kein spekulativer (im Gegensatz zu dem, was die ‚Erhabenheit‘ seines Themas annehmen lassen könnte). Von ihm kommt man zum spekulativen, wenn das Prädikat dieses Satzes (Sein) zum Subjekt gemacht wird, Subjekt wird. Nämlich: das Sein ist Gott. Dabei geschieht aber keine bloße Umkehrung der grammatischen Struktur des normalen Satzes. Es hat sich etwas geändert. Die bloße Umkehrung würde besagen: Das Sein ist Gott, wie die bloße Umkehrung von ‚Die Rose ist eine Pflanze‘ ergäbe: ‚Die Pflanze ist eine Rose.‘ Es handelt sich aber nicht nicht nur um eine Umkehrung, sondern um einen Gegenstoß, eine auf das erste ‚ist‘ wirkende Gegenbewegung des zweiten ‚ist‘. Aber was bedeutet nun das so umgestoßene ‚ist? Meister Eckhart sagte: Istic-heit. Das Sein ist Gott, jetzt spekulativ verstanden, bedeutet: das Sein ‚istet‘ Gott, das heißt das Sein läßt Gott Gott sein. ‚Ist‘ spricht hier transitiv und aktiv. Das entfaltete Sein selbst (wie es in Hegels ‚Logik‘ entfaltet wird) ermöglicht erst (in einem spekulativen Rückstoß) das Gott-sein. (Heidegger 1986, S. 325).

Meister Eckhart begründet seine These „Esse est Deus (Das Sein ist Gott)“ (Eckhart, LW 1, S. 156) mit folgenden fünf Argumenten: 1. „Wenn das Sein etwas anderes ist als Gott, so ist Gott entweder nicht oder er ist nicht Gott ... Also ist Gott und das Sein dasselbe oder Gott hat sein Sein von einem anderen. Und so ist – gegen unsere Voraussetzung – nicht Gott selbst, sondern etwas anderes, Früheres als er, und das ist (dann) die Ursache seines Seins (si esse est aliud ab ipso deo, deus nec est nec deus est ... Deus igitur et esse idem, aut deus ab alio habet esse. Et sic non ipse deus, ut praemissum est, sed aliud ab ipso, prius ipso, est et est sibi causa, ut sit)“. Hierin sind Hinweise auf Avicenna 1, 7 enthalten 2. „Alles was ist, (Alles Seiende) hat es durch das Sein und von dem Sein (Omne quod est per esse et ab esse habet, quod sit sive quod est (Eckhart, LW 1, S. 157 f.) 3. „Vor dem Sein ist nichts. Wer also Sein mitteilt, der schafft und ist Schöpfer. Schaffen heißt ja aus dem Nichts Sein geben. Es steht aber fest, dass alles das Sein vom Sein selbst hat. (ante esse est nihil. Propter quod conferens esse creat et creator est. Creare quippe est dare esse ex nihilo. Constat autem quod omnia habent esse ab ipso esse)“.

(Eckhart, LW 1, S. 157). 4. „Alles, was Sein hat, ist. (Omne habens esse est)“ (Eckhart, LW 1, S. 157). Daraus folgt: „Wenn das Sein etwas anderes wäre als Gott, so müssten alle Dinge ohne Gott sein können, und dann wäre Gott nicht die erste Ursache, sondern überhaupt nicht die Ursache für das Sein der Dinge (Vgl. Eckhart, LW 1, S. 157). 5. „Außerhalb des Seins und vor dem Sein ist allein das Nichts. Wenn also das Sein etwas anderes als Gott und Gott fremd ist, wäre Gott nichts, oder, wie oben, wäre er von etwas anderem als er und etwas Früherem als er. Und das wäre dann Gott für Gott und aller Dinge Gott. Auf das Gesagte spielt das Wort an: ‘ich bin, der ich bin’ Exodus 3, 14). (Extra esse et ante esse solum est nihil. Igitur si esse est aliud quam deus et alienum do, deus esset nihil aut, ut, prius esset ab alio a se et a priori se. Et istud esset ipsi deo deus et omnium deus. Praemissis alludit illud Exodi 3 : ‘ego sum qui sum’).“ (Eckhart, LW 1, S. 158). Auf diesen Satz aus der Heiligen Schrift gründet Meister Eckhart seine Metaphysik des Seins und verknüpft sie auf diese Weise mit der göttlichen Offenbarung. Diesen Zusammenhang erläutert er zunächst sehr kurz: „Dass nämlich Gott allein im eigentlichen Sinne seiend ist erhellt aus den Worten: ‚ich bin, der ich bin‘; der da ist, hat mich gesandt (Ex. 3, 14) und: ‚du, der du allein bist‘ (Hiob 14, 4). (quod solus deus ens proprie est, patet Exodi 3: ‚ego sum qui sum‘; qui est misit me‘ et Iob: ‚tu, qui solus es‘)“, (Eckhart, LW 1, S. 168). Mit anderen Worten: das absolute Sein ist Gott, der sich mit seinem Namen „Ich bin der ich bin“ geoffenbart hat. Was Meister Eckhart hier kurz andeutet, hat er in seinem Exodus-Kommentar ausführlich erläutert und gedeutet.

Was Avicenna im 6. Kapitel des 8. Buches der Metaphysik sagt: „das notwendige Sein“, nämlich Gott, ist mehr als vollkommen, denn selbst das Sein, das ihm eignet, behält er nicht für sich allein, vielmehr strömt alles Sein aus seinem Sein hervor, es ist und fließt aus ihm, und dieses selbst ist die lautere Güte (necesse esse, deus scilicet, „est plus quam perfectum, quoniam ipsum esse, quod est ei, non est ei tantum, immo etiam omne esse est exuberantia ab eius esse et est et fluit ab ipso, et ipsum est pura bonitas“ (Eckhart, LW 3, S. 298).

Bei diesem Ausgießen gibt es „nach Avicenna weder ‚ein Verbergen‘ noch ‚zurückhaltenden Neid‘ (nec est ‚occultatio aliqua‘ secundum Avicennam nec invidia retrahens)“. (Avicenna, Philosophia prima. 6, 6). Denn das Sein selbst empfängt sein Sein nicht an etwas noch von etwas

noch durch etwas noch kommt es (von außen) herbei noch zu etwas hinzu, sondern es geht voraus und ist früher als alles. Deshalb ist das Sein aller Dinge unmittelbar von der ersten Ursache und von der allumfassenden Ursache aller Dinge. Vom Sein also ‚und durch es und in ihm ist alles‘ (Röm. 11, 36), es selbst aber ist von nichts anderem. Denn was verschieden ist vom Sein, ist nicht oder ist nichts. Denn das Sein als solches verhält sich zu allem anderen wie dessen Verwirklichung und Vollendung, ja es ist die Wirklichkeit aller Dinge, auch der Formen. Deshalb sagt Avicenna im 6. Kapitel des 8. Buches seiner Metaphysik: ‚das, was jedes Ding verlangt, ist das Sein und die Vollkommenheit des Seins, insofern es Sein ist‘. Und er fügt hinzu: ‚das alles, was wahrhaft verlangt wird, ist das Sein‘. (Ipsum enim esse non accipit quod sit in aliquo nec ab aliquo nec per aliquid, nec advenit nec supervenit alicui, sed praevenit et prius est omnium. Propter quod esse omnium est immediate a causa prima et a causa universali omnium. Ab ipso igitur esse ‘et per ipsum et in ipso sunt omnia’, ipsum non ab alio. Quod enim aliud est ab esse, non est aut nihil est. Ipsum enim esse comparatur ad omnia sicut actus et perfectio et est ipsa actualitas omnium, etiam formarum. Propter quod Avicenna VIII Metaphysicae 6 c. ait: ‘id quod desiderat omnis res, est esse et perfectio esse, inquantum est esse’; et subdit: ‘id ergo quod vere desideratur, est esse’: id autem quod desiderat omnis res est esse et perfectio esse, inquantum est esse“). (Avicenna, Philosophia prima 8, 6).

„Außerdem ‘ist das Seiende das erste, was vom Verstand’, wie Avicenna sagt, und überhaupt von der Wahrnehmung ‘erfasst wird’. Daher geht der Metaphysiker, der von den ersten Seienden (d. h. von den Intelligenzen und von Gott) und von den ersten Seinsprinzipien handelt, vom Seienden aus. Das Seiende ist und heißt deshalb sein Subjekt wörtlich: das Zugrundeliegende). Denn es liegt allem als Voraussetzung zugrunde, auch der ersten Erkenntnis, durch die etwas erfasst wird, (Adhuc autem ‚primum, quod cadit in intellectu‘, secundum Avicennam, et universaliter in apprehensione, ‚est ens‘. Propter quod etiam primus philosophus tractans de primis entibus et primis rerum principiis praesupponit ens.. Et ipsum ob hoc est et dicitur eius subiectum, eo quod subicitur et praesupponitur omni, etiam primae cognitioni et apprehensioni)“). (Avicenna, Philosophia prima, 1, 2).

### 3. Das notwendige Sein als Name Gottes

„Das Sein ist unter allen Namen Gottes der vornehmste und ihm am meisten eigene. Aus diesem Grunde nennt Avicenna Gott sehr oft, besonders in seiner Metaphysik, ‚das notwendige Sein‘. (quod esse est primum et proprium nomen die inter omnia. Propter quod Avicenna frequenter valde, specialiter in Metaphysica sua, vocat et nominat dum ‘necesse esse’“. (Eckhart, LW 1, S. 27).

„Das notwendige Sein an sich ist reine Güte; und es sehnt sich überhaupt nach dem Guten; Nun ist das, was jedes Ding begehrt, Sein und die Vollkommenheit des Seins, sofern es Sein ist; Aber Entbehrung, insofern sie Entbehrung ist, ist nicht erwünscht, es sei denn, Existenz und Vollkommenheit folgen ihr. Was also wirklich erwünscht ist, ist zu sein, und daher ist Sein reine Güte und reine Vollkommenheit. Und überhaupt ist das Gute das, was jedes Ding nach seinem Maß begehrt, da durch es sein Sein vollendet wird; Tatsächlich hat die Bosheit kein Wesen, sondern ist entweder eine Beraubung der Substanz. Deshalb ist Sein das Gute, und die Vollkommenheit des Seins ist die Güte des Seins; aber das, was nicht mit der Entbehrung verbunden ist, noch mit der Entbehrung der Substanz, noch mit der Entbehrung von irgendetwas, was von Substanz ist, sondern immer wirksam ist, ist das reine Gute selbst. (Necesse esse per se est bonitas pura; et bonitatem desiderat omnino quidquid est; id autem quod desiderat omnis res est esse et perfectio esse, inquantum est esse; Privatio vero, inquantum est privatio, non desideratur nisi inquantum eam sequitur esse et perfectio. Id igitur quod vere desideratur est esse, et ideo esse est bonitas pura et perfectio pura. Et omnino bonitas est id quod desiderat omnis res iuxta modulum suum, quoniam per eam perficitur eius esse; malitia vero non habet essentiam, sed est vel privatio substantiae. Igitur esse est bonitas et perfectio essendi est bonitas essendi; esse vero cui non coniungitur privatio nec privatio substantiae nec privatio alicuius quod sit substantiae, sed semper est in effectum, ipsum est bonum purum)“. (Avicenna, Philosophia prima 8, 6).

Das Sein ist aber auch Ruhe, denn alle Bewegungen und Tätigkeiten kommen in ihm zur Ruhe. Das Sein ist deshalb auch das Ziel alles Strebens. Im Unterschied zu Sein wird das Nicht-Sein und der Tod gefürchtet, denn in allem, was Furcht erregt, fürchtet man den Tod. Der Grund dafür ist..., dass der Tod Beraubung des Lebens ist. „Leben aber

für die lebenden Wesen Sein ist“ „Sein aber ist das, was jedes Ding ersehnt. Auch hier stützt sich Meister Eckhart auf Avicenna (Avicenna, *Philosophia prima* 8, 6).

#### **4. Das Sein und der Gottesname „Ich bin, der ich bin“.**

Meister Eckhart beginnt seine Deutung des dritten Exodus-Kapitels (*Expositio libri Exodi*) mit dem ersten Vers: „Moses aber hütete die Schafe (*Moyses autem pascebat oves*) 3,1“. (Eckhart, LW 2, S. 14). Anschließend folgt in den Versen zwei bis fünf die Schilderung vom brennenden Dornbusch: „Und der Engel des Herrn erschien ihm in einer feurigen Flamme aus dem Dornbusch. Und er sah, dass der Busch im Feuer brannte und doch nicht verzehrt wurde. Da sprach er: Ich will hingehen und die wundersame Erscheinung besehen, warum der Busch nicht verbrennt. Als aber der Herr sah, dass er hinging, um zu sehen, rief Gott ihn aus dem Busch und sprach: Mose, Mose! Er antwortete: Hier bin ich. Gott sprach: Tritt nicht herzu, zieh deine Schuhe von den Füßen, denn der Ort, darauf du stehst, ist heiliges Land“ Ex 3, 2-5). Meister Eckhart geht auf diese Schilderung nicht ein, sondern geht sogleich zum sechsten Vers über: „Moses verhüllte sein Angesicht; (denn er fürchtete sich, Gott anzuschauen. (*Abscondit Moyses faciem suam*) und erklärt, dass jeder, der die göttlichen Dinge anschauen und verstehen will, sich ihnen mit Ehrfurcht und Scheu nähern und sich vorher reinigen muss. Er zitiert dazu mehrere Bibelverse Aristoteles, Maimonides und Avicenna: „Wir spüren und erfahren nichts von tiefer verborgenen und göttlichen Dingen, und nichts zieht uns zu ihnen, wenn wir nicht zuvor das Joch der Lust und des Zornes und ihre Schwestern von unserem Nacken abschütteln (*non sentimus ... non inquirimus eam ne allicimur (ad seretiora et divina), nisi prius deposuerimus a cervicibus nostris iugum voluptatis et irae et sorores earem*)“ (Eckhart, LW 2, S. 14 und Avicenna, *Philosophia prima* 9, 7).

Als Moses Gott fragt, was sein Name sei, antwortet Gott: „Ich bin, der ich bin (*Ego sum qui sum*)“ (Ex 3, 14). (Vignaux 1978), Diesen von Gott geoffenbarten Namen setzt Meister Eckhart in seiner Metaphysik mit dem ewigen und unwandelbaren Sein gleich. Diese Gleichsetzung gründet sich auf die griechische (platonische und neuplatonische) Philosophie, die sehr früh vom Christentum übernommen wurde. Dementsprechend deutet

Meister Eckhart den biblischen Gottesnamen „Ich bin, der ich bin“ vor allem mit Hilfe der neuplatonischen Seinsmetaphysik (Albert 1994, S. 80-95). Er geht dabei in vier Schritten vor.

#### 4.1. Erster Schritt

Im ersten Schritt untersucht Meister Eckhart die einzelnen Bestandteile des Satzes „Ich bin, der ich bin (Ego sum qui sum)“. Die in ihm enthaltenen drei Wörter „ich (ego), bin und der“ kommen allein Gott zu. Das Fürwort „ich“ unterscheidet sich von Allem, was durch es ist und bezeichnet die reine Substanz ohne jedes Akzidens und kommt so allein Gott zu. Die Substanz ist „durch sich ganz in sich selbst als ganzer und ,in allem, was zu ihr gehört‘, die sich auf nichts stützt, mit nichts vermischt ist“ (substantia se tota stans in se ipsa tota et ,in quodlibet sui‘). (Eckhart, LW 2, S. 239). Die Substanz als solche ist „über dem Sein (über wesene)“ und deshalb unendlich und unermesslich. Diese Bedeutung hat das Wort „der (qui)“, das allein Gott zukommt. Das „bin (sum)“ bedeutet das reine Sein.

#### 4.2. Zweiter Schritt

In einem zweiten Schritt stellt Meister Eckhart fest, dass das „Ich bin“, das den zweiten Teil des Satzes „Ich bin, der ich bin“ bildet, das Prädikat des Satzes „Ich bin der ich bin“ ist. Es bezeichnet „das lautere Sein und das bloße Sein am Subjekt und vom Subjekt, und dass es selbst das Subjekt, das heißt die Weseheit des Subjekts ist, also die Identität von Wesenheit und Sein, die allein Gott zukommt, dessen Washeit seine Obheit (Anitas) (Alonso 1958, S. 311-345 Alonso 1959, S. 375-400) ist, wie Avicenna sagt, und der keine Washeit außer der bloßen Obheit hat, die durch sein Sein bezeichnet wird. (Quod quotiens fit, purum esse et nudum esse significat in subiecto et de subiecto et ipsum esse subiectum, id est essentiam subiecti, idem scilicet essentiam et esse, quod soli deo convenit, cuius quidditas est sua anitas, ut ait Avicenna, nec habet quidditatem praeter solam anitatem quam esse significat). (Eckhart LW 2, S. 21). „Ich werde also zurückkommen und sagen, dass es zunächst keine Existenz hat, sondern eine Existenz, die selbst diskret ist. (Redibo igitur et dicam quod primum non habet quidditatem nisi anitatem quae sit discreta ab ipsa. Dico enim quod necesse esse non potest habere quidditatem quam comitetur necessitas essendi)“ (Avicenna, Philosophia prima 8, 4).

### **4.3.Dritter Schritt**

Im dritten Schritt betrachtet Meister Eckhart die Wiederholung im Satz „Ich bin der ich bin“ und stellt fest, dass diese „Wiederholung: Ich bin, der ich bin die Lauterkeit der Bejahung unter Ausschluß jeder Verneinung von Gott anzeigt. Wiederum auch eine Art Rückwendung des Seins zu sich und auf sich selbst und ein verharren oder Feststehen in sich, ferner aber gleichsam ein Aufwallen (*bullitio*). (Beierwaltes 1972, S. 38-62, Pagnoni-Sturlese 1980, S. 635-654) oder sich Sichselbstgebären – (das Sein ist) in sich brausend und in sich und aus sich fließend und wallend, Licht, das in Licht und zu (neuem) Licht (erstrahlt), das sich selbst ganz durchdringt, das von allen Seiten ganz auf sich selbst zurückfließt und – strahlt, nach dem Wort des Weisen: „die Einheit zeugt – oder zeugte – die Einheit, und auf sich selbst strahlte sie ihre Liebe – oder ihre Glut – zurück“. Daher heißt es: ‚in ihm war das Leben‘ (Joh. 1, 4). Leben nämlich bedeutet eine Art Überquellen, wodurch etwas in sich selber aufschwillt und sich zuerst ganz und gar in sich selber ergießt, jedes Teilchen mit sich selbst durchdringend, bevor es sich ausgießt und überwallt. (*Tertio notandum quod repetitio. Quod bis ait: sum qui sum, puritatem affirmationis excluso omni negativo ab ipso deo indicat; rursus ipsius esse quandam in se ipsum et super se ipsum reflexivam conversionem et in se ipso mansionem sive fixationem; madhuc autem quandam bullitionem sive parturitionem sui – in se fervens et in se ipso et in se ipsum liquescens et bulliens, lux in luce et in lucem se toto se totum penetrans, et se toto super se totum conversum et reflexum undique, ecum illud sapientis: ‘monas monadem gignit – vel genuit – et in se ipsum reflexit amorem – sive ardorem’, Propter hoc Ioh. 1 dicitur: ‘in ipso vita erat’. Vita enim quandam dicit exsertionem, qua res in se ipsa intumescens se profundit primo in se toto, quodlibet sui in quodlibet sui, antequam effundat et ebulliat extra*)“.

(Eckhart LW 2, S. 21 f.).

### **4.4.Vierter Schritt**

„Das Wort *wer* (*quis*) kann verschiedene Bedeutungen haben, aber eigentlich „fragt ‚wer‘ wie auch ‚was‘ nach der Washeit oder Wesenheit eines Dinges, die sein Name bezeichnet und sein Begriff oder seine Begriffsbestimmung anzeigt. Weil nun bei allem Erschaffenen Sein und Wesenheit verschieden sind – das Sein ist von einem anderen (gegeben), die Wesenheit ist nicht von einem anderen – deshalb ist die Frage, ob

etwas ist, verschieden von der Frage, was etwas ist: jene fragt nach der Obheit oder dem Sein des Dinges, diese fragt, wie gesagt, nach der Washeit oder Wesenheit des Dinges. .... Bei Gott aber, wo die Obheit eben die Washeit ist, ist die richtige Antwort auf die Frage, wer oder was Gott sei: ‚Gott ist‘. Denn das Sein ist Gottes Washeit“ (Eckhart LW 2, S. 23 f.). (Proprie tamen ipsum ‚quis‘ sicut et li ‚quid‘ quaerit de quidditate sive essentia rei, quam significat nomen et ratio sive diffinitio indicat. Quia igitur in omni creato aliud est esse et ab alio, aliud essentia et non ab alio (Avicenna, Philosophia prima 5, 4), propter hoc alia est quaestio an est, quaerens de anitate sive de esse rei, alia quaestio quid est, quaerens, ut dictum est, de quidditate sive essentia ipsius rei... In deo autem, ubi anitas est ipsa quidditas, convenienter respondetur quaerenti, quis aut quid sit deus, quid ‚deus est‘. Esse enim dei est quidditas“ (Eckhart Lw 2, S. 23). Beim Menschen und allem Erschaffenen dagegen sind Sein und Wesenheit verschieden.

Gott ist bei den Menschen uns, weil er „ununterschieden ...; wir aber sind nicht bei ihm, da wir also geschaffen und begrenzt sind. Dewegen paßt auf Gott, da er ja unbegrenzt ist, keine Begriffsbestimmung, wie Avicenna sagt. Die Begriffsbestimmung besteht nämlich aus Begrenzungen (termini). (Deus enim nobiscum est, utpote indistinctus; nos autem secum non sumus, utpote distincti, quia creati et terminati. Propter quod deo, utpote interminato, diffinitio non competit, ut Avicenna) (Avicenna, Philosophia prima 8, 4). Gott ist nicht dies oder das, sondern über allem (dies oder das). Auch Avicenna sagt im 8. Buch der Metaphysik gegen Ende des 5. Kapitels: Es ist offenkundig, dass der Erste keine Gattung hat‘ und weiter: er ist der Höchste und Herrliche, denn alles, was ist, stammt von ihm, und er hat nichts gemeinsam mit dem, was von ihm stammt. Er ist aber alles, was da ist, und ist doch nicht etwas von diesem‘. (Primo, quia ipse deus non est hoc aut hoc, sed super omnia. Avicenna etiam dicit VIII Metaphysicae c. 5 in fine: ‚manifestum est quod primus non habet genus‘: et infra: ‚qui est altissimus et gloriosus‘, ‚quoniam omne quod est, ab eo est, et non est communicans ei quod est ab ipso. Ipse vero est (omne quod est), et tamen non est aliquid ex his‘)“ (Eckhart LW 2, S. 614).

## **5. Der göttliche Name „der Allmächtige“**

In seiner Deutung des göttlichen Namen „der Allmächtige omnipotens“)“ stützt sich Meister Eckhart auf das „Buch von den Ursachen (liber de causis)“ und stellt fest, dass Gott alle Namen übersteigt. Zugleich stellt er fest, dass im „Buch von den Ursachen“ „Gott nicht unbeschreiblich genannt wird, sondern „über alle Beschreibung erhaben“, gemäß den Worten ‚du hast deinen heiligen Namen über alles herrlich gemacht‘ (Ps. 137, 2) und ‚er hat ihm einen Namen gegeben, der über alle Namen ist‘ (Phil. 2, 9). Dem Oberen fehlen nämlich die Vollkommenheiten des Niederen nicht, sondern er hat sie alle in vorzüglicher Weise voraus. ‚Der Name‘ also, ‚der über alle Namen ist‘ ist nicht unnennbar, sondern auf jede Weise nennbar“. (Eckhart LW 2, S. 416).

Aus dem letzten Kapitel des 8. Buches der Philosophia prima von Avicenna zitiert Meister Eckhart: ‚Das erste, was man Gott als ihm eigentümlich zuschreibt, ist dies, dass er ist‘, das heißt das Sein. ‚Bei dem übrigen handelt es sich‘ entweder um ‚das Sein mit einer Beziehung‘ oder um ‚das Sein mit einer Verneinung‘. Der Grund ist nach seiner Lehre der, dass keine Bestimmung der einen oder anderen Art in Gottes Wesenheit irgendwie eine Vielheit oder Verschiedenheit hineintragen darf‘. Sagt man zum Beispiel, Gott sei ‚Substanz, so wird damit verneint, dass er in einem Träger hat. Sagt man, Gott sei einer, so bedeutet das, da man jede Teilbarkeit von ihm verneint‘. Sagt man, Gott sei der Erste, so bedeutet das in ihm nur die Beziehung seines Seins zu jedem‘ oder zu allem (Seienden). Ebenso ist es bei ähnlichen Aussagen. (Secundo accipiatur verbum Avicennae VIII Metaphysicae capitulo ultimo, ubi dicit: ‚quod prima proprietas de deo est quia est‘, id est esse. In ‚aliis autem proprietatibus‘ in quibusdam est ‚esse cum relatione‘, in quibusdam vero est ‚esse cum negatione‘, cuius ratio est, ut dicit, quia ‚nulla harum duarum proprietatum facit in die essentia debere esse multitudinem nullo modo nec variationem‘. Verbi gratia, cum dicitur esse ‚substantiae‘, ‚negatur‘ ab ipso ‚esse in subiecto. Dum dicitur deus unus, non intelligitur‘ ‚nisi negata ab omni divisione‘. Cum dicitur quod deus ‚est primus, non intelligitur in eo nisi relatio sui esse ad omne‘ vel ad omnia. Et sic de similibus. (Avicenna, Philosophia prima 8, 7).

## 6. Zum Abschluss

In dieser kurzen Darstellung der Rezeption Avicennas durch Meister Eckhart, die nur einen kleinen Teil der Rezeptionsgeschichte zwischen den beiden ausmacht, ist deutlich geworden, dass Meister Eckhart nicht die Religion Avicennas, das heißt den Islam oder wenigstens einige Teile dieser Religion übernommen hat. Es handelt sich eindeutig um die Rezeption der Metaphysik des persischen Philosophen. Die dogmatische Gegensätzlichkeit zwischen Christentum und Islam wird davon nicht berührt oder verändert, denn dieser Gegensatz ist vom metaphysischen Standpunkt nur verhältnismäßig und nicht absolut. Um dies zu verstehen, muss darauf hingewiesen werden, dass bei jeder wahren Religion zwischen Form und Gehalt unterschieden werden muss. Weil jede Form als solche begrenzt ist, ist auch die Religion, insoweit sie Form ist, begrenzt. Im Unterschied dazu ist der Inhalt der Religion nicht begrenzt, sondern gründet im Absoluten oder im Unbedingten. Die Metaphysik im ursprünglichen Sinn bezieht sich auf dieses Absolute oder Unbedingte. Auf dieser Ebene hat sich die Rezeption der Metaphysik Avicennas durch Meister Eckhart vollzogen. Das absolute Sein Gottes, auf das sich die Metaphysik Avicennas und Meister Eckharts bezieht, wird von Avicenna „Notwendiges Sein, (Necesse esse, wāğib al-wuğūd)“ genannt, und diese metaphysische Bezeichnung hat Meister Eckhart von ihm übernommen und uneingeschränkt in seine Lehre eingefügt. Das „Notwendige Sein“ bedeutet aber auf keinen Fall irgendeinen einen Zwang, denn in Gott gibt es keinen Zwang. Vielmehr verweist die Notwendigkeit auf die Unbedingtheit des Seins. Das verbindende Band zwischen der Lehre Avicennas und der Lehre Meister Eckharts ist allein die Metaphysik, die alle Begrenzungen und Beschränkungen übersteigt.

### Interessenkonflikt

Der Autor erklärt, dass im Zusammenhang mit der Veröffentlichung dieses Artikels kein Interessenkonflikt besteht.

### Förderung

Der Autor erklärt, dass diese Forschung ohne finanzielle Unterstützung durch externe Fördermittel durchgeführt wurde.

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## Original Research Paper

# Algorithmic reconstruction of Iranian identity; A futures study of artificial intelligence in Iran's communication culture

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## Abstract

The convergence of AI and IoT is redefining cultural norms and collective identity at an unprecedented pace. In Iran, this transformation carries deeper complexity due to its ancient civilization, rich heritage rooted in Iranian-Islamic values, and collectivist social structure. This study investigates how intelligent algorithms and connected objects are reshaping communicative cultural norms and identity among Iranians, and projects plausible future trajectories. Employing a qualitative futures studies methodology, we conducted environmental scanning to extract and analyze cultural biases embedded in algorithms of three major domestic platforms – Snapp, Divar, and Rubika. We applied Causal Layered Analysis and the Critical Uncertainty Matrix to develop scenarios for the 2041 horizon. Three distinct scenarios emerged: (1) "Silent Assimilation" – accelerated algorithmic redefinition of norms without societal resistance; (2) "Indigenous Resilience" – development of algorithms aligned with Iranian-Islamic ethics and local priorities; and (3) "Schizoid Ambivalence" – dual existence within conflicting value systems, generating profound identity crisis. Current evidence indicates Iranian society is trending toward the third scenario. Algorithms are never neutral; they participate as non-human cultural agents in redefining identities through visibility, behavioral prediction, and normalization of biases. Iranian users are not passive; they employ circumvention, hidden resistance, creative reinterpretation, and selective rejection. The prevalence of the "ambivalent actor" identity type (40% of the sample) serves as a serious warning. The findings underscore a critical transition from content-centric to intelligent algorithmic governance. We propose strategic investment in indigenous ethical AI and promotion of critical algorithmic literacy as key policy strategies.

**Keywords:** Algorithmic reconstruction of identity, artificial intelligence, Iranian communication culture, cultural futures studies

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## مقاله پژوهشی

# بازتعریف الگوریتمی هویت ایرانی؛ آینده پژوهی هوش مصنوعی در فرهنگ ارتباطی ایران

طاهره جهان پرور<sup>۱</sup>، محمدمهدی جهان پرور

دریافت: ۱۴۰۴/۰۷/۱۸؛ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۴/۰۹/۲۵

## چکیده:

هم‌گرایی هوش مصنوعی و اینترنت اشیا بازتعریف هنجارهای فرهنگی و هویت جمعی را در جوامع گوناگون رقم زده و در ایران، این تحول به دلیل تمدن دیرپای، میراث غنی برخاسته از ارزش‌های ایرانی-اسلامی و ساختار اجتماعی جمع‌گرا، با دلالت‌های عمیق‌تری همراه است. هدف این پژوهش، تحلیل فرایند بازتعریف الگوریتمی هویت ایرانی در عصر هم‌گرایی هوش مصنوعی و ترسیم سناریوهای محتمل آینده است. پرسش اصلی آن است که الگوریتم‌های هوشمند و اشیاء متصل، هنجارهای ارتباطی و هویت ایرانیان را چگونه بازتعریف و این دگرگونی‌ها به‌سوی چه جهتی سوق داده می‌شوند. این مطالعه با رویکرد کیفی و روش‌شناسی آینده‌پژوهی انجام شد. در گام نخست، با تکنیک پویای محیطی، سوگیری‌های فرهنگی نهفته در الگوریتم‌های سه سکوی مخاطب ایرانی یعنی اسنپ، دیوار و روبیکا، به‌طور نظام‌مند استخراج و تحلیل شد. در گام بعدی، با به‌کارگیری تحلیل لایه‌ای علت‌ها و ماتریس عدم قطعیت‌های حیاتی، سناریوهای محتمل برای افق ۱۴۲۰ تدوین گردید. سه سناریوی متمایز شناسایی شد: ۱) «هم‌سازی خاموش» - بازتعریف شتاب‌زده الگوریتمی هنجارها بدون مقاومت مؤثر اجتماعی؛ ۲) «تاب‌آوری بومی» - تولید الگوریتم‌های هم‌سو با ارزش‌های ایرانی-اسلامی و اولویت‌های فرهنگی داخلی؛ و ۳) «دوسوگرایی شیزوئید» - حالت زیست‌همزمان افراد در دو نظام ارزشی متعارض که به بحران هویتی عمیق می‌انجامد. شواهد و روندهای کنونی نشان می‌دهد جامعه ایران عمده‌تأ به‌سوی سناریوی سوم در حرکت است. یافته‌ها حاکی از آن است که گذار از «حکمرانی محتوا-محور» به «حکمرانی الگوریتمی هوشمند»، ضرورتی اجتناب‌ناپذیر و فوری است. سرمایه‌گذاری راهبردی در توسعه هوش مصنوعی اخلاقی بومی و ارتقاء همگانی سواد انتقادی الگوریتمی، به‌عنوان کلیدی‌ترین راهبردهای سیاستی برای مدیریت این گذار بحرانی پیشنهاد می‌شود.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** آینده‌پژوهی فرهنگی، بازتعریف الگوریتمی هویت، فرهنگ ارتباطی ایران، هوش مصنوعی

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## Original-Forschungsarbeit

# Algorithmische Neudefinition der iranischen Identität; Eine Zukunftsforschung der künstlichen Intelligenz in der iranischen Kommunikationskultur

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### Zusammenfassung:

Die Konvergenz von KI und IoT definiert kulturelle Normen und kollektive Identität neu. Im Iran gewinnt dieser Wandel durch die uralte Zivilisation, das reiche Erbe iranisch-islamischer Werte und die kollektivistische Sozialstruktur besondere Tiefe. Die zentrale Frage lautet: Wie verändern intelligente Algorithmen und vernetzte Objekte die kommunikativen Normen und die Identität der Iraner? Diese Studie untersucht diese Prozesse und entwirft plausible Zukunftsszenarien für 2041. Mit einem qualitativen Ansatz der Zukunftsforschung führten wir ein Environmental Scanning durch, um kulturelle Verzerrungen in den Algorithmen der drei großen iranischen Plattformen Snapp, Divar und Rubika zu extrahieren und zu analysieren. Zusätzlich wurden Interviews mit 30 Nutzern geführt, um ihre Strategien im Umgang mit algorithmischen Vorgaben zu verstehen. Mittels Kausalschichtenanalyse und der Matrix kritischer Unsicherheiten entwickelten wir drei Szenarien: (1) „Stille Assimilation“ – algorithmische Neudefinition von Normen ohne gesellschaftlichen Widerstand; (2) „Indigene Resilienz“ – Entwicklung von Algorithmen im Einklang mit iranisch-islamischer Ethik und lokalen Prioritäten; und (3) „Schizoide Ambivalenz“ – gleichzeitige Existenz in widersprüchlichen Wertesystemen, die zu einer tiefen Identitätskrise führt. Aktuelle Anzeichen deuten auf das dritte Szenario. Algorithmen sind nicht neutral; sie wirken als nicht-menschliche kulturelle Akteure an der Neudefinition von Identitäten mit. Iranische Nutzer sind nicht passiv; sie setzen auf Umgehung, versteckten Widerstand, kreative Neuinterpretation und selektive Ablehnung. Die Verbreitung des „ambivalenten Akteurs“ (40 % der Stichprobe) ist ein ernstes Warnsignal. Die Ergebnisse unterstreichen den Übergang von inhaltszentrierter zu intelligenter algorithmischer Regierungsführung. Wir schlagen strategische Investitionen in indigene ethische KI und die Förderung kritischer algorithmischer Kompetenz als zentrale politische Maßnahmen vor.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Algorithmische Neudefinition der Identität, Iranische Kommunikationskultur, Kulturelle Zukunftsforschung, Künstliche Intelligenz

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## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, emerging technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT), have brought about fundamental transformations in the social, economic, cultural, and political structures of human societies. As a primary driver of the "Fourth Industrial Revolution," AI, with its capabilities in big data processing, continuous learning, rapid decision-making, and natural language processing, has established itself as a strategic tool in fields such as health, education, industry, security, and culture. Concurrently, the IoT, as a network of sensors and connected objects, enables the unprecedented collection of data from daily life, paving the way for real-time algorithmic decision-making. What distinguishes these two phenomena from previous technological shifts is their convergence in the form of "AI-IoT Integration": a phenomenon where data collected by IoT sensors feed intelligent algorithms for prediction, decision-making, and even the modification of human behavior.

However, the rapid expansion of these technologies has sparked growing concerns regarding their social, ethical, cultural, and identity-related consequences. Researchers have warned that unregulated AI development can deepen digital divides, algorithmic discrimination, unequal access to technology, and emerging threats such as deepfakes. On a deeper level, automated decision-making systems may distance humans from independent judgment and choice, fostering an increasing cognitive dependency on intelligent systems. In her influential book, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Shoshana Zuboff describes this phenomenon not merely as an economic shift but as a threat to the very essence of being human: "If industrial capitalism flourished at the expense of nature and now threatens the earth, the information civilization forged by surveillance capitalism will flourish at the expense of human nature and threaten humanity itself" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 11). Zuboff argues that surveillance capitalism appropriates human experience as free raw material for extraction, prediction, and the sale of our behavior, thereby depriving us of our "right to a future" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 11).

From a theoretical perspective, what makes this research necessary is the crisis facing classical theories of communication and culture in confronting "speaking non-human agents." Theorists like Manuel Castells,

in his renowned trilogy *The Information Age*, have analyzed the transformations of identity in the network society. In the second volume, *The Power of Identity*, Castells argues that in the information age, cultural, religious, and national identities have become the primary sources of meaning for people, and social movements of resistance against the new global order are organized around these identities (Castells, 2010, p. 5). However, Castells' theory was largely formulated in an era when "media" and "technology" had not yet reached the level of pervasiveness and agency they possess in the age of AI and IoT. In the era of AI-IoT integration, it is no longer just humans who construct identity; algorithms also participate in the identity-making process, redefine norms, and pre-structure the "contexts of possible action."

From a local perspective, the significance of this research is amplified by the specific characteristics of Iranian society. Iran, with its ancient civilization, rich culture grounded in Iranian-Islamic values, and the lived experience of the Islamic Revolution as a "meaning-oriented phenomenon," now faces fundamental questions in the age of algorithms. Domestic research indicates that the algorithms of social media platforms, through the application of an "algorithmic memory policy"—via classification, highlighting, deletion, and disparities in content visibility—create memory gaps, resulting in collective forgetting and the fragmentation of collective memory in Iran (Mirmohammadi, 2025, p. 103). Furthermore, these processes, by creating a context for the plurality and proliferation of memories, exacerbate the "crisis of identity and meaning" in Iran's postmodern social condition (Mirmohammadi, 2025,, p. 105).

On a more objective level, field research shows that Iran's younger generation, particularly Gen Z girls, are using generative AI tools to produce content that resists the state, redefine female identity, and create alternative narratives. Contemporary reports indicate that these groups use tools like ChatGPT, Midjourney, and deepfake technologies to produce symbolic imagery, translate protest texts into foreign languages, and even create satirical videos against the official discourse (Raseef22, 2025). In response, the Iranian government also employs advanced algorithms for surveillance, facial recognition, tracking linguistic patterns, and automatic geolocation to control these emerging spaces of resistance

(Raseef22, 2025). This algorithmic contestation between citizens and the state has given rise to a new form of socio-political conflict in which algorithms themselves have become the battlefield.

Furthermore, conceptual shifts indicate that what was perceived as "construction" by the generation of the 1979 Revolution, based on the study of religious and Iranian texts, has in the perception of subsequent generations transformed into "social construction" (barsakht) over the last decade. In other words, algorithms have replaced ideologies, and new processes such as personalized content production and the creation of simulated environments have created a powerful gap between the beliefs of the '79 generation and the generations that followed.

Despite the considerable growth of domestic and international research on AI and IoT, significant gaps exist in the literature: First, a lack of comprehensive analysis on the identity, cultural, and cognitive consequences of AI-IoT integration in non-Western societies. Most existing research either focuses on technical aspects or Western societies with their specific cultural assumptions. What has been overlooked is the analysis of how algorithms interact with local identities and the processes of their reproduction or transformation. Second, the absence of indigenous indicators for measuring the cultural impacts of AI in Islamic societies. Third, the dominance of descriptive and linear approaches over futures-oriented approaches capable of depicting the uncertainties and pluralities of possible futures.

These gaps necessitate research that, with a futures-oriented approach and from the perspective of communication and cultural sociology, analyzes the processes of "algorithmic redefinition of identity" in Iran. The present article seeks to demonstrate that algorithms and connected objects are no longer neutral tools but are cultural agents that, in the hidden layers of everyday life, redefine norms, identity boundaries, and collective memory.

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the process of algorithmic redefinition of Iranian identity in the era of AI-IoT convergence and to map out alternative future scenarios using a futures-oriented approach from the perspective of communication and cultural sociology. In line with this primary objective, the following sub-objectives

are pursued: first, identifying the cultural biases embedded in the algorithms of popular Iranian and international platforms; second, explaining the strategies of resistance, reinterpretation, and circumvention employed by Iranian users in the face of algorithmic redefinition of norms; third, designing a typology of emerging communicative identities in Iran in the age of AI-IoT integration; fourth, mapping probable scenarios for the future of Iran's communication culture by the 2041 horizon ; and fifth, providing a policy framework for the transition from content-centric to intelligent algorithmic governance.

The main research question is: How will the convergence of AI and IoT, by the 2031-2041 horizon, transform the processes of redefining norms, reconstructing identity, and symbolic power structures at the micro-level (everyday life), meso-level (institutions and cities), and macro-level (identity policies)? Within this framework, the following sub-questions are raised: First, what cultural presuppositions regarding concepts like trust, efficiency, beauty, gender, and privacy do the algorithms prevalent on popular Iranian platforms (e.g., Snapp, Divar, Rubika) reproduce? Second, how do Iranian users perceive, interpret, reject, or reproduce algorithmic biases? Third, what typology of communicative identities in facing AI-IoT integration can be identified in Iran? Fourth, based on existing trends and drivers, which of the three scenarios (Silent Assimilation, Indigenous Resilience, Schizoid Ambivalence) is more probable for the future of Iran's communication culture? Fifth, what communicative, educational, legal, and technical requirements are necessary for the transition from content-centric to intelligent algorithmic governance in Iran?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. International Background**

A vast body of international research has been dedicated to the technical aspects of AI and IoT convergence. These studies mainly focus on system architecture, machine learning algorithms for sensor data processing, energy consumption optimization, cybersecurity, and communication protocols. For instance, Zhang et al. (2023) presented a paper on "Federated Learning for Distributed IoT," offering solutions for

privacy preservation during centralized model training. Researchers like Lee et al. (2024) have designed "edge computing" architectures to reduce latency in intelligent IoT-based systems. However, these studies do not systematically address the cultural and social dimensions of this convergence, treating technology largely as a neutral and instrumental entity. The neglect of semantic and identity layers constitutes a major gap in this field.

Over the past decade, a growing body of socio-cultural research has focused on the consequences of AI and IoT. Shoshana Zuboff (2019), in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, provides the most influential work in this area. Through a detailed analysis of the business models of major tech companies like Google and Facebook, she demonstrates how the prediction of human behavior has become a decisive commodity, stripping the subject of concepts like "autonomy" and the "right to a future." Although Zuboff primarily focuses on economic and political aspects, her concepts of "surveillance capitalism" and the "future behavior market" indirectly influence identity dimensions.

Following this, Tarleton Gillespie (2018), in *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media*, analyzes how recommendation algorithms shape user taste, preference, and cultural identity. He shows that algorithms on platforms like YouTube and Spotify do not merely reflect user taste but actively enhance the "visibility" of some content while diminishing others, thus directing user taste and identity (Gillespie, 2018, p. 125). Nevertheless, Gillespie's study mainly focuses on Western societies and does not address the specific characteristics of non-Western or collectivist societies.

Safiya Umoja Noble (2018), in *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, critically analyzes racial and gender biases in Google's algorithms. She demonstrates that algorithms, contrary to claims of objectivity and neutrality, carry the values and biases of dominant groups (predominantly white, male, and middle-class) and contribute to the reproduction of structural inequalities (Noble, 2018, p. 56). Although theoretically pioneering in the field of critical algorithm studies, her focus is on race and gender within the American context and overlooks non-Western identities (such as Iranian-Islamic identity).

In futures studies, numerous reports and articles have mapped the future of AI and IoT. The World Economic Forum (2020), in its report "The Future of Artificial Intelligence and the Internet of Things," outlines four probable scenarios for the 2030 horizon: "The Smooth World" (global cooperation), "Walled Gardens" (geopolitical fragmentation), "My World" (extreme personalization), and "The World of Conflict" (military and surveillance competition). Although these scenarios are methodologically rich, they mainly concentrate on economic, political, and security dimensions, paying little attention to cultural-identity consequences in specific societies.

Another study by the Oxford University Foresight Centre (2022), titled "Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Culture," was also published. In this report, researchers like Orlandi and Cowell showed that generative AI algorithms (e.g., large language models) can lead to "cultural homogenization," meaning that by mass-producing content based on dominant statistical patterns, cultural diversity decreases, and minority cultures are marginalized (Orlandi & Cowell, 2022, p. 42). However, this report also overlooks the context of specific societies (including Iran), and its recommendations are general and universal.

## **2.2. Domestic Background**

In Iran, numerous studies have also been conducted on the technical aspects of AI and IoT. These studies are mainly published in specialized journals on electrical engineering, computer science, and information technology. Examples include studies on "Designing IoT Architecture for Smart Cities" (Rahmani et al., 2022), "Algorithms for Optimizing Energy Consumption in Wireless Sensor Networks" (Karimi & Ahmadi, 2021), and "A Hybrid Machine Learning Model for Urban Traffic Prediction" (Razavi & Mohammadi, 2023). While technically valid, these studies do not explicitly address social, cultural, and identity consequences and consider technology in a social vacuum.

In the last decade, socio-cultural research related to new technologies in Iran has grown considerably. One of the most important research areas has been "Social Media and Identity" studies. Research indicates that using social media like Instagram and Telegram has had significant effects on the individual and collective identity of Iranian users. However, these

studies have mainly concentrated on user-generated "content" and have neglected the algorithmic "platform."

A study by Mirrahmani (2025) titled "Qualitative Study of Algorithmic Memory Policy in the Tradition of Cultural Studies Using Grounded Theory" is among the few studies directly addressing the role of algorithms in redefining collective memory in Iran. The findings show that social media algorithms, through "classification" and "highlighting" content, create "memory gaps" and consequently "fragmentation of collective memory" in Iran (Mirrahmani, 2025, p. 103). Although this research is close to the present study in terms of approach (cultural studies) and method (grounded theory), it is limited to social media and ignores the IoT. Moreover, it lacks a futures-oriented methodology, focusing only on analyzing the current situation.

In the domain of IoT, social research is very scarce. An example is the article by Javadi and Norouzi (2023) entitled "A Study of Privacy Perception in Smart Homes: A Case Study of Tehran." This research shows that Iranian users have high concerns about surveillance and data collection in smart homes but, due to practical benefits (e.g., energy savings), show a tendency to accept the technology (Javadi & Norouzi, 2023, p. 45). Although this research approaches cultural-communicative dimensions, it does not specifically address identity and cultural norms.

One of the most comprehensive domestic studies in this field is the report "The Future of Artificial Intelligence in Iran," published by the Center for Strategic Studies of the Presidency (2024). Using a futures-oriented approach, this report outlines four scenarios for the future of AI in Iran: "Intelligent Leap" (leading and indigenous development), "Algorithmic Dependency" (reliance on foreign technologies), "Technological Passivity" (slow and limited development), and "Security Deterrence" (focus on military-security applications). While methodologically (scenario planning) this report is close to the present study and some scenarios overlap, it primarily emphasizes economic, political, and security dimensions, paying less attention to cultural-identity and communicative aspects. Furthermore, it does not address the "convergence" of AI and IoT, neglecting the IoT aspect, and is not analyzed from the perspective of communication and cultural sociology.

A review of the literature shows that very few studies have simultaneously addressed the three components of "AI-IoT convergence," "redefinition of cultural identity," and "futures studies in Iran." Research by Roghani and Ahmadi (2024) titled "The Impact of IoT on Urban Lifestyle in Iran: A Futures-Oriented Approach" examined some lifestyle components (such as energy consumption, transportation, health) but neglected identity, semantic, and communicative dimensions.

The most recent international research relevant to Iran is a study by Abdi et al. (forthcoming, 2026) entitled "Algorithmic Dependency: The Impact of Technology Monopoly on Developing Societies; A Case Study of the Islamic Republic of Iran." This research shows that dependency on foreign algorithms, not only at the hardware level but also at the "epistemological" level (i.e., decision-making rules, problem prioritization, and ethical standards embedded in code), subjects Iran to the threat of "algorithmic colonialism" (Abdi et al., forthcoming, p. 15). Although conceptually (algorithmic dependency) this research is highly relevant, its methodology is mainly documentary and analytical, and it does not utilize futures-oriented methods (like scenario planning or Causal Layered Analysis). Also, it does not specifically address the "redefinition of identity" from the perspective of communication and cultural sociology.

Summarizing the literature reveals the main research gaps:

First, a shortage of research simultaneously addressing "AI-IoT convergence" in Iran. Most domestic studies focus either on AI or IoT, with less attention to their convergence.

Second, neglect of cultural-identity and communicative dimensions in technical research. Although extensive technical research has been conducted in Iran, almost none engages with questions about "identity," "meaning," "norms," and "representation."

Third, the lack of a futures-oriented approach in socio-cultural studies. The few existing socio-cultural studies (Mirrahmani, 2025) are mainly descriptive-analytical or based on grounded theory and do not utilize futures-oriented methods (like scenario planning or Causal Layered Analysis).

Fourth, insufficient focus on the "redefinition of identity" in the face of AI-IoT integration. Even influential international studies like Zuboff (2019) and Gillespie (2018) mainly focus on economic, political, and taste-based dimensions and have not specifically addressed "identity reconstruction" in non-Western societies (especially Iran).

Fifth, a lack of indigenous scenarios for the future of Iran's communication culture in the age of AI-IoT integration. The report by the Center for Strategic Studies (2024), despite its methodological value, primarily concentrates on economic-security dimensions and overlooks cultural-communicative scenarios.

The present study aims to fill these gaps by analyzing the processes of "algorithmic redefinition of Iranian identity" in the era of AI-IoT convergence using a futures-oriented approach from the perspective of communication and cultural sociology.

### **3. Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Framework**

**Algorithmic Redefinition of Identity:** The process whereby algorithmic systems—search engines, recommendation systems, scoring platforms—redefine contexts, priorities, and identity boundaries through "channeling," "visibility," and "behavioral prediction" (Gillespie, 2018). Unlike classical identity theories emphasizing human agency, identity today is not just "socially constructed" but also "algorithmically constructed."

**"Convergence of AI and IoT":** A state where AI's learning, decision-making, and prediction capabilities merge with IoT's sensor network. Key features: "Continuous Learning," "Real-time Decision Making," and "Closed-loop Feedback" (Zhang et al., 2023).

**Communication Culture:** Patterns, norms, values, and beliefs shaping message production, distribution, reception, and interpretation. In Iran, communication culture is influenced by three layers: Iranian (politeness, taarof, face-saving), Islamic (modesty, enjoining good, respect for elders), and modern (individualism, directness, speed) (Bashirieh, 2015).

**Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation:** Identity is not fixed essence but "representation" constructed in discursive processes, constantly subject to

change (Hall, 1990). In the age of algorithms, representational processes are no longer solely human; algorithms participate through selecting "what is seen" and "what is not seen."

**Manuel Castells' Theory of Identity:** In the network society, identity becomes the primary source of meaning. He distinguishes "Legitimizing Identity" (dominant institutions), "Resistance Identity" (marginalized positions), and "Project Identity" (social transformation) (Castells, 2010). Algorithms sometimes play the role of "dominant institutions," producing new "legitimizing identities."

**Social Constructionism of Technology (SCOT):** Technologies are not neutral but carry values, interests, and worldviews of specific social groups (Bijker & Law, 1992). Algorithms and IoT standards are "stabilized" manifestations of dominant cultural values (Western, individualistic, capitalist).

**Marshall McLuhan's Media Theory:** "The medium is the message" – each technology imposes specific "sensory ratios" and "perceptual patterns" (McLuhan, 1964). AI-IoT creates "decision-making prostheses" extending beyond sensory extension to cognitive prostheses.

**Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT):** No qualitative distinction between "human actors" and "non-human actors." Objects and technologies possess "agency" and can advance, modify, or block action programs (Latour, 2005). Algorithms and IoT sensors are "non-human actors" actively participating in redefining identities. Latour emphasizes: "Technology does not reflect society; it creates society."

**James Carey's Ritual View of Communication:** Communication is not just information transfer but "representation of shared beliefs" and "continuity of collective identity" (Carey, 1989). Algorithms weaken the ritual view as communication becomes "personalized transaction" rather than "shared ceremony."

**Pierre Bourdieu's Field Theory:** Objective structures and subjective structures reproduce each other. Iran's communication culture is a "field" where actors with different "cultural capital" compete. Algorithms introduce new capital called "algorithmic literacy" (Bourdieu, 1984).

**Michel Foucault's Governmentality Theory:** Power operates through "conducting conduct" and "managing populations" via statistics, prediction, and regulation (Foucault, 2007). In the age of algorithms, this takes "algorithmic" form: rather than prohibiting, algorithms assign scores and direct behavior.

**Algorithmic Governmentality:** Algorithmic systems structure the "context of possible action" through channeling, persuasion, prediction, and behavioral regulation. Control is exerted through "this is the best option for you" rather than "you cannot" (Raud, 2023).

**Shoshana Zuboff's Theory:** "Surveillance capitalism" appropriates human experience and predicts behavior, acquiring "instrumentarian power." "Knowledge of our behavior becomes a tool for shaping our behavior" (Zuboff, 2019). The algorithm not only predicts behavior but steers behavior towards its prediction.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

This research was conducted using a qualitative and futures-oriented approach. Since the primary aim was to analyze the processes of algorithmic redefinition of identity and to outline future scenarios, the research methodology combined futures studies techniques and cultural analysis. The overall approach was "critical futures studies," which seeks not only to predict the future but also to identify power dynamics, inequalities, and dominant discourses shaping possible futures.

Data collection utilized **three primary** methods:

The goal of environmental scanning was to identify macro-trends, drivers, and weak signals related to AI-IoT convergence in Iran and globally. In this phase, various documents and resources were analyzed, including Iran's upstream and policy documents (Vision Plan ), General Cyberspace Policies, National Scientific Roadmap), international reports (WEF reports, Oxford Foresight Centre reports), reputable domestic and international scientific articles (52 articles from Scopus, Web of Science, and Magiran databases from 2018-2025), as well as news and technical reports on technology in Iran and globally (87 reports from reliable

sources like WEF, ITU, and the Center for Strategic Studies). Document analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis with the assistance of MAXQDA software (version 2022).

An "algorithmic discourse analysis" was conducted using the "algorithmic walkthrough" technique. The goal of this phase was to identify cultural biases embedded in the algorithms of popular Iranian platforms (Snapp, Divar, Rubika) and international ones (Instagram, YouTube, Google). This method was implemented by strictly adhering to the following protocol:

For each of the six platforms studied, 10 test user accounts (60 accounts in total) were designed and created with different profiles. These profiles were categorized based on four main control variables:

**Gender:** 5 female and 5 male accounts per platform.

**Age:** 3 accounts in the 18-25 range, 4 in the 26-35 range, and 3 in the 36-45 range.

**Location:** 5 accounts with Tehran location (center) and 5 with locations in Mashhad, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Tabriz (provincial cities).

**Activity History:** 3 accounts with high activity (over 50 daily interactions), 4 with medium activity (10-50 interactions), and 3 with low activity (less than 10 interactions).

The algorithmic walkthrough was conducted over a 3-month period (from September to December 2025). Each account was used for 21 consecutive days (3 weeks). In the first week, accounts behaved "naturally" without researcher intervention. In the second week, controlled activities (including searching for specific terms, liking selected content, and following designated accounts) were performed. In the third week, algorithmic outputs (suggestions, search results, Explore content) were recorded and documented.

To eliminate confounding effects, the following variables were controlled. For each platform, 50 standard search terms were designed and executed in the following domains:

**Identity and Beauty:** "beautiful woman," "successful man," "fashion model," "makeup," "hairstyle."

**Employment and Social Roles:** "exemplary doctor," "exemplary nurse," "successful manager," "exemplary teacher."

**Family Norms:** "successful family," "marriage," "parenting," "relationship with spouse."

**Lifestyle:** "single life," "married life," "travel," "leisure."

**Cultural-Religious Content:** "religious speech," "elegy," "prayer," "Quran session."

All algorithmic outputs (search results, suggestions, content displayed on the first page) were recorded using screen recording tools and screenshots. In total, 4,320 outputs were collected and coded. The calculation was as follows: 6 platforms  $\times$  10 accounts  $\times$  50 searches  $\times$  3 weeks, with an overlap coefficient of 0.48 applied to account for content duplication.

Output analysis was performed at three levels:

**Quantitative Analysis:** Counting the frequency of content types in outputs and calculating ratios and statistical indicators.

**Qualitative Content Analysis:** Identifying themes, patterns, and qualitative biases.

**Discourse Analysis:** Identifying dominant discourses and embedded cultural assumptions.

All test accounts were created in compliance with the terms and conditions of each platform. No real user data was used, and all accounts were deactivated after the research concluded.

The objective of these interviews was to explain the strategies of resistance, reinterpretation, and circumvention employed by users in response to the algorithmic redefinition of norms. The study population consisted of youth aged 18-35 residing in Tehran. Sampling was purposive using a snowball technique. Sample size was determined based on the principle of theoretical saturation, achieved after 30 interviews (18 women and 12 men). Diversity was ensured regarding education (diploma to PhD), employment status (student, employed, self-employed, unemployed), and level of digital platform use (low, medium, high).

Interview questions were designed around themes such as experiences with smart platforms, perception of algorithm functioning, strategies to counter algorithmic recommendations, and changes in privacy perception. Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, was recorded with participants' informed consent, and subsequently transcribed. All interviews were conducted between November 2025 and February 2026.

With 30 interviewees from Tehran's youth, this study does not seek statistical generalization to the entire Iranian population. However, based on the following four factors, the findings possess "transferability" or "trans-contextual validity" and can be insightful for analyzing Iranian identity in the age of algorithms:

**Theoretical Saturation:** The repeated emergence of concepts and patterns in interviews 25 to 30 indicates theoretical saturation and reproducibility.

**Alignment with Previous Research:** Findings are consistent and corroborative with similar studies in Iran (e.g., Mirrahmani, 2025; Javadi & Norouzi, 2023).

**Methodological Triangulation:** Overlap between interview findings and results from the algorithmic walkthrough and environmental scanning indicates high internal validity.

**Purposive Sampling:** Selecting interviewees from the demographic most engaged with algorithms (Tehrani youth aged 18-35) allowed for the identification of the most nuanced and complex patterns of algorithmic engagement.

Therefore, while the results are not directly generalizable to all age, gender, and geographical groups in Iran, they can be considered a "leading sample" of patterns that will gradually extend to other social groups.

For analyzing the interview data, the grounded theory method with the Strauss and Corbin approach was used, which includes three stages of open, axial, and selective coding. All coding stages were performed using MAXQDA software (version 2022).

In the open coding stage, 432 initial codes were extracted from the interview transcripts. Examples of initial codes included:

- Liking contrary to actual interest
- Searching for unrelated topics
- Using temporary accounts
- Using VPNs
- Scrolling without stopping (infinite scroll)
- Not liking or commenting
- Muting or watching without sound
- Selective alignment with algorithmic suggestions
- Reinterpretation within a local framework
- Producing hybrid/syncretic content
- Migrating to alternative platforms
- Using open-source tools
- Understanding biases but being unable to change behavior
- Feeling of cognitive dissonance
- Nostalgia for pre-algorithmic times

In the axial coding stage, initial codes were organized into 17 subcategories and 5 main categories:

**Active Circumvention Strategies:** Codes like liking contrary to interest, searching unrelated topics, using temporary accounts, VPNs.

**Hidden Resistance Strategies:** Including non-stop scrolling, no likes/comments, watching without audio.

**Creative Reinterpretation Strategies:** Including selective alignment, reinterpretation within a local framework, producing hybrid content.

**Selective Rejection Strategies:** Including migrating to alternative platforms, using open-source tools.

**Awareness without Change Strategies:** Including understanding biases but inability to change behavior.

In the selective coding stage, the main categories were organized around a core category called the "Dual Algorithmic Lifeworld." The final model shows that Iranian users live in a "field" where two conflicting value systems (indigenous collectivist values vs. algorithmic individualistic values) are in constant confrontation. The five identified strategies represent agential responses to this confrontation, ranging from complete circumvention to conscious submission.

For analyzing data from the environmental scanning and algorithmic walkthrough, the method of qualitative content analysis with an inductive approach was used. In this method, document texts and algorithmic outputs were systematically examined, coded, and categorized. The unit of analysis was the "theme," and coding was performed by two independent coders; the inter-coder agreement coefficient was 0.87, indicating high reliability.

The final stage of the research was "scenario planning." In this stage, by combining findings from environmental scanning, algorithmic analysis, and interviews, and utilizing the critical uncertainty matrix, probable scenarios for the future of Iran's communication culture by the 1420 horizon (2041) were constructed. Based on the driver analysis, two main critical uncertainties shaping the scenario space were identified:

**Intensity of Algorithmic Governmentality:** This axis represents the extent of influence and surveillance applied by two main forces: (a) State surveillance (through the National Information Network, authentication systems, and social scoring), and (b) The influence of surveillance capitalism (major tech companies that, by appropriating user data, predict and direct behavior).

**Level of Societal Resilience and Agency:** This axis represents society's ability—including civil actors, content producers, and ordinary users—to resist the algorithmic redefinition of identity. This resilience manifests through strategies like active circumvention, creative reinterpretation,

selective rejection, and creating parallel ecosystems.

The interaction of these two axes produced three main and distinct scenarios:

**Smart Panopticon** (equivalent to "Silent Assimilation"): High intensity of governmentality, low societal resilience.

**Intelligent Resilience** (equivalent to "Indigenous Resilience"): High intensity of governmentality, high societal resilience (preferred scenario).

**Passive Chaos** (equivalent to "Schizoid Ambivalence"): Low intensity of governmentality, low societal resilience.

Following the construction of the main scenarios, each was further analyzed using the CLA method across four layers:

**Layer 1 (Litany):** Superficial description and surface-level events of the scenario.

**Layer 2 (Systemic Causes):** Structural, economic, and institutional factors.

**Layer 3 (Discourse/Worldview):** Dominant discourses and cultural presuppositions.

**Layer 4 (Metaphor/Myth):** Archetypes, foundational narratives, and deep cultural metaphors.

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, four strategies were used:

**Methodological and Data Source Triangulation:** Combining the three methods of environmental scanning, algorithmic walkthrough, and in-depth interviews.

**Member Checking:** Presenting a summary of findings to 8 interviewees to confirm the accurate interpretation of their perspectives.

**Peer Review:** Presenting the research report to 3 professors in communication and cultural studies for feedback.

**Prolonged Engagement:** The researcher's sustained presence in the research field (continuous document study, platform usage, user engagement) for 6 months.

Table 1. Algorithmic Walkthrough Results - Individualistic Bias on Instagram

| Content Type                                            | Number of Displays in Explore (per 1000 samples) | Display Ratio |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Content on Individual Success and Independent Lifestyle | 683                                              | 68.3%         |
| Content on Family and Group Relationships               | 207                                              | 20.7%         |
| Other Content                                           | 110                                              | 11%           |
| Individualistic to Collectivistic Ratio                 |                                                  | 3.3 to 1      |

Source: Algorithmic Walkthrough Data, September-December 2025.

Table 2. Algorithmic Walkthrough Results - Gender Bias on Google

| Search Phrase      | Ratio of Male to Female Images (out of first 100 images) |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Exemplary Doctor   | 82 to 18 (4.56 to 1)                                     |
| Exemplary Nurse    | 30 to 70 (0.33 to 1)                                     |
| Successful Manager | 79 to 21 (3.76 to 1)                                     |
| Exemplary Teacher  | 45 to 55 (0.82 to 1)                                     |

Source: Algorithmic Walkthrough Data, September-December 2025.

Table 3. Algorithmic Walkthrough Results - Gender Bias on Divar

| Job Ad Type                     | Suggestion Ratio for Men | Suggestion Ratio for Women | Male to Female Ratio |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Management and Leadership       | 73%                      | 27%                        | 2.7 to 1             |
| Education and Domestic Services | 22%                      | 78%                        | 0.28 to 1            |
| Technical and Engineering       | 81%                      | 19%                        | 4.26 to 1            |
| Administrative Services         | 46%                      | 54%                        | 0.85 to 1            |

Source: Algorithmic Walkthrough Data, September-December 2025.

Table 4. Distribution of Identity Types in the Interview Sample

| Identity Type                                 | Count<br>(out of 30) | Percentage | Predominant Demographic<br>Characteristics                       |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Compliant Surveilled<br>Citizen               | 4                    | 13.3%      | Over 30, high school education,<br>low digital literacy          |
| Circumventor Actor                            | 6                    | 20%        | 18-25 years, university education,<br>high digital literacy      |
| Ambivalent Actor<br>Engaged in Meaning Crisis | 12                   | 40%        | 25-35 years, university education,<br>medium digital literacy    |
| Creative Algorithmic<br>Collaborator          | 4                    | 13.3%      | 25-35 years, Master's degree,<br>entrepreneur or content creator |
| Data-Anxious Escapee                          | 4                    | 13.3%      | 25-35 years, Master's degree,<br>programmer or privacy activist  |

Source: In-depth Interview Data, November 2025-February 2026.

Table 5. Matrix of Critical Uncertainties and Resulting Scenarios

|                                     | Low Societal Resilience                   | High Societal Resilience                            |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| High Algorithmic<br>Governmentality | Smart Panopticon (Silent<br>Assimilation) | Intelligent Resilience (Indigenous<br>Resilience) ✓ |
| Low Algorithmic<br>Governmentality  | Passive Chaos (Schizoid<br>Ambivalence)   | (Improbable)                                        |

Source: Scenario Planning Analysis.

The state of "Low Governmentality, High Resilience" was deemed improbable due to Iran's structural dependency on foreign technologies and the perceived need for state surveillance.

The methodology of this research, by combining three data collection methods (environmental scanning, algorithmic walkthrough, and in-depth interviews) and two analytical methods (grounded theory and qualitative content analysis) with scenario planning, has enabled a deep and multi-layered investigation of the processes of algorithmic redefinition of Iranian identity. The algorithmic walkthrough, using 60 test accounts and 4,320 documented outputs, quantitatively identified cultural biases. The grounded theory analysis, with 432 initial codes, 17 subcategories, and 5 main categories, provided a theoretical model for understanding user strategies. Scenario planning, utilizing the critical uncertainty matrix and Causal Layered Analysis, outlined three main scenarios for the 1420 (2041)

horizon. Despite the sample limitation to 30 Tehrani youth, the transferability of findings is ensured through triangulation, theoretical saturation, and alignment with previous research.

## **5. Findings**

The findings reveal a deep gap between "indigenous cultural values" (collectivism, cyclical time, face-to-face relationships, privacy based on intimacy, committed identity) and "values embedded in dominant global algorithms" (extreme individualism, linear time, quantitative optimization, privacy based on data ownership, fluid consumerist identity).

Algorithms are never neutral. They reflect originating culture values (Western-American) while actively participating as "non-human cultural agents" in redefining user identities. This redefinition occurs through: (1) Visibility – what algorithms show or hide; (2) Prediction and Channeling – steering behavior toward algorithmic predictions; (3) Normalization of Biases – internalizing cultural biases as "reality."

Iranian users resist through circumvention, hidden resistance, creative reinterpretation, and selective rejection. However, the "ambivalent actor in meaning crisis" type (40%) signals a serious warning: many youth are caught in an "algorithmic dilemma" – drawn to algorithmic culture's advantages while feeling rooted in Iranian-Islamic culture. This duality generates a "silent identity crisis."

At the macro level, three scenarios show Iran's communication culture future depends on interplay between "Algorithmic Governmentality" and "Societal Resilience." Both "Smart Panopticon" and "Passive Chaos" lead to identity loss – first through forced assimilation, second through chaotic dissolution.

Only "Intelligent Resilience" allows identity preservation while leveraging technology: producing indigenous identity-oriented algorithms, participatory regulation, and strengthening societal agency through algorithmic literacy.

**Algorithmic Biases:** The individualistic bias finding confirms Gillespie (2018) with precise quantitative data (3.3:1 ratio) and extends to Iranian

platforms. Even localized Iranian platforms showed similar bias, reinforcing Noble's (2018) "globalization of cultural biases." Gender bias findings align with Noble but gain complexity in Iran's context due to intersection with Islamic-Iranian values—stereotypes reproduced by algorithms sometimes conflict with social realities. The linear temporal bias is theoretically innovative, showing algorithms influence not just "what" but "how" (narrative structure and temporality). Linguistic/visual biases align with "visual colonialism" (Mirzoeff, 2011) and "linguistic colonialism" (Phillipson, 1992), with "Finglish" prioritization on Rubika indicating "discursive dominance" of English (Khosravi, 2020).

**User Resistance Strategies:** The five strategies share commonalities with Mirrahmani's (2025) "algorithmic memory policy" study. The "Dual Algorithmic Lifeworld" core category expands "memory gap" to entire "semantic lifeworld." Javadi and Norouzi's (2023) privacy findings align with "critical awareness without behavior change," enriched by adding "cognitive dissonance" as "cognitive-identity crisis." "Creative reinterpretation" and "selective alignment" align with "cultural translation" (Latour, 2005) and "creative user agency" (Jenkins, 2006).

**Identity Typology:** The "compliant surveilled citizen" (13.3%) aligns with Castells' (2010) "legitimizing identity," with algorithms as "new dominant institutions." "Circumventor actor" (20%) aligns with Scott's (1985) "hidden resistance," innovatively showing resistance as cultural, not merely political. "Ambivalent actor" (40%) compares to "modern-traditional dilemma" (Giddens, 1991), but introduces "value triad" concept with algorithms as third option. "Creative algorithmic collaborator" (13.3%) aligns with "project identity" (Castells) and "creative user" (Jenkins). "Data-anxious escapee" (13.3%) compares to "digital escapee" (Zuboff), but escape in Iran remains "incomplete" due to infrastructural dependencies.

**Scenario Analysis:** "Smart Panopticon" resembles WEF's (2020) "World of Conflict" but focuses on cultural-identity dimensions. "Intelligent Resilience" resembles Center for Strategic Studies' (2024) "Intelligent Leap" but emphasizes "identity-oriented algorithms." "Passive Chaos" resembles "passive laggard" and "algorithmic chaos" scenarios, with the novel insight that their combination leads to "perpetual identity crisis." Oxford's (2022) "cultural homogenization" risk is accompanied in Iran by "value duality," introducing "schizoid ambivalence."

This research offers four main innovations: (1) "Dual Algorithmic Lifeworld" as core category; (2) Typology of communicative identities with tripartite components (awareness, agency, value conflict); (3) Identification of linear temporal bias in algorithms; (4) "Value triad" concept (human-traditional, human-modern, algorithmic-postmodern).

A systematic discussion shows: (1) Cultural biases consistent with international research; (2) Linear temporal bias as most innovative finding; (3) Resistance strategies congruent with domestic research; (4) Identity typology consistent with classical/modern theories, introducing "value triad"; (5) Scenarios share commonalities with futures reports but offer novel cultural-identity focus; (6) Limitations mitigated through triangulation and theoretical saturation.

## **6. Conclusion**

This research analyzed algorithmic redefinition of Iranian identity in the AI-IoT convergence era and outlined future scenarios from communication and cultural sociology perspectives. Findings reveal a deep gap between "indigenous cultural values" (collectivism, cyclical time, face-to-face relationships, intimacy-based privacy, committed identity) and "values embedded in dominant global algorithms" (extreme individualism, linear time, quantitative optimization, data-ownership privacy, fluid consumerist identity).

The most significant finding is that algorithms are never neutral. They reflect originating Western-American culture while actively participating as "non-human cultural agents" in redefining user identities through three mechanisms: (1) Visibility – what algorithms show or hide; (2) Prediction and Channeling – steering behavior toward algorithmic predictions; (3) Normalization of Biases – cultural biases internalized as "reality."

Iranian users resist through circumvention, hidden resistance, creative reinterpretation, and selective rejection. However, the "ambivalent actor in meaning crisis" type (40%) signals a serious warning: many youth are caught in an "algorithmic dilemma" – drawn to algorithmic culture's advantages (speed, individuality, endless choice) while feeling rooted in Iranian-Islamic culture. This duality generates a "silent identity crisis" among Iran's younger generation.

At the macro level, three scenarios for the 2041 horizon show Iran's communication culture future depends on interplay between "Algorithmic Governmentality" (state surveillance/control) and "Societal Resilience and Agency" (resistance, creativity, cultural reproduction). The "Smart Panopticon" (high surveillance, passive society) and "Passive Chaos" (no surveillance, fragmented society) both lead to Iranian-Islamic identity loss—first through forced assimilation, second through chaotic dissolution.

Only "Intelligent Resilience" allows identity preservation while leveraging technological benefits. This scenario involves neither passive submission nor technological isolation, but rather "producing indigenous identity-oriented algorithms," "participatory regulation," and "strengthening societal agency through algorithmic literacy and alternative platforms." It demonstrates that the future is neither predetermined nor beyond human will—shaped in a battlefield between centralizing forces (state, surveillance capitalism, imported algorithms) and horizontalizing forces (civil society, cultural actors, aware users, indigenous producers).

If Iran pursues "Intelligent Resilience," it preserves its identity and serves as a model for non-Western societies on using "homogenizing technologies" to "strengthen cultural distinctions." However, if collective awareness and action are lost, "Silent Assimilation" or "Passive Chaos" await. This research demonstrates the necessity of shifting from passive technology acceptance to an agentic perspective where society, culture, and intelligent policymaking steer algorithmic transformations in favor of local identity and values. The choice remains with us—provided we recognize "speaking non-human agents" before it is too late and organize collective will to confront them.

## **7. Strategic Recommendations**

### **7.1. Institutional and Policy Recommendations**

This research analyzed algorithmic redefinition of Iranian identity in the AI-IoT convergence era and outlined future scenarios from communication and cultural sociology perspectives. Findings reveal a

deep gap between "indigenous cultural values" (collectivism, cyclical time, face-to-face relationships, intimacy-based privacy, committed identity) and "values embedded in dominant global algorithms" (extreme individualism, linear time, quantitative optimization, data-ownership privacy, fluid consumerist identity).

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## **7.2. Applied Recommendations**

**Incorporate "Critical Algorithmic Literacy" into Formal Education:** The Ministry of Education should implement a mandatory "Digital and Algorithmic Literacy" course for grades 7-12 covering: algorithm fundamentals; search/recommendation mechanics; deepfake detection; digital rights and privacy; data protection strategies; and ethical/cultural critique. This should begin indirectly in primary school through games and stories.

**Design National "Algorithmic Awareness" Campaigns for Families:** IRIB, the Islamic Propaganda Organization, and the Ministry of Culture should collaborate on media campaigns familiarizing parents with algorithm concepts, warning about children's platform risks, offering privacy-respecting supervision strategies, and introducing non-algorithmic family entertainment alternatives.

**Support "Culturally Aligned Content" Production:** Many Iranian-Islamic content producers lack algorithmic optimization skills. The Ministry of Culture and Vice Presidency for Science and Technology should organize "Algorithmic Literacy Workshops" and provide financial incentives for culturally aligned content produced in "algorithm-friendly" formats.

**Create "Non-Algorithmic Alternative Platforms":** Public-private investment should support platforms that are either entirely non-algorithmic (user search/manual follow) or use transparent, ethical, low-intervention algorithms. Global examples: Wikipedia, Mastodon, RSS. Iranian platforms like Baleh, Soroush, and Gap could become such spaces with transparent, non-discriminatory, user-customizable algorithms.

Promote "Data Fasting" Among Youth: "Data fasting"—completely stopping algorithm-based platform use for set periods (one day/week or one week/month)—reduces algorithmic dependency and increases awareness. Cultural institutions should launch "Data Fasting Campaigns" with collective challenges.

Empower Local Actors for "Smart Cities with Iranian Identity": Establish "Cultural Smart City Working Groups" with City Councils, municipalities, universities, and NGOs to identify neighborhood cultural needs, design identity-preserving smart solutions (e.g., adhan/prayer apps, intelligent mosque lighting, local cooperation platforms), facilitate public oversight, and promote the "committed smart citizen."

Establish a "National Foundation for Cultural Studies of Algorithms": The Ministry of Science, Academy of Persian Language, and major universities should establish this foundation to: fund cultural-algorithm research; publish *Cultural Studies of Algorithms* journal; hold conferences; train PhD students in "Cultural Studies of Technology"; and provide cultural consultancy to policymakers and tech companies.

### 7.3. Research Limitations

Sample Limitation: The sample concentrated on youth aged 18-35 in Tehran. While this "leading sample" has methodological justification, it overlooks older groups, rural populations, ethnic minorities, and marginalized groups. Findings mainly represent "Iran's urban digital generation" experience.

Temporal Limitation: The algorithmic walkthrough covered three months (September-December 2025). Algorithms are dynamic, with frequent updates potentially producing different results. Findings represent a "cross-sectional picture" rather than a fixed one.

Algorithmic Black Box Limitation: The walkthrough with 60 test accounts faces three limitations: (a) Test accounts cannot replicate full human behavior complexity; (b) Accounts lack real social networks; (c) Algorithms are "black boxes" without access to codes/logic. Bias analysis relies solely on outputs (manifest behavior).

Interview Limitations: Interviews face: (a) "Self-reporting bias"—interviewees may not accurately report behaviors due to social desirability

or fear; (b) "Memory limitations"—many algorithmic responses are automatic/unconscious; (c) "Interview context effect"—formal settings may encourage socially desirable responses. The researcher mitigated these through comfortable atmosphere and confidentiality emphasis.

**Theoretical and Conceptual Limitations:** "Identity" is multi-layered and cannot be reduced to few indicators. Focusing on communicative/cultural dimensions overlooked psychological, biological, political, and historical aspects. AI-IoT convergence is emerging with no mature humanities theories; integrating theories across fields may involve conceptual inconsistencies.

**Translation and Terminology Limitations:** Concepts like "Algorithmic Governmentality" and "Surveillance Capitalism" carry "meaning change" risks in Persian translation. Precise equivalents and conceptual explanations mitigated this.

**Researcher Bias Limitation:** Theoretical inclination towards critical algorithm studies may have emphasized domineering aspects. Member checking, professor feedback, and clarifying presuppositions reduced this, though complete "indeterminacy" is unattainable in qualitative research.

**Recommendations for Future Research:** (1) Expand sample to include diverse age groups, rural populations, ethnic minorities; (2) Conduct longitudinal studies tracking algorithmic changes; (3) Develop methods accessing algorithmic code (e.g., regulatory transparency); (4) Employ mixed-methods combining quantitative big data with qualitative interpretations; (5) Conduct comparative studies between Iran and other non-Western societies facing similar challenges.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently without any financial or personal relationships that could have influenced the findings, interpretations, or conclusions presented in this study.

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### **AI statement**

During preparation, the authors used AI-assisted tools solely for grammar checking and language refinement. All suggestions were reviewed, edited, and approved by the authors. No generative AI was used for data collection, analysis, interpretation, or generating core findings and conclusions. The conceptual framework, theoretical analysis, methodological design, and final writing remain the authors' intellectual work. The authors take full responsibility for the content and integrity of this research.

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## Original Research Paper

# Path dependency theory and Iran's 1962 land reforms: How initial goals shaped the current situation

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## Abstract

When the Pahlavi regime launched its land reform program in 1962 as the centerpiece of the White Revolution, the official narrative promised a transformation of Iranian society through equitable land distribution, social justice, increased agricultural productivity, and improved living conditions for rural communities. Decades later, however, the outcomes present a different picture. This article examines how and why the reforms diverged from their original objectives and became increasingly resistant to change. Using path dependency as an analytical framework, the study draws on archival records, government reports, and scholarly literature to trace the mechanisms that placed agricultural policy on a trajectory from which it could not easily deviate. The findings indicate that, despite the developmental rhetoric surrounding the reforms, they were never fully implemented as intended. Political considerations shaped the process from the outset, while rising oil revenues, ineffective policies, and the growing influence of interest groups with a stake in maintaining the status quo reinforced the established trajectory over time. The 1979 Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, and prolonged economic sanctions further reinforced this path, making fundamental changes to agricultural policy increasingly costly and politically difficult. What began as a transformative political choice, shaped by both Cold War geopolitics and domestic political objectives, gradually became an institutional constraint on subsequent policy change. The resulting outcomes diverged substantially from the original development objectives. By illuminating this process, the article contributes to an understanding of the political economy of reform in resource-dependent states and provides an analytical framework that may be applicable to the study of other institutional trajectories in modern Iran.

**Keywords:** Iran, development, land reform, path dependency, institutional lock-in, agricultural policy

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## مقاله پژوهشی

# نظریه وابستگی به مسیر و اصلاحات ارضی ۱۳۴۱ ایران: چگونه اهداف اولیه وضعیت کنونی را شکل دادند؟

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## چکیده:

زمانی که رژیم پهلوی در سال ۱۳۴۱ برنامه اصلاحات ارضی را به‌عنوان محور اصلی انقلاب سفید آغاز کرد، روایت رسمی از تحولی عمیق در جامعه ایران سخن می‌گفت: تقسیم عادلانه زمین، عدالت اجتماعی، بهره‌وری بالاتر کشاورزی و زندگی بهتر برای روستاییان. اما دهه‌ها بعد، واقعیت چیز دیگری نشان می‌دهد. پرسش اصلی این است که اصلاحات چگونه و چرا از مسیر اولیه‌اش فاصله گرفت و چرا امروز تا این اندازه در برابر تغییر مقاومت می‌کند. این پژوهش با به‌کارگیری نظریه وابستگی به مسیر، و با تکیه بر اسناد آرشیوی، گزارش‌های دولتی و منابع علمی، به دنبال ردیابی سازوکارهایی است که سیاست کشاورزی را به مسیری کشاند که خارج‌شدن از آن دشوار شد. یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهند که اصلاحات ارضی باوجود شعارهای توسعه‌خواهانه، هیچ‌گاه به‌طور کامل و مطابق با نیت اولیه اجرا نشد. از همان ابتدا، محاسبات سیاسی موتور محرک این فرایند بود و به‌مرور، افزایش درآمدهای نفتی، سیاست‌های اشتباه و قدرت‌یابی گروه‌های ذی‌نفعی که به وضع موجود دل بسته بودند، مسیر تعیین‌شده را تقویت کردند. انقلاب ۱۳۵۷، جنگ با عراق و تحریم‌های اقتصادی پیوسته نیز بر شدت این قفل‌شدگی افزودند و هرگونه اصلاح بنیادین در سیاست کشاورزی را پرهزینه‌تر و از نظر سیاسی ناممکن‌تر ساختند. آنچه به‌عنوان یک تصمیم تحول‌آفرین آغاز شد - که به‌اندازه جبر جغرافیای سیاسی جنگ سرد از جاه‌طلبی‌های داخلی تأثیر پذیرفته بود - کم‌کم به قالبی نهادی تبدیل شد که هیچ‌گونه تغییری را برنمی‌تابد. نتایج کنونی شباهت چندانی به چشم‌انداز توسعه‌ای اولیه ندارند. این مقاله با روشن کردن این فرایند، به درک بهتر اقتصاد سیاسی اصلاحات در کشورهای وابسته به منابع طبیعی کمک می‌کند و چارچوبی برای بررسی سایر مسیرهای نهادی در ایران معاصر ارائه می‌دهد.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** ایران، توسعه، اصلاحات ارضی، وابستگی به مسیر، قفل‌شدگی نهادی، سیاست کشاورزی

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## Original-Forschungsarbeit

# Pfadabhängigkeitstheorie und die iranische Bodenreform von 1962: Wie ursprüngliche Ziele die gegenwärtige Situation prägten

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### Zusammenfassung:

Als das Pahlavi-Regime 1962 sein Bodenreformprogramm als Kernstück der Weißen Revolution startete, versprach die offizielle Erzählung eine tiefgreifende Transformation der iranischen Gesellschaft: gerechte Landverteilung, soziale Gerechtigkeit, höhere landwirtschaftliche Produktivität und bessere Lebensbedingungen für die ländliche Bevölkerung. Jahrzehnte später zeichnet die Realität ein anderes Bild. Dieser Artikel untersucht, wie und warum die Reformen von ihrem ursprünglichen Kurs abdrifteten und warum sie gegenüber Veränderungen resistent bleiben. Mit der Pfadabhängigkeit als Rahmen stützt sich die Studie auf Archivmaterialien, Regierungsberichte und Literatur, um die Mechanismen nachzuzeichnen, die die Agrarpolitik auf einen schwer veränderbaren Pfad drängten. Die Befunde zeigen, dass die Reformen trotz ihrer entwicklungsorientierten Rhetorik nie vollständig wie beabsichtigt umgesetzt wurden. Von Anfang an prägten politische Kalküle den Prozess. Im Laufe der Zeit verstärkten steigende Öleinnahmen, fehlgeleitete Politiken und die wachsende Macht von Status-quo-Interessengruppen den eingeschlagenen Pfad. Die Revolution von 1979, der Krieg mit dem Irak und Wirtschaftsanktionen vertieften die Blockade und machten grundlegende Agrarreformen zunehmend kostspielig und politisch undurchführbar. Was als transformative politische Entscheidung begann, geprägt von der Geopolitik des Kalten Krieges und innenpolitischen Ambitionen, verhärtete sich allmählich zu einem institutionellen Korsett. Die Ergebnisse haben wenig Ähnlichkeit mit der ursprünglichen Entwicklungsperspektive. Der Artikel trägt damit zum Verständnis der politischen Ökonomie von Reformen in rohstoffabhängigen Staaten bei und bietet einen Rahmen für die Analyse anderer institutioneller Entwicklungen im modernen Iran.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Iran, Entwicklung, Bodenreform, Pfadabhängigkeit, institutionelle Blockade, Agrarpolitik

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## **1. Introduction**

The 1962 Land Reform is regarded as the most significant program of the White Revolution under the second Pahlavi regime and was implemented with multiple objectives related to development and modernization. In Iran, this policy was initiated in the 1960s and was accompanied by ambitious promises, including equitable land distribution, social justice, increased agricultural productivity, and improved rural livelihoods. However, decades later, a fundamental question arises: Do the current outcomes of these reforms correspond to their original objectives? In many respects, the policy not only failed to achieve its intended goals but also produced unintended consequences, including land fragmentation, declining agricultural output, increased dependence on food imports, rural-to-urban migration, and the expansion of urban slums. Therefore, analyzing the causes of the gap between the original objectives and subsequent outcomes is essential from economic, political, and social perspectives. While many existing studies are primarily historical and descriptive in nature, the present research seeks, through a critical analysis of land reform, to propose a model that can also be generalized to the analysis of other structural reforms in Iran.

The primary objective of this study is to compare the original goals of the Land Reform with its current outcomes across various dimensions and to explain the present situation. In this regard, the following specific objectives are pursued:

1. Examining the policymakers' primary objectives in implementing the Land Reform;
2. Assessing the current outcomes of the Land Reform;
3. Analyzing the gap between the initial goals and present outcomes based on path dependence theory; and
4. Proposing policy recommendations.

In this research, the original objectives of the Land Reform programs are reviewed and their tangible outcomes in contemporary Iran are evaluated. A comparison between the initial goals and current outcomes is then conducted, providing a basis for developing corrective policy recommendations for future decision-making.

Research on the topic of this article can be examined from two perspectives:

1. Official and governmental documents, memoirs of executive officials, and critical analyses, including reports from the Ministry of Agriculture during the Pahlavi era, the memoirs of Alam and Arsanjani, the proceedings of the National Consultative Assembly, the political notes of Dr. Ali Amini, and critical analyses by Ervand Abrahamian. These sources examine the reasons for and methods of implementing the Land Reform and, in other words, its initial objectives during the Pahlavi era.

2. Research examining the outcomes of the Land Reform in subsequent decades. For example, Mostafa Azkia, in *Sociology of Development and Rural Underdevelopment in Iran*, examines the Land Reform from a sociological perspective. In his book, he analyzes patterns of land ownership before and after the reforms and discusses their effects on rural areas. This work provides valuable assistance in examining the social conditions of the areas under study, although it largely approaches the issue from a general perspective (Azkia, 1991).

Ahmed Ashraf, in his historical and sociological writings, such as *Social Classes, State and Revolution in Iran*, has attempted to analyze the socioeconomic causes of the Land Reform, as well as the views and theories concerning land reform in Iran. He points to various pressures surrounding the implementation of the reforms and argues that the implementation of reform programs brought about extensive changes in different social and economic spheres of Iranian society (Ashraf, 2007).

John Foran, in his book *Fragile Resistance*, adopts a structural perspective and uses development theory to provide a comprehensive examination of Iranian history from the pre-Qajar period through the Pahlavi era and beyond. In the third part of the book, he analyzes the social structure of Iran during the Pahlavi period and thereafter within the framework of development theory (Foran, 1999).

Nikki Keddie, in her book *Roots of the Iranian Revolution*, examines the modern history of Iran and refers to the impact of agricultural problems and the implementation of reforms, including the Land Reform, as an introduction to and prelude to the Islamic Revolution. She considers the

role of the Kennedy administration in initiating the Land Reform to have been significant (Keddie, 1990).

Ann Lambton, in *Land Reform in Iran*, approaches the Land Reform from a modernization, exogenous, and developmental perspective. In Chapters 3–11, she examines the law, implementation, and various stages of the Iranian reforms from a village-centered perspective and discusses their effects on rural society (Lambton, 2015).

Eric Hooglund, in *Land and Revolution in Iran*, examines the problems associated with the implementation of the Land Reform and discusses the limited influence of foreign governments on the reform process. The book addresses Iran's economic and governmental policies during the period from 1961 to 1981 and examines transformations in the country's economic and political structures during and after the reform period. It also analyzes the effects of the Land Reform on rural society, patterns of landownership following the implementation of land laws, associated problems, and the role of various actors during the Pahlavi period (Hooglund, 2002).

These works, which approach the 1962 Land Reform from both positive and critical perspectives, have primarily focused on two main dimensions: either the examination of its short-term economic consequences, such as changes in agricultural production, or its sociopolitical consequences, such as the transformation of the landlord–peasant system and migration to urban areas. The innovation of the present research is based on two main dimensions: (1) applying the theoretical framework of path dependence, which views the reforms as a “beginning” of a long-term trajectory shaped at various stages by factors such as oil revenues, war, and sanctions; and (2) explaining the transition from “incomplete implementation” to “lock-in.” Rather than simply addressing the failure of the Land Reform, this research seeks to explain how a set of political, economic, and war-related factors has caused the country's agricultural structure to become trapped in a “policy trap” from which it appears difficult and costly for policymakers to escape. In other words, the study establishes an analytical bridge between traditional variables, such as the 1962 Land Reform, and modern structural variables, including oil revenues, sanctions, and institutional conflicts of interest, an integrated relationship that has received limited attention in previous studies.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The theory of path dependence gained prominence in the late 1950s and, within less than two decades, became one of the most significant theories in academic circles for explaining development-related issues, particularly in Third World countries. In Iran, it attracted serious attention from the early 1970s, especially after the Islamic Revolution. Despite the passage of decades and the decline in its initial importance, it continues to have proponents who use it to analyze historical developments and their influence on future trajectories (Salimi, 2011, p. 171).

Path dependence was initially introduced by scholars in the fields of political science and economics and gradually became a common explanatory approach in the social sciences. Its core principle is that past decisions and policies influence current patterns of thought, reinforcement, and conditions because path dependence constrains potential courses of action and shapes future developments. Thus, the theory explains how paths become reinforced, increasingly complex, and constrained over time (Kay, 2005, p. 571).

Based on the theory of path dependence, the 1962 Land Reform under the Pahlavi regime can be considered a political project that influenced both economic and political objectives. These reforms sought to expand the government's control and social base in rural areas through externally imposed, Western-modeled land redistribution, while simultaneously preventing a peasant revolution and the spread of communist influence. Therefore, the framework of path dependence is used to examine the political economy of these land reforms and to demonstrate how a historical decision and policy became reinforced over time, thereby limiting future possible trajectories.

three analytical phases operationalized in this study, which are as follows:

The first stage of path dependence theory is the formation of an initial event—that is, a policy or decision made at an earlier point in time that influences subsequent events and developments (Mahoney, 2000, p. 545).

The second principle occurs when the initial conditions of a policy decision become increasingly stabilized and reinforced over time, as alternative options are constrained through a self-reinforcing process

(Sydow., 2012, p. 157). In practice, the initial path is reinforced by interest groups and policymakers, thereby ensuring its continuation.

The third stage arises when the prolonged implementation of a policy over several decades leads to a state of lock-in, a phase in which changing course becomes extremely difficult because of the limited availability of alternatives (Rose, 2011, p. 205).

In essence, path dependence theory serves as an analytical framework for demonstrating how the Pahlavi regime's past policies and decisions shaped the trajectory of land reforms and directed them toward the formation of the current situation.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

During the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the government of Manouchehr Eghbal seriously considered drafting land reform legislation for the first time. The proposal was presented to Parliament in the form of a bill during the tenure of Brigadier General Akhavi and, subsequently, Amouzegar, as Ministers of Agriculture. 1962 marked the beginning of the implementation of the main program within the framework of the White Revolution, although legal reforms had already existed prior to that. Although the bill underwent several revisions in Special Parliamentary Commission 19, particularly concerning landownership limits and the method of implementation, the Minister of Agriculture, in defending the bill before the parliamentary commission, referred to its gradual, region-by-region implementation and the avoidance of simultaneous implementation nationwide. Eventually, the Land Reform Bill was approved by the National Consultative Assembly on March 14, 1959, and by the Senate on May 16, 1959. Later, in January 1960, the Amendment to the Land Reform Law, which had been approved by Parliament in 1958, was finally approved by the government during the premiership of Ali Amini (Shahbazi & Norouzi, 2016, pp. 61–106).

Ali Amini needed financial assistance to implement the reforms desired by the Kennedy administration. Based on his doctrine, Kennedy took two measures to provide the necessary financial resources: (1) He ordered the oil consortium to increase production so that Iran could become the third-largest oil exporter and, using the resulting revenues, provide part of the financial resources required to implement the land reform program (Farsi, 1994, p. 52). (2) The Kennedy administration

reconsidered arms sales to Iran and sought to limit the arms sales program; it also pressured the Amini government to reduce military expenditures (Ali Amini as Documented by SAVAK, 2000, p. 27).

Although the White Revolution program, particularly its most important component—the land reform—was implemented under external pressure and at the explicit request of the Kennedy administration, the Americans did not interfere in the manner of its implementation. Rather, its initiation and implementation were carried out by Iranians, particularly by Arsanjani within the Ministry of Agriculture and by individuals such as Hossein Malek and Amir Parviz in the Department of Economics (Shahbazi & Norouzi, 2016, p. 60).

The implementation of land reforms took place gradually in three stages between 1962(Beginning )and 1972( End)and was not uniform across all regions due to factors such as natural and agricultural conditions, a lack of trained personnel, budgetary constraints, and differences in the circumstances of farmers across regions. There were significant geographical differences between northern and southern Iran. The southern provinces exhibited considerable diversity, while the northwestern regions were characterized by abundant fertility. In contrast, the southern regions had predominantly dry and semi-arid climates. In addition, the cold mountains of the northwest and the elevated areas of the southwest contributed to differences in the implementation process (Lambton, 2015, p. 151).

Furthermore, because nationwide implementation was considered impractical due to the possibility of unrest and adverse consequences for the government, it was decided that the land reform program should initially be implemented on a regional basis (Hooglund, 2002, p. 111). Accordingly, the law was first implemented in Maragheh and subsequently in other regions of Azerbaijan Province. It was then extended to the provinces of Qazvin, Gilan, Arak, East Azerbaijan, Fars, Ardabil, Kermanshah, and Kurdistan (Avery, 1989, p. 78).

### **3.1. Initial Goals of the 1962 Land Reforms**

The land reform program was driven by external pressure and aimed to advance the goals of the capitalist system within the framework of Wallerstein's world-systems theory. This was because the implementation

of land reforms was expected to eliminate two potential dangers: (1) the occurrence of a peasant revolution in Iran and (2) the spread of communism.

Huntington argued that the fear of a peasant revolution in Iran, similar to the revolution that had occurred in Cuba, together with the desire to create the necessary conditions for the development of capitalist structures, contributed to the implementation of land reforms as a means of preventing revolution. According to this perspective, the middle class needed to be strengthened, which required land reform and greater government control over rural areas (Huntington, 1968, p. 292).

The second concern was the danger of communism. Salour argues that, when discussing external pressure, attention should not be limited to the United States; the interests of the Soviet Union and the external conditions arising from the disintegration and obsolescence of the landlord-peasant system, as well as the desire to establish a smallholder system in different countries, should also be considered (Rasoulipour, 1997, p. 249).

To achieve these two objectives, land reforms were implemented in oil-rich countries within the framework of the Kennedy Doctrine (Ambrose, 1991, p. 254). John F. Kennedy of the Democratic Party was elected President of the United States in November 1960. In response to the political, economic, and social crises in Third World countries, he proposed a new strategy entitled "Flexible Response," which envisaged reducing military and financial assistance while emphasizing the need for economic and social reforms in oil-rich Third World countries, including Iran (Azghandi, 2011, p. 280).

The goals of land reform in Iran constitute a complex and multifaceted issue that can be examined from political, economic, social, and historical perspectives.

Some scholars consider the reforms to have resulted from the need for economic development through modernization. From this perspective, the reforms were intended to bring about structural changes in the Iranian economy, particularly in the agricultural and rural sectors. The principal objectives included economic development, industrialization, increased agricultural production and productivity, food security and reduced dependence on agricultural imports, a more equitable distribution of agricultural land, the incorporation of surplus agricultural labor into

urban industries, and, ultimately, the reduction of poverty and economic inequality. This perspective holds that the Pahlavi II regime sought economic transformation and modernization through various reforms, including land reform (Voshmeh , 2017, p. 69). Accordingly, the need for structural transformation of the economy, particularly the transition from traditional to modern agriculture, has been identified as an overarching objective of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's reforms (Momeni, 1980, p. 181).

Others regard the objectives of the reforms as responses to political, external, and international pressures aimed at preventing the spread of communism in Iran. According to this perspective, the principal impetus behind land reform was external pressure, particularly from the Kennedy administration. This position is reflected in the message to Congress: "No amount of weapons and military force can give stability and continuity to regimes that do not want or cannot carry out reforms" (Kazemi, 2005, p. 3).

Others have interpreted the objectives of land reform primarily in political terms, arguing that the reforms were implemented as a means of preventing peasant revolutions similar to those that had occurred in countries such as China and Cuba. From a political perspective, other objectives have also been identified, including consolidating the power of the Pahlavi regime, preventing the influence of communism and left-wing movements in Iran, responding to pressure from Western allies, particularly the United States, promoting modernization and political modernization, and enhancing the international image of the Pahlavi regime. From this perspective, the principal objectives of the reforms promoted by the Kennedy administration were to prevent imminent peasant uprisings in Iran and to undermine the main social base of the left-wing movement (Razmjou & Razmjou, 2023, p. 61).

Some scholars have approached land reform from a social perspective, emphasizing objectives such as reducing social inequality, reducing migration to cities, preventing revolution, and responding to popular pressures. From this perspective, agricultural land in the traditional Iranian system was concentrated in the hands of a limited number of large landowners, while most farmers (peasants) lived in conditions of poverty and dependency. Land reform was therefore implemented with the aim of achieving a more equitable distribution of land and improving the living conditions of rural populations.

Overall, the most important initial goals of land reform were as follows:

**A) Political Goals**

- Preventing peasant revolution and the spread of communism (Kennedy Doctrine)
- Eliminating the influence of large landowners (Huntington, 1991, p. 410)

**B) Economic Goals**

- Transforming the agricultural structure from traditional to industrial in order to promote rural development (Halliday, 1979, p. 113)
- Achieving a more equitable distribution of land between landowners and farmers
- Mechanizing agriculture and increasing agricultural production

**C) Social Goals**

- Expanding the government's social base and control over rural areas through the involvement of villagers (Majd, 1991, p. 74)
- Creating a new middle class (Ashtiani, 2009, p. 38)
- Promoting social justice (Sullivan, 1982, p. 313)

**3.2. Current Outcomes of the 1962 Land Reforms**

The consequences of the land reform program in Iran can be examined from various perspectives. Some scholars, including Marxists, argue that the primary outcome of the reforms was an increase in the power of the central government and the strengthening of capitalist relations in rural areas. Others, including opponents of the reforms such as conservatives and domestic clerics, argue that the reforms resulted in the destruction of and loss of independence in Iranian agriculture. Still others, particularly Western-oriented supporters, maintain that land reforms resulted in a more equitable distribution of land.

Thus, the land reforms not only produced numerous consequences in the economic and political spheres following their implementation but also laid the groundwork for political and economic developments in subsequent decades in Iran.

### **3.2.1. Economic Outcomes**

- Fragmentation of landholdings (Azkia, 1991, p. 212)
- Weakening of the traditional agricultural structure (Hooglund, 2002, p. 101; Foran, 1999, p. 479)
- Expansion of mechanization (Naraghi, 1989, p. 48)
- Widening of the gap between the agricultural sector and other economic sectors (Amid, 2002, pp. 191-195)
- Increased dependence on the oil-based economy (Behnoud, 1991, p. 146)
- Increased imports of food products (Majd, 1991, p. 74)

### **3.2.2. Political Outcomes**

- Laying the groundwork for the emergence of the Islamic Revolution (Rezapour et al., 2003, p. 4)
- Elimination of the political power of large landowners
- Increased government presence in rural areas (Hooglund, 2002, p. 228)

### **3.2.3. Social Outcomes**

- Rural-to-urban migration (Huntington, 1991, p. 410)
- Formation of shantytowns (marginal settlements)
- Increased rural unemployment (Naraghi, 1989, pp. 44-48)

## **4. Analysis of Initial Goals, Outcomes, and Current Status Based on Path Dependency Theory**

The objective of the present study is to analyze the process of land reform within the framework of path dependency theory. Accordingly, the study examines the initial goals of the land reforms as a policy adopted by the Pahlavi government in the 1960s in order to provide a more precise analysis of the impact of the land reform trajectory on the current situation. Within path dependency theory, several stages can be identified for analyzing the development of a policy, including the following:

#### **4.1. First Stage: Formation (1960–1962)**

According to path dependency theory, the first stage of decision-making involves the formation of initial goals, which play a crucial role in determining and sustaining a particular path. Regarding the intellectual origins of land reform, two general perspectives can be identified.

The first perspective emphasizes the necessity of implementing reforms across various sectors in order to transform societies into quasi-European societies in economic terms, while emphasizing national independence and sovereignty.

The second perspective holds that no country is inherently inferior to others and that, therefore, countries should pursue land reform (Hooglund, 2002, p. 75). Accordingly, two factors appear to have been influential in the adoption of land reform as a development policy in twentieth-century countries:

1. The occurrence of World Wars I and II shifted global economic and political power from the European powers to the United States.
2. The fall of Tsarist Russia and the establishment of the Soviet Union under communist ideology generated concerns that led Western countries, particularly the United States, to prevent developing and Third World countries from aligning with communism.

Additionally, the emergence of the global economic system encouraged developing countries to seek models of development and economic growth. The responsibility for formulating such a program was assumed by the renowned sociologist Walt Whitman Rostow, a professor at the University of Massachusetts. In addition to his academic research and publications, Rostow was involved in formulating U.S. foreign and military policies. This position provided him with a broader perspective on the development of his theories.

The most significant aspect of Rostow's development theories, concerning the structural transition from traditional to industrial societies, was presented in his five-stage model of economic growth, first introduced in his book *The Stages of Economic Growth*. The core of Rostow's theory was incorporated into U.S. economic aid programs for developing countries, ostensibly to promote development and growth but, in reality,

also to prevent their alignment with the Soviet Union (Khormashad & Musanejad, 2017, p. 150).

More specifically, land reform in Iran was the result of a combination of domestic and international roots and objectives. On the one hand, the Pahlavi regime sought to consolidate its power and reduce the influence of domestic rivals, such as large landowners and clerics. On the other hand, external pressures, particularly those exerted by the United States, and concerns about the spread of communism played a significant role in the implementation of these reforms.

Overall, the findings of the study indicate that the initial policy choice made in 1962 placed Iran's agricultural trajectory – despite all subsequent efforts and policies after the Revolution – on a path toward lock-in. Following the reinforcement and stabilization of this path over subsequent decades, the possibility of change and transformation became increasingly difficult.

#### **4.2. Stage of Consolidation and Strengthening (1961–1977)**

Based on path dependency theory, the second stage involves the consolidation and strengthening of the policy established during the previous stage. The initial stages of a policy can place specific aspects of a political system on a particular path, which is subsequently reinforced over time (Pierson, 2014, p. 88). The initial goals of the 1962 land reforms were not only consolidated during the 1970s but were also strengthened by several factors, the most important of which are discussed below.

##### **4.2.1. Decline of the Agricultural Economy and the Expansion of the Oil Economy**

Historically, the economic livelihood of the people and governments of Iran, particularly in rural areas, was largely based on land. Although production and trade also existed alongside agriculture, agriculture was more significant in terms of scale (Hashemi, 2001, p. 35).

With the implementation of land reforms and the subsequent expansion of capitalism, together with the increase in oil revenues during the 1950s and at various periods during the Islamic Republic, the decline of the agricultural economy and the increasingly dominant role of oil and oil rents in the Iranian economy became more apparent. Governments no longer regarded agriculture as the principal economic source; instead,

they increasingly relied on an oil-based and industrial economy, giving greater importance to urban areas than to rural areas (Hojjat, 2006, p. 78).

#### **4.2.2. Expansion of Self-Reinforcing Institutions**

Following the land reforms, the government implemented various mechanisms, including the establishment of agricultural corporations and cooperatives, to support farmers and increase agricultural productivity. Although these measures had positive short-term effects, in the long term—particularly during the Islamic Republic era—they contributed to widespread problems associated with quasi-state (public-private) companies.

Initially, cooperatives played a beneficial role by assisting farmers with the purchase of seeds and fertilizers, the repair of qanats (underground irrigation systems), the marketing of agricultural products, and the management of food processing. However, in subsequent decades, the absence of a comprehensive support system capable of replacing the former landlords created significant challenges, particularly with regard to government control over agriculture.

These ostensibly private companies were involved in the distribution of products, the provision of agricultural credit, and retail activities. Over time, however, they exerted pressure to purchase crops at lower prices while also acquiring the capacity to hoard products and create artificial shortages, thereby securing substantial profits. Gradually, they assumed the role of quasi-state (public-private) companies (Agricultural Research, Education and Extension Organization, 1998, p. 37).

Chart 1 examines the distribution of landownership before and after the reforms. Before the reforms, the largest share of land—approximately 70%—was held by large and medium-sized landowners, while smallholders owned only 20%. During the 1960s and 1970s, the immediate short-term outcomes of the reforms presented a different picture: smallholders held the largest share, at approximately 50%, while the government controlled only 20%, primarily through cooperatives.

By the 2020s, the situation had changed again. The largest share of land, approximately 50%, was once again held by large and medium-sized landowners, with the key difference being that these were now state-

affiliated entities or quasi-state companies. Meanwhile, small-scale landownership had declined slightly compared with the reform period.

In essence, the land reforms resulted in a major transformation in the management structure rather than in the distribution of ownership. While large landowners were replaced by quasi-state companies, land fragmentation increased, shifting the agricultural structure from consolidated estates toward small-scale holdings (Chart 1).

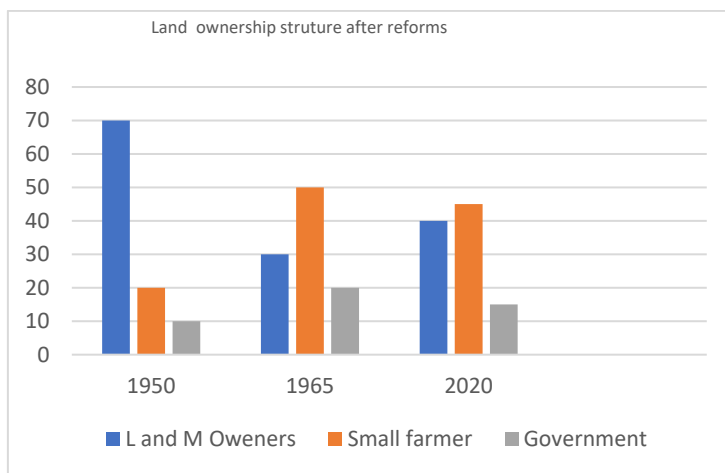


Chart 1. Changes in the Structure of Land Ownership Before, During, and After the 1962 Land Reforms (Agrarian and Peasant Issues, 1982).

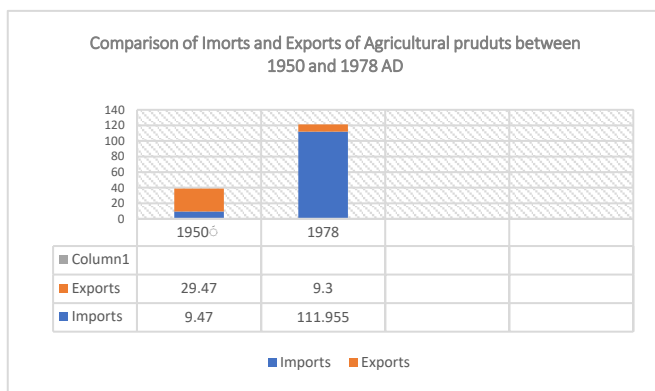
#### 4.2.3. Rural-to-Urban Migration and the Formation of Slums in Iran's Major Cities

After acquiring land, many farmers—owing to their inability to manage the land effectively and the attraction of urban employment opportunities—chose to migrate to cities. This migration not only placed additional pressure on urban resources but also played a fundamental role in transforming traditional family structures and generating social challenges in subsequent decades (Rastandeh, 2009, p. 15).

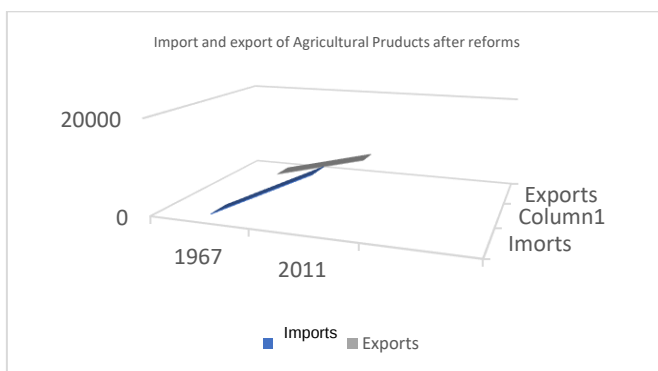
Furthermore, the outmigration of labor from rural areas contributed to a decline in agricultural productivity. By 1976, Iran had become one of the largest importers of agricultural products (Chart 2). Although factors such as rising oil prices and increasing national income contributed to this

development, flawed economic policies during the Pahlavi era – particularly the White Revolution and land reforms, which sought to accelerate Iran's industrialization – also played a significant role (Sadrolashrafi & Sud, 1979, p. 23).

These agricultural policies continued even during the early years following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, as the government continued to prioritize non-agricultural industries, particularly the oil sector, thereby maintaining high levels of food imports (Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Chart 3). However, from the 1990s onward, under the slogan "Agriculture as the Foundation of Development," greater attention was devoted to restoring the role of agriculture in national development (Agricultural Research, Education, and Extension Organization, 1998, p. 83).



*Chart 2. Trends in Agricultural Imports in Iran Following the 1962 Land Reforms (The Structural and Functional Trends of Political and Economic Development from Land Reform to the Islamic Revolution, 2010).*



*Chart 3. Trends in Agricultural Imports in Iran, 1979–Present*

#### **4.2.4. The Rise of Worker-Peasant Movements and the Formation of the Revolution**

One of the most influential groups in the 1979 Islamic Revolution was the working class, which, following the 1962 land reforms and subsequent rural-to-urban migration, assumed an increasingly revolutionary character.

Following the land reforms, the decline of agriculture and the resulting rural unemployment, coupled with the expansion of industries and factories, led dissatisfied peasants to migrate to cities in search of employment. Over time, this process contributed to the formation of a large coalition of dissatisfied migrant workers and peasants (Tanhaei., 2013, p. 201).

Regarding the role of peasants who were dissatisfied with the land reforms, Samuel Huntington wrote:

"The main source of urban revolts must seemingly be sought in the slums and shantytowns that emerged after land reforms as a result of the influx of poor and unemployed villagers into cities." (Huntington, 1991, p. 405)

#### **4.3. Path Dependency and Institutional Lock-In: The Lock-In Phase (1979–Present)**

The stabilization phase of path dependency theory indicates that, following the land reforms—particularly during the 1970s—Iran increasingly prioritized a non-agricultural, oil-based economy. This process included the establishment of agricultural cooperatives and state-affiliated corporations as self-reinforcing institutions intended to expand the government's social base in rural areas.

Over time, a network of vested interest groups emerged and was further consolidated by post-revolutionary conditions, the Iran-Iraq War, and the state's centralized economic policies. These factors facilitated the emergence of quasi-state (public-private) entities, thereby reinforcing the initial policy path. The long-term consequences of this path dependency have been substantial.

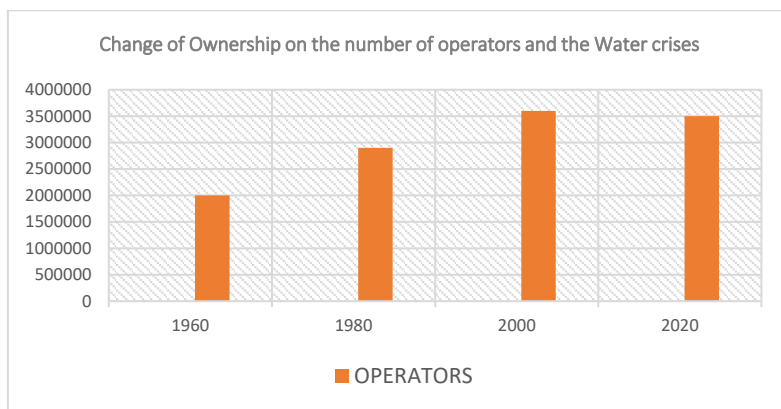
Within path dependency theory, the lock-in phase occurs when an initial policy becomes deeply entrenched over time, making a change in

direction extremely difficult because of resistance from vested interest groups (Alavian & Ebrahimi, 2024, p. 499). Many of the current challenges facing Iran's agricultural sector can be traced to the initial land reform policies, which have become institutionalized and have consequently made systemic change extremely difficult.

#### **4.3.1. The Water Crisis**

The Pahlavi-era land reforms, together with population growth and drought, have significantly contributed to Iran's current water crisis (Ghaffari & Rezazadeh, 2023, p. 176).

Following the reforms, new landowners—often lacking expertise in water management—fragmented agricultural plots, dug illegal wells, and overexploited groundwater because of inadequate oversight (Javan & Fal Soleiman, 2008, p. 122) and the absence of modern irrigation technologies. These unsustainable practices resulted in severe groundwater depletion (Chart 4).



*Chart 4. Groundwater Depletion Resulting from Unsustainable Agricultural Practices (Javan & Fal Soleiman, 2008, p. 122)*

#### **4.3.2. Environmental Crisis**

Following the land reforms, many farmers—facing fragmented plots or seeking additional land—encroached upon forests and pastures. In some cases, these lands were legally allocated to farmers or certain landowners. Over time, this process resulted in the degradation of vegetation and pastures. Destruction continued in subsequent decades, particularly

during the Islamic Republic era, exacerbating desertification and disrupting traditional livelihood systems (Gharavi et al., 2023, p. 302).

In addition, the decades following the reforms witnessed population growth and the expansion of an industry-driven economy, which accelerated the conversion of agricultural land for urban and industrial development. Although this process helped meet housing demands and generated high land prices, thereby benefiting speculators, it caused long-term damage to agriculture and the environment (Yazdani & Hashemi Bonab, 2014, p. 46).

In essence, the 1962 land reforms, together with their subsequent iterations, reflected a lack of serious commitment to agriculture as a cornerstone of rural development. The consequences—including rural migration, urban population growth, land-use changes, and environmental degradation—are now clearly evident (Mehrabi et al., 2013, pp. 20–307).

#### **4.3.3. Shift in Cropping Patterns**

Following the reforms, land fragmentation dismantled consolidated farms and encouraged farmers to cultivate water-intensive cash crops in pursuit of higher profits. This process shifted cropping patterns toward subsistence farming rather than commercial production. This type of agriculture, characterized by simple technologies, small plot sizes, and low yields, focuses on self-sufficiency but has become economically unsustainable (Lobeau, 1975, p. 356). Although subsistence farming may meet short-term needs, its long-term inefficiencies pose a threat to food security.

The excessive cultivation of water-intensive crops, facilitated by the availability of qanats (traditional irrigation systems), subsequently contributed to water crises. Although post-revolutionary development plans sought to privatize self-reinforcing institutions, the "lock-in" effect of path dependency hindered meaningful change. Instead, state-affiliated entities, including foundations and bank-owned investment firms, absorbed these assets, thereby perpetuating quasi-state control (Heidari, 2005, p. 104).

## **5. Conclusions**

To comprehend the current state of Iran's agricultural sector, one may distinguish between its "stated objectives" and the "consequences of its political function" regarding the 1962 Land Reforms. While the primary goals—such as land redistribution and curbing the power of large landowners—were framed as instruments of modernization, evidence suggests that this process, either implicitly or explicitly, contributed to consolidating state centralization and mitigating the influence of rival political factions in rural areas. This may be identified as the starting point of a certain "path dependency," wherein agricultural policies were shaped not solely by economic efficiency, but by considerations of political and social stability at the time.

This experience indicates that the Land Reforms represented more than a mere change in land ownership; they marked the inception of a process in which conflicting stakeholder interests and the influx of oil revenues steered semi-coherent structures toward systems that proved increasingly resistant to fundamental change. Consequently, the current state of Iranian agriculture may be viewed as the outcome of a "historical trajectory" in which structural reforms have become costly due to the emergence of new stakeholders and deep-seated ties to rent-seeking mechanisms.

Within this framework, any attempt to reform agriculture solely through "executive policies" (such as altering cropping patterns or adjusting subsidies), without accounting for this historical context and path dependency, may likely remain limited to "palliative measures" rather than fostering structural transformation. Breaking this cycle arguably requires a reconsideration of macro-structures—an undertaking that could include:

- Redefining the state-agriculture relationship in a manner that strengthens the economic autonomy of producers.
- Adjusting the distribution mechanisms of macroeconomic revenues, thereby shifting economic incentives from "maintaining the status quo" toward productivity and competitiveness.
- In sum, transitioning from a rent-dependent agricultural sector toward a competitive system necessitates a deeper inquiry into the

formation of these institutions, enabling the conceptualization of strategies that transcend short-term policymaking.

**Finding 1 (Distortion of Purpose):** Land reform was initially implemented under the guise of “development,” but in practice, it became a tool of “political engineering.” This divergence between its stated and underlying purposes sowed the seeds of structural inefficiency in the 1960s.

**Finding 2 (Reinforcing the Path through Oil Rents):** The findings indicate that the increase in oil revenues in subsequent decades, rather than providing an opportunity to reform agricultural infrastructure, helped conceal the structural deficiencies created by the land reforms and reduced incentives to reconsider ineffective policies.

**Finding 3 (Institutional Lock-In Mechanism):** The most important finding is that conflicts of interest among stakeholder groups, which developed under conditions shaped by oil revenues and war, contributed to the creation of self-reinforcing institutions. In other words, the system has not only resisted reform but has also developed institutional mechanisms that constrain attempts to alter its established trajectory.

## **6. Recommendations**

Based on the findings of dependency theory, it was shown that land reform from 1962 onward progressed in a direction that gradually became reinforced and entrenched. The post-revolution conditions, the imposed war, misguided policies along this path, increasing dependence on oil revenues, corruption, and the self-reinforcing interests of stakeholders made changes in this path difficult—even in the face of institutional shocks such as the 1979 revolution and deep structural transformations like multiple development plans. Therefore, the present study recommends the following:

- Examining past experiences and laws can improve current conditions, provided that any macro-level agricultural policymaking, relying on cropping patterns and the use of new technologies, is updated and strives to enhance social and environmental conditions—such as water resource management,

environmental impacts, and rural development—alongside primary economic objectives.

- Given the experience of land fragmentation during land reform and its irreversible consequences in the agricultural sector, governments must not only take serious measures against the division, fragmentation, and conversion of agricultural lands but also implement policies to consolidate land holdings.
- To counter self-reinforcing institutions (quasi-governmental entities), local institutions and councils involving farmers, experts, and villagers should be strengthened to reduce the power of self-reinforcing institutions that emerged after land reform.
- Institutional and long-term reforms for transforming the path should be gradual and modeled after the successful experiences of countries like Turkey or Brazil to facilitate a path shift.

#### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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## Original Research Paper

# Postsocial genealogies: Persian medical cultures as early epistemic formations

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## Abstract

Karin Knorr Cetina developed the concept of "postsocial relations" to explain the increasing importance of epistemic objects in the organization of knowledge, expertise, and social interaction within late modern scientific and technological contexts. While this theoretical approach has primarily been applied to contemporary developments, its historical scope remains largely unexplored. The present article investigates whether medieval Persian medicine can be understood as a historically specific form of object-centered epistemic relations that is analytically comparable to the relational dynamics described by postsocial theory. The focus is on Persian medicine between the ninth and fifteenth centuries, examining manuscripts, hospitals, pharmaceutical substances, medical instruments, and pedagogical practices as material components of an epistemic culture. Methodologically, the study is based on a historical-conceptual analysis within the framework of Science and Technology Studies (STS), drawing on research concerning Islamic medicine and material knowledge cultures. The findings indicate that these material entities functioned as dynamic and open-ended centers of epistemic engagement, structuring learning, clinical practice, and scholarly communities in ways that exhibit important structural similarities to the characteristics Knorr Cetina associates with epistemic objects. Rather than arguing that medieval Persian medicine constituted a postsocial society in the strict historical sense, the article proposes that it developed historically specific configurations of object-centered epistemic relations. By doing so, the study extends the temporal and geographical horizon of postsocial theory, contributes to the globalization of STS, and demonstrates how non-Western knowledge cultures can serve as sources of theoretical refinement.

**Keywords:** Postsocial relations, epistemic objects, Persian medicine, epistemic cultures, science and technology studies, history of science

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## مقاله پژوهشی

# تبارشناسی‌های پسااجتماعی: فرهنگ‌های پزشکی ایرانی به مثابه صورت‌بندی‌های معرفتی اولیه

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دریافت: ۱۴۰۴/۷/۲۱؛ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۴/۱۰/۱

## چکیده:

کاربن کنور ستینا مفهوم «روابط پسااجتماعی» را برای تبیین نقش روزافزون اشیای معرفتی در سازمان‌دهی دانش، تخصص و تعاملات اجتماعی در محیط‌های علمی و فناورانه متأخر مطرح کرد. با وجود تأثیر گسترده این چارچوب نظری، کاربرد آن عمدتاً به زمینه‌های معاصر محدود مانده و ظرفیت تاریخی آن کمتر مورد بررسی قرار گرفته است. مقاله حاضر بررسی می‌کند که آیا پزشکی ایرانی در دوره اسلامی میانه را می‌توان نمونه‌ای تاریخی از روابط معرفتی شیء‌محور دانست که از نظر تحلیلی با پویایی‌های رابطه‌ای توصیف‌شده در نظریه روابط پسااجتماعی قابل مقایسه باشد یا خیر. این پژوهش با تمرکز بر پزشکی ایرانی از سده‌های سوم تا نهم هجری قمری (نهم تا پانزدهم میلادی)، از رویکردی تاریخی - مفهومی در چارچوب مطالعات علم و فناوری (STS) بهره می‌گیرد. تحلیل بر پایه پژوهش‌های معتبر تاریخی انجام شده و نسخه‌های خطی، بیمارستان‌ها، مواد دارویی، ابزارهای پزشکی و شیوه‌های آموزش پزشکی را به‌عنوان مؤلفه‌های مادی یک فرهنگ معرفتی بررسی می‌کند. این شواهد تاریخی بر اساس نقش مستند آن‌ها در سازمان‌دهی دانش پزشکی، شکل‌گیری اقتدار حرفه‌ای و سامان‌دهی کنش‌های نهادی انتخاب و با استفاده از مفاهیم «اشیای معرفتی» و «روابط شیء‌محور» تحلیل شده‌اند. یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد که این عناصر مادی به‌عنوان کانون‌های پویا و گشوده تعامل معرفتی عمل می‌کردند و یادگیری، عمل بالینی و اجتماعات علمی را به شیوه‌هایی سازمان می‌دادند که از نظر ساختاری با ویژگی‌هایی که کنور ستینا برای اشیای معرفتی برمی‌شمارد، شباهت دارند. با این حال، مقاله مدعی نیست که پزشکی ایرانی در دوره اسلامی میانه به معنای دقیق تاریخی، جامعه‌ای پسااجتماعی بوده است؛ بلکه استدلال می‌کند که این سنت پزشکی، صورت‌بندی‌های تاریخی خاصی از روابط معرفتی شیء‌محور را پدید آورده است که افق زمانی و جغرافیایی نظریه روابط پسااجتماعی را گسترش می‌دهد. این پژوهش با ایجاد گفت‌وگو میان پزشکی ایرانی و مطالعات علم و فناوری، هم به جهانی‌تر شدن مباحث STS و هم به تاریخ‌نگاری پزشکی یاری می‌رساند و نشان می‌دهد که فرهنگ‌های معرفتی غیرغربی نه‌تنها می‌توانند نمونه‌های تاریخی برای آزمون نظریه‌های جامعه‌شناختی باشند، بلکه ظرفیت پالایش و توسعه مفهومی این نظریه‌ها را نیز دارند.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** روابط پسااجتماعی، اشیای معرفتی، پزشکی ایرانی، اسلام میانه، مطالعات علم و فناوری، تاریخ پزشکی

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## Original-Forschungsarbeit

# Postsociale genealogien: Persische medizinische Kulturen als frühe epistemische Formationen

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### Zusammenfassung:

Karin Knorr Cetina entwickelte das Konzept der „postsozialen Beziehungen“, um die zunehmende Bedeutung epistemischer Objekte für die Organisation von Wissen, Expertise und sozialer Interaktion in spätmodernen wissenschaftlichen und technologischen Kontexten zu erklären. Während dieser theoretische Ansatz bislang vor allem auf gegenwärtige Entwicklungen angewandt wurde, bleibt seine historische Reichweite weitgehend unerforscht. Der vorliegende Beitrag untersucht, ob die persische Medizin des mittelalterlichen Islam als historisch spezifische Form objektzentrierter epistemischer Beziehungen verstanden werden kann, die analytisch mit den von der Postsocial-Theorie beschriebenen relationalen Dynamiken vergleichbar ist. Im Fokus stehen die persische Medizin zwischen dem 9. und 15. Jahrhundert sowie Handschriften, Krankenhäuser, pharmazeutische Substanzen, medizinische Instrumente und pädagogische Praktiken als materielle Bestandteile einer epistemischen Kultur. Methodisch basiert die Studie auf einer historisch-konzeptionellen Analyse im Rahmen der Science and Technology Studies (STS) und nutzt Forschungsergebnisse zur islamischen Medizin und materiellen Wissenskultur. Die Untersuchung zeigt, dass diese materiellen Entitäten als dynamische und offene Zentren epistemischer Auseinandersetzung fungierten und Lernprozesse, klinische Praxis sowie wissenschaftliche Gemeinschaften strukturierten. Dabei weisen sie wesentliche strukturelle Gemeinsamkeiten mit den von Knorr Cetina beschriebenen Eigenschaften epistemischer Objekte auf. Der Beitrag argumentiert jedoch nicht, dass die mittelalterliche persische Medizin eine postsoziale Gesellschaft im strengen historischen Sinne darstellte, sondern dass sie eigenständige Formen objektzentrierter epistemischer Relationen hervorbrachte. Dadurch erweitert die Studie den zeitlichen und geografischen Horizont der Postsocial-Theorie und leistet einen Beitrag zur Globalisierung der STS sowie zur Neubewertung außereuropäischer Wissenskulturen als Quellen theoretischer Weiterentwicklung.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Postsociale Genealogien, epistemische Objekte, iranische Medizin, mittelalterlicher Islam, Science and Technology Studies (STS), Geschichte der Medizin

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## **1. Introduction**

Karin Knorr Cetina's idea of postsocial relations attempts to clarify the transformation that takes place in knowledge organization, as well as the design of sociality, in contemporary culture. According to her, objects, particularly epistemic objects, occupy relations that were once considered the province of human beings. They assume the position of active, dynamic participants in interaction, engaging attention, affecting and guiding conduct, and defining the terms within which meaning and cooperation emerge. According to Knorr Cetina, this is the nature of knowledge in the late modern world, in places such as molecular biological laboratories or trading floors in the global marketplace, where objects embody "incomplete" entities with indeterminate ontologies that always call for interaction, employing complex webs of social persons (Knorr Cetina, 1997, 2001). Postsocial relations overturn traditional sociological views, including those of Goffman (1967), Mead (1934), and Schutz (1967), which regard sociality as essentially interpersonal. They instead give prominence to objects as active participants in the construction of sociality (Knorr Cetina, 1997; Humphries & Smith, 2014).

Although this framework remains enormously influential, it raises a pressing question regarding the temporal immanence and spatial extent of postsociality. Do postsocial relations, as Knorr Cetina asserts, remain largely a product of the last decades of modernity? Or might corresponding relational assemblages be identified in other historical and cultural milieus, particularly outside the Euro-American sociocultural habitats that gave rise to STS as a theoretical project? Indeed, the most widely shared assumption within the literature is that postsociality emerges together with "advanced technologies, laboratory sciences, or informational capitalism." However, a growing body of literature within global history and the history of science shows that so-called "premodern epistemic cultures" were predicated, in tandem, upon dynamic, open-ended "objects" that correspond structurally with modern theoretical models (Daston, 2004; Hamling & Richardson, 2010; Mukherjee & Dasgupta, 2023; Salmani Bidgoli, 2026). The present study does not argue that medieval Persian medicine was postsocial in the historical sense proposed by Knorr Cetina. Rather, it suggests that certain relational configurations within medieval Persian medicine exhibit structural and,

in selected domains, functional characteristics analogous to those identified in postsocial knowledge societies. Accordingly, the concept of postsocial relations is employed as a heuristic analytical framework rather than as a historically literal category. This distinction is intended to avoid conceptual anachronism while allowing the analytical vocabulary of Science and Technology Studies to illuminate earlier forms of object-centered knowledge practices.

This article argues that Persian medicine during the medieval Islamic period developed an object-centered epistemic culture whose relational configuration is structurally comparable to what Knorr Cetina later conceptualized as postsocial relations. Rather than claiming historical equivalence, the article proposes that medieval Persian medicine represents a configuration that broadens the historical genealogy of object-centered epistemic relations. Although it is not the same as modern postsociality, Persian medical culture shared important structural features with it (Gutas, 2012; Pormann & Savage-Smith, 2007; Ullmann, 2019). These included reliance on incomplete and changing knowledge objects; relational approaches mediated through texts and tools; institutional settings that treated objects as central players; and regional manuscript networks that linked scholars through shared materials. By examining these historical dynamics through the lens of postsocial theory, the article aims to expand the understanding of object-mediated social connections, challenge the idea that the modern West is the only place where this developed, and show the deeper historical roots of object-oriented knowledge practices (Conrad, 1995; Rosenthal, 2007).

The argument unfolds in six steps. First, I present Knorr Cetina's theoretical framework and explain its importance for historical analysis. Second, I examine key aspects of Persian medicine during medieval Islam, focusing on written practices, hospitals, tools, and the movement of manuscripts. Third, I demonstrate how these objects created early forms of social relations by influencing authority, identity, and social life. Fourth, I outline the limitations of using the postsocial framework in premodern settings. I explain how medieval object relations differ from modern technological interactions. Finally, I consider the implications for Science and Technology Studies, advocating for a broader and more historically informed view of object-centered sociality.

This article engages with three important debates in contemporary scholarship. First, it contributes to ongoing efforts within Science and Technology Studies (STS) to globalize theoretical frameworks beyond their original Euro-American contexts (Anderson, 2019; Harding, 2011; Seth, 2009). In doing so, it situates Knorr Cetina's concept of postsocial relations in dialogue with broader STS discussions concerning material agency, epistemic objects, historical ontology, and medical practice, while maintaining postsociality as its primary analytical framework. Second, it builds upon historical scholarship emphasizing the material dimensions of medieval Persian scientific and medical traditions. Third, it contributes to sociological debates on object-centered sociality by arguing that the relational logic underlying epistemic objects possesses a deeper historical genealogy than has generally been recognized. Medieval Persian medicine thus provides a historically rich setting for reconsidering the temporal and geographical boundaries of postsocial relations.

## **2. Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative conceptual-historical approach situated at the intersection of Science and Technology Studies (STS) and the history of medicine. Rather than reconstructing the institutional history of medieval Persian medicine or conducting archival research on specific medical texts, the article seeks to extend the theoretical scope of Knorr Cetina's concept of postsocial relations by examining its analytical applicability to a premodern epistemic culture. Accordingly, the study is conceived as a theory-oriented historical interpretation in which historical materials are employed not merely as descriptive evidence but as conceptual resources for reassessing the temporal and geographical boundaries of postsociality.

The analysis is based on a critical synthesis of the established historiography of medieval Persian medicine together with foundational STS scholarship on epistemic objects and epistemic cultures. Historical literature concerning medical manuscripts, *bīmāristāns*, diagnostic and surgical instruments, pharmaceutical substances, and pedagogical practices was selected because these domains constitute the principal material infrastructures through which medical knowledge was produced, transmitted, institutionalized, and practiced in the medieval

Persian world. Rather than attempting an exhaustive reconstruction of medieval medicine, these domains were purposefully chosen as analytically representative sites in which relationships between humans and knowledge-bearing objects become most visible.

The analytical strategy proceeds in four stages. First, the defining characteristics of epistemic objects are identified through a close reading of Knorr Cetina's theoretical work, particularly her discussions of epistemic cultures, object-centered sociality, and postsocial relations. Second, these conceptual characteristics are translated into historically observable analytical criteria suitable for examining premodern medical practices. Third, the selected historical domains are comparatively interpreted to determine whether they exhibit relational configurations analogous to those associated with modern epistemic objects. Finally, the historical findings are brought into dialogue with contemporary STS theory to evaluate both the continuities and discontinuities between medieval Persian medicine and modern knowledge societies.

Within this analytical framework, an object is treated as an epistemic object not because of its technological sophistication or chronological location but because of the relational role it performs within knowledge production. Accordingly, historical objects are identified as epistemic objects when they display one or more of the following characteristics: epistemic openness, continual reinterpretation through commentary or practice, ontological incompleteness that generates further inquiry, mediation of professional authority and expertise, and the capacity to organize collective forms of knowledge production. These criteria are derived deductively from Knorr Cetina's theoretical formulation and are subsequently employed as interpretive tools rather than empirical variables.

The objective of this methodological approach is therefore neither to demonstrate that medieval Persian medicine was identical to contemporary scientific practice nor to claim a direct historical continuity between the two. Instead, it seeks to investigate whether the relational logic that underlies postsociality can be historically identified beyond the temporal limits assumed by contemporary STS literature. In doing so, the study proposes a historically grounded theoretical extension of the concept of postsocial relations while remaining attentive to the cultural and institutional particularities of the medieval Persian medical tradition.

Table 1. Operationalizing Knorr Cetina's Concept of Epistemic Objects: Analytical Criteria and Historical Indicators

| Characteristic of Epistemic Objects (Knorr Cetina) | Historical Indicator in Medieval Persian Medicine  | Empirical Domain        |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Ontological incompleteness                         | Continuous commentary, annotations, revisions      | Medical manuscripts     |
| Epistemic openness                                 | Ongoing interpretation and transmission            | Canonical medical texts |
| Mediation of expertise                             | Clinical diagnosis and therapeutic practice        | Medical instruments     |
| Organization of collective practice                | Teaching, patient care, and institutional routines | Bimāristāns             |
| Generation of further inquiry                      | Experimentation with compounds and remedies        | Materia medica          |

### 3. Theoretical Scope and Conceptual Translation

Knorr Cetina developed the concept of postsocial relations to explain transformations in late modern knowledge societies, particularly within environments such as molecular biology laboratories and global financial markets. In these settings, epistemic objects are not passive tools but dynamic entities that continuously organize attention, structure professional practice, and mediate social relations. Their defining characteristics include ontological openness, epistemic incompleteness, and the capacity to generate ongoing inquiry. The concept was therefore formulated to account for forms of sociality emerging within technologically advanced systems of knowledge production rather than as a general historical theory applicable to all periods and cultures.

The present study acknowledges these theoretical boundaries and does not seek to extend the concept through historical equivalence. It does not argue that medieval Persian medicine constituted a postsocial society in the historical sense intended by Knorr Cetina, nor does it suggest that medieval medical institutions functioned as precursors of modern laboratories. Such claims would risk conceptual anachronism by projecting categories developed for late modern scientific environments

onto fundamentally different historical contexts. Instead, the article employs postsocial relations as a heuristic analytical framework that enables the examination of how object-centered forms of knowledge organization operated within a distinct premodern epistemic culture.

The central argument is therefore based on structural comparison rather than historical identification. Structural comparison does not assume that two historical settings are identical; rather, it investigates whether they are organized through comparable relational logics despite profound differences in chronology, technology, and institutional context. The analysis asks whether certain material entities in medieval Persian medicine—medical manuscripts, hospitals, surgical instruments, pharmaceutical substances, and scholarly textual traditions—performed relational functions analogous to those attributed to epistemic objects in Knorr Cetina's account. Specifically, the study examines whether these objects mediated professional authority, organized collective medical practice, generated continuous interpretation and revision, and sustained durable relationships between physicians and material artifacts.

In several domains, these similarities are also functional. Canonical medical texts were continually expanded through commentary and annotation, hospitals organized clinical practice through material infrastructures, instruments structured diagnostic and therapeutic procedures, and pharmaceutical substances remained open to refinement through observation and experimentation. Although these practices unfolded within religious, educational, and institutional settings fundamentally different from those of contemporary science, they nevertheless reveal comparable mechanisms through which objects actively participated in the production, circulation, and stabilization of medical knowledge. The comparison therefore concerns the epistemic functions performed by objects rather than the historical conditions under which those functions emerged.

Accordingly, the argument advanced in this article is neither metaphorical nor essentialist. It does not use postsociality merely as a rhetorical analogy, nor does it claim that medieval Persian medicine and late modern scientific cultures are historically equivalent. Rather, the study proposes that the relational logic later conceptualized by Knorr Cetina has a broader historical genealogy than has generally been

recognized within Science and Technology Studies. Medieval Persian medicine is therefore interpreted as exhibiting relational configurations that are historically specific forms of object-centered epistemic relations, which anticipate certain structural dimensions of postsociality without collapsing the distinctions between premodern and modern knowledge cultures.

This theoretical translation serves two purposes. First, it enables the concept of postsocial relations to be evaluated beyond the Euro-American settings in which it was originally formulated, thereby contributing to ongoing efforts to globalize STS theory. Second, it demonstrates that the history of medicine can function not merely as an empirical illustration of existing sociological concepts but also as a source of theoretical refinement. By placing medieval Persian medicine in dialogue with contemporary STS, the article seeks to expand the historical imagination of postsocial theory while preserving the historical specificity of both analytical contexts.

Table 2. Levels of Conceptual Comparison

| Dimension                 | Modern Postsocial Relations | Medieval Persian Medicine      | Nature of Similarity |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Historical context        | Late modernity              | Medieval Islam                 | Different            |
| Institutional setting     | Laboratory, finance         | Bimāristān, manuscript culture | Different            |
| Object-centered relations | Yes                         | Yes                            | Structural           |
| Knowledge production      | Yes                         | Yes                            | Functional           |
| Epistemic incompleteness  | Yes                         | Yes                            | Structural           |
| Technological environment | Modern                      | Premodern                      | Different            |

### **3.1. Postsocial Relations in Dialogue with Related STS Traditions**

Although postsocial relations constitute the principal theoretical framework of this article, the concept has emerged within a broader intellectual landscape concerned with materiality, knowledge production, and the agency of objects. Positioning the present study within this wider tradition is important not only for clarifying its theoretical contribution but also for distinguishing its analytical orientation from adjacent approaches in Science and Technology Studies (STS) and the history of science.

The most immediate point of comparison is Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT). Latour challenged conventional sociology by arguing that social action is generated through heterogeneous networks composed of both human and non-human actors rather than exclusively through interpersonal relations (Latour, 1996, 2005, 2011). Medical texts, instruments, hospitals, and pharmaceutical substances therefore participate in networks of action alongside physicians, patients, and institutions. The present study shares ANT's commitment to recognizing the material agency of objects. However, it departs from ANT in an important respect. Rather than treating all entities as symmetrical actors within networks, the analysis focuses specifically on epistemic objects – objects whose significance derives from their capacity to organize knowledge production, sustain inquiry, and structure professional practice. In this respect, Knorr Cetina provides a more precise analytical vocabulary for understanding the knowledge-generating role of material artifacts in medieval Persian medicine.

Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's concept of epistemic things provides an even closer theoretical affinity. Rheinberger argues that scientific research is organized around material entities that remain inherently incomplete and whose indeterminacy drives further experimentation and discovery (Rheinberger, 1997, 2020). This conception closely parallels Knorr Cetina's emphasis on epistemic incompleteness. The present study builds upon this shared insight by arguing that canonical medical manuscripts, pharmaceutical substances, and diagnostic instruments in medieval Persian medicine similarly functioned as evolving objects of inquiry rather than fixed repositories of knowledge. Their importance lay not simply in preserving information but in continually generating new interpretations, commentaries, and practical innovations.

Michel Foucault's archaeology of knowledge offers a complementary perspective by demonstrating that systems of knowledge emerge through historically specific discursive formations rather than through the accumulation of objective facts (Foucault, 2013). Whereas Foucault primarily investigates the historical conditions under which statements become possible, the present article shifts attention toward the material objects through which those statements were produced, circulated, and stabilized. Rather than replacing Foucauldian analysis, the concept of postsocial relations extends it by highlighting the constitutive role of material artifacts within epistemic practices.

Ian Hacking's notion of historical ontology further supports the methodological orientation adopted here. Hacking argues that the categories through which reality is understood are themselves historically contingent and should not be projected uncritically across different periods (Hacking, 2002). This insight directly informs the present analysis. The article does not claim that medieval Persian medicine was "postsocial" in the historical sense intended by Knorr Cetina. Instead, it employs postsociality as a heuristic analytical framework for identifying structurally comparable forms of object-centered epistemic relations while preserving the historical specificity of the medieval Persian context.

Finally, Annemarie Mol's concept of the body multiple demonstrates that scientific and medical objects acquire different identities through distinct practices rather than existing as singular, fixed entities (Mol, 2002). Her practice-oriented ontology reinforces the present study's emphasis on the dynamic character of medical objects. Medieval manuscripts, hospitals, and therapeutic substances were not static artifacts but continually enacted through teaching, copying, diagnosis, treatment, and commentary. Their epistemic significance therefore emerged through practice rather than through intrinsic properties alone.

Taken together, these theoretical traditions provide an important intellectual context for the present study while also clarifying its distinctive contribution. Unlike Actor-Network Theory, the article does not seek a general sociology of heterogeneous networks. Unlike Rheinberger, it extends the analysis beyond experimental systems into premodern medical cultures. Unlike Foucault, it foregrounds the epistemic functions of material objects rather than discursive formations

alone. Unlike Hacking, it uses historical ontology not as an endpoint but as a caution against conceptual anachronism. Unlike Mol, it focuses less on ontological multiplicity than on object-centered relations of knowledge. Through this dialogue, the article positions Knorr Cetina's theory as the primary analytical framework while demonstrating that its historical extension is strengthened—not weakened—by engagement with the broader STS tradition.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Applying Postsocial Relations to Medieval Persian Medicine**

Knorr Cetina's idea of postsocial relations stems from a broader sociological concern about the shifting foundations of social life in late modernity. Traditional sociology viewed society as a network of interactions among people. Social bonds were seen as personal, communicative, and regulated by norms. In contrast, Knorr Cetina argues that modern life increasingly revolves around relationships between people and objects that act as active partners. These objects are not just static materials; they are entities with evolving, uncertain qualities that require ongoing involvement. They encourage exploration, create emotional investments, and shape social practices (Knorr Cetina, 1999, 2007; Salmani Bidgoli & Namazi, 2026). Situated within the broader tradition of Science and Technology Studies (STS), Knorr Cetina's theory extends earlier concerns with materiality by emphasizing the epistemic capacities of objects rather than treating them merely as passive instruments.

Central to this idea is the concept of the epistemic object. Unlike everyday objects, epistemic objects are incomplete and possess an internal complexity that cannot be fully comprehended at any given moment. Their key quality is that they always offer more to discover. This openness makes epistemic objects the center of inquiry, the guiding principle of communities, and the foundation of professional identities. In laboratory settings, for example, the molecule or cellular process being studied becomes the partner with which scientists engage. The object's resistance, unpredictability, and changing characteristics shape the work and commitments of the scientific community (Nerland & Jensen, 2016; Rescher, 2012).

Postsocial relations involve shifting social agency from humans to objects. Objects may lack intentionality, but they still exert force, structure interactions, and influence ways of living. These relationships are asymmetrical; objects do not respond in human ways, but they are still relational, emotionally charged, and contribute to social meaning (Knorr Cetina, 1997; Humphries & Smith, 2014). In financial markets, the electronic trading screen acts as an epistemic object that traders observe, engage with, and center themselves around. Its constant movement captures attention and triggers emotional responses. In molecular biology, the genetic sequence serves as an object that directs experimental practice (Chang, 2011; Miettinen & Virkkunen, 2005). The analytical significance of these examples lies not in their historical specificity but in the relational logic they reveal—namely, that material objects may organize sustained forms of knowledge production and social coordination. This relational logic provides the basis for the historical comparison developed in the present study.

The present study employs this theoretical framework as a heuristic lens through which selected features of medieval Persian medicine may be examined. Rather than claiming that Persian medicine constituted a postsocial society in the historical sense proposed by Knorr Cetina, the analysis investigates whether certain object-centered epistemic configurations exhibit structural—and, in selected domains, functional—similarities to those identified in contemporary knowledge societies. The following sections therefore examine medical texts, hospitals, instruments, and pharmacological practices to assess the extent to which they functioned as epistemic objects within their own historical context.

#### **4.2. Persian Medicine as an Epistemic Culture**

The medieval Persian world, from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries, witnessed the emergence of a sophisticated medical tradition that integrated clinical practice, theoretical inquiry, and practical innovation. Drawing upon Greek, Indian, Egyptian, Islamic, and local intellectual traditions, Persian medicine developed a distinctive epistemic culture in which medical knowledge was produced, transmitted, and continually refined (Emami et al., 2013; Gorji & Ghadiri, 2002; Hamedei et al., 2013; Zargarani & Zarshenas, 2017). Knowledge circulated through manuscripts, educational institutions, hospitals (*bīmāristāns*), itinerant scholars, and

apprenticeship networks, creating interconnected communities of learning (Angeletti, 1990; Nutton, 2004). This tradition produced influential encyclopedic works, most notably Ibn Sīnā's *Canon of Medicine* (*al-Qānūn fī al-Ṭibb*), al-Rāzī's *Comprehensive Book* (*al-Hāwī*), and later works such as Jurjānī's *Zakhīreh-ye Khwārazmshāhī*, alongside specialized treatises devoted to anatomy, pharmacology, diagnosis, and medical instruments. These works were not static repositories of inherited knowledge but remained central reference points for teaching, commentary, revision, and clinical practice across successive generations of physicians.

The epistemic culture of Persian medicine was fundamentally organized around material objects that mediated both knowledge production and professional practice. Medical manuscripts functioned not merely as containers of information but as evolving scholarly artifacts whose marginal annotations, commentaries, diagrams, and successive recensions continually reshaped interpretation and medical reasoning (Bulus & Abiola, 2025; Orayj, 2022). The *Canon of Medicine*, for example, generated an extensive tradition of commentary and abridgment that extended over several centuries, illustrating how authoritative texts remained open to continual interpretation rather than becoming intellectually closed. Likewise, hospitals (*bīmāristāns*) served not simply as places of treatment but as institutional environments in which architectural organization, clinical observation, instruments, teaching, and record-keeping collectively structured medical learning. Pharmaceutical substances—including herbs, minerals, distilled preparations, and compound remedies—required continual observation, classification, and therapeutic refinement, while diagnostic and astronomical instruments facilitated systematic interaction between physicians, patients, and the natural world (Garrison, 1933; Irannejad, 2023; Pourahmad, 2008).

Viewed through the analytical framework developed in the previous section, these material entities functioned not only as practical tools but also as object-centered focal points around which medical authority, professional identity, and scholarly communities were organized. Their significance derived not from passive materiality but from their capacity to sustain inquiry, coordinate practice, and invite continual engagement. The *Canon of Medicine*, for instance, exemplifies this relational dynamic: rather than operating as a closed repository of authoritative knowledge, it

remained an evolving object of inquiry through continuous commentary, pedagogical use, translation, and clinical interpretation. Similarly, hospitals, pharmaceutical substances, and diagnostic instruments acquired meaning through repeated interaction and practical engagement rather than through fixed or completed forms. These observations do not suggest that medieval Persian medicine constituted a postsocial society in the modern sense. Rather, they indicate that its epistemic culture exhibited object-centered relational configurations that are structurally comparable to the epistemic dynamics identified by Knorr Cetina in contemporary knowledge environments. The following sections examine each of these domains in greater historical detail (Moorey, 1985; Shoja & Tubbs, 2007; Ziai, 1975).

#### 4.3. Manuscripts as Epistemic Objects

Manuscripts in Persian medicine played a central role as active, developing sources of knowledge. Their creation involved scribes, calligraphers, paper-makers, illuminators, and scholars, all contributing to the manuscript's changing identity (Melville, 2018). A manuscript was never finished; it allowed for marginal notes, commentaries, glosses, and super-commentaries that altered its content and meaning over time. The physical aspects of the manuscript, including its script, layout, diagrams, and even the quality of its paper, influenced how readers interacted with it and affected the spread of knowledge (Tadjbakhsh, 2007). The manuscript tradition surrounding Ibn Sīnā's *Canon of Medicine* illustrates this dynamic particularly well. Surviving copies frequently contain marginal annotations, corrections, glosses, and later commentaries added by successive generations of physicians, demonstrating that the text remained open to continual reinterpretation rather than functioning as a fixed repository of knowledge.

The manuscript's incompleteness relates closely to Knorr Cetina's idea of the epistemic object. It appeared as a problem to explore, a space for potential connections, and a place for further investigation. Physicians viewed manuscripts not just as sources of authoritative knowledge but as partners in a continuing relationship of understanding. They revisited the text over and over, drawing new insights, discussing interpretations, and providing corrections. The manuscript functioned relationally: it attracted attention, required care, and guided scholarly work (Buts et al., 2021;

Knorr Cetina, 2001; Vihla, 2000; Whitt, 2023). The *Canon of Medicine*, for instance, was repeatedly consulted not merely to preserve established doctrine but to resolve clinical problems, compare therapeutic approaches, and integrate newly accumulated experience into existing medical knowledge.

The manuscript's evolving nature is clear in the commentary tradition that thrived in Persian intellectual culture. Commentaries were not just reflections; they actively expanded on the subject. They changed the original text, forming a complex object that included different voices and interpretations. Each commentary raised new questions and opened up new possibilities, adding to the object's ongoing incompleteness. The manuscript turned into a living entity that supported communities of scholars over generations (Khan, 2016; Zaman, 1999). The extensive commentary tradition on the *Canon of Medicine* demonstrates this process particularly clearly. Scholars such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, and numerous later commentators did not merely explain Ibn Sīnā's arguments; they questioned diagnoses, refined classifications, reconciled contradictions, and introduced new clinical observations. The manuscript therefore evolved through cumulative scholarly intervention, continuously expanding the epistemic possibilities embedded within the original work.

Manuscripts played a key role in establishing authority and professional identity. Owning a high-quality manuscript showed one's status in academic circles. Students engaged with texts through memorization, recitation, and annotation. These activities fostered strong connections with the manuscript, which were both educational and emotionally engaging. Medical education in many Persian scholarly circles required students to copy authoritative manuscripts, annotate them during instruction, and preserve them as professional resources throughout their careers.

Viewed through the analytical framework developed in this article, the Persian medical manuscript exhibits several structural characteristics associated with Knorr Cetina's epistemic objects. Its openness to continual revision, its capacity to organize scholarly communities, and its role in sustaining long-term engagement suggest an object-centered relational configuration that is structurally comparable to, although historically

distinct from, the postsocial dynamics described in contemporary knowledge environments (El Shamsy, 2020; Sardar, 1993). Rather than demonstrating the existence of postsociality in medieval Persia, the manuscript illustrates how similar epistemic relations could emerge within a fundamentally different historical and institutional setting (Becker, 2012; Nerland & Jensen, 2016).

#### **4.4. Hospitals as Relational Environments**

The hospital provides insight into the object-centered relationships in Persian medicine throughout the medieval Islamic period. Unlike modern hospitals, which are often seen as places controlled by bureaucracy and technology, medieval hospitals were knowledge-focused, epistemic environments. Their layout, architectural features, instruments, and record-keeping methods acted as essential parts of medical practice. The hospital itself shaped the actions of everyone inside it. Its design influenced social interactions: the arrangement of wards, the location of pharmacy rooms, the setup of patient beds, and the movement of students and doctors all relied on how the hospital was designed (Dols, 1987; Ragab, 2020).

The hospital's structure showed the traits of an epistemic object because it was always adapted, expanded, and reinterpreted. New wards were added, instruments were replaced, and protocols were modified. The institution was never complete, as it constantly offered new possibilities for intervention and change. Physicians engaged with the hospital as a dynamic partner, and its organization affected their diagnostic and therapeutic choices (Ragab, 2015; Sayılı, 1980).

Within the hospital, objects like clinical observations served as relational nodes. These records were not just data storage but also interpretive objects that facilitated communication among physicians. They preserved clinical narratives, allowed for comparisons between cases, and encouraged joint reasoning. The record's evolving nature, which was continually updated, corrected, and annotated, established a relational dependency between the physician and the object. It required attention, invited interpretation, and shaped clinical practice.

The hospital's pharmacy acted as an important epistemic environment. Shelves filled with various substances, jars of compounds, and

preparation tools created a system focused on objects that influenced interactions. Apprentices engaged with these substances using their senses—smelling, tasting, touching, and observing reactions. These materials functioned as relational objects in processes of exploration, eliciting fascination, caution, and curiosity. Their properties were never fully understood; each new preparation uncovered potential differences, leading to further experiments (Ragab, 2015, 2020). Thus, the pharmacy exemplified the open-endedness of the epistemic object: it was a space of ongoing inquiry, where understanding was continuously reassessed and renegotiated.

Viewed through the analytical framework adopted in this article, the medieval bīmārīstān exhibits several structural characteristics associated with object-centered epistemic relations. Its architectural organization, material infrastructure, pharmaceutical spaces, and clinical practices collectively mediated professional interaction and knowledge production. This comparison does not imply that medieval hospitals constituted postsocial institutions in the late modern sense proposed by Knorr Cetina. Rather, it suggests that they embodied historically specific relational configurations in which material environments actively organized medical knowledge and professional practice.

#### 4.5. Pharmaceutical Substances and Material Knowledge

Persian medicine's object-centered relationality is most clearly seen in pharmacology. Pharmaceutical agents, such as herbs, minerals, animal products, distilled substances, and complex formulations, remained dynamic objects that did not have their properties wholly revealed. Works such as Ibn Sīnā's *Canon of Medicine* and Ismā'īl Jurjānī's *Zakhīreh-ye Khwārazmshāhī* devoted extensive sections to the classification, preparation, and therapeutic properties of medicinal substances, illustrating the centrality of material objects within Persian medical knowledge. They were knowledge-producing (epistemic) entities that demanded regular communication and involved observation, experimentation, and sensory engagement (Hamedī et al., 2013; Zargaran & Zarshenas, 2017).

The incompleteness of the ontology of pharmaceutical substances corresponds very well to the qualities of the epistemic object. Physicians and pharmacists knew that the actions of substances differed according to

the way they were made, the amount given, the time of year, the place of origin, and the combination with other substances. The effects were uncertain; therefore, patient trials and meticulous documentation were essential. Every single material allowed for the acquisition of new knowledge and the formulation of new questions. Both the *Canon* and the *Zakhīreh* repeatedly emphasize that the efficacy of a remedy depends upon factors such as the quality of raw materials, geographical origin, season, dosage, preparation techniques, and the patient's individual temperament (*mizāj*). Consequently, medicinal substances could never be treated as fixed entities; rather, they demanded continual observation and clinical judgment. The object's developing character demanded a relational connection: physicians and pharmacists did not gain their knowledge just through reading but by actually experiencing the substances through their senses (Golshani et al., 2015; Irannejad, 2023).

Physicians' engagement with pharmaceutical substances involved sustained practical attention, careful judgment, and professional commitment. Such engagement frequently required patience, caution, and confidence developed through repeated clinical experience. Although historically distinct from contemporary laboratory settings, these forms of attachment resemble what Knorr Cetina describes as the affective dimension of epistemic objects (Salmani Bidgoli, 2025).

In addition, the use of substances mediated social relations by serving as markers of professional expertise and marked social stratification and professionalism in society. The skill of distinguishing original materials, making compounds, and foreseeing effects was the means to attain an authoritative position. Knowledge of substances was transmitted through apprenticeship, with direct engagement with objects constituting a central component of the learning process. Medical education commonly required apprentices to identify raw materials, prepare compound remedies, and observe therapeutic outcomes under the supervision of experienced physicians and pharmacists. Practical engagement with medicinal substances therefore constituted an essential component of professional formation rather than merely an application of textual knowledge. The substance was the focal point of the teacher-student relationship: the teacher controlled the student's interaction with the object, showing how to read signs and effects. Consequently, the

pharmaceutical object formed a relational triad interconnecting student, teacher, and substance.

Viewed through the analytical framework developed in this article, pharmaceutical substances exhibit several structural characteristics associated with epistemic objects. Their therapeutic properties remained open to continual investigation, their efficacy depended upon ongoing interaction, and their practical use organized relationships among physicians, apprentices, pharmacists, and patients. These observations do not imply that medieval Persian pharmacology constituted a postsocial domain in the late modern sense. Rather, they suggest that pharmaceutical practice embodied historically specific object-centered relational configurations that are analytically comparable to the epistemic dynamics identified by Knorr Cetina.

#### 4.6. The Social Life of Instruments

Scientific and medical instruments in the Islamic and Persian world, such as astrolabes, mortars, balances, and diagnostic tools, played central relational roles. Medical instruments are described extensively in works such as al-Zahrāwī's *al-Taṣrīf* and appear throughout Persian medical literature, including Ibn Sīnā's *Canon of Medicine*. Surgical instruments, urine flasks used in uroscopy, balances employed in pharmaceutical preparation, and astrolabes for determining astronomical conditions related to medical practice illustrate the diversity of material devices that mediated diagnosis, treatment, and teaching. These instruments facilitated interactions between physicians and patients, offering structured ways to perceive and interpret bodily signs. They were not just extensions of the body but active participants in diagnostic reasoning. Using them required training, interpretation, and trust (Ganchy, 2009; Shamsaei & Mahmoudi, 2017).

The role of the instrument lay in its ability to shape how phenomena were perceived. It filtered sensory information, showed new types of evidence, and focused attention on specific features of the body (Käs, 2023). Like other knowledge-seeking epistemic objects, the instrument had an open-ended ontology. It needed calibration, produced surprising results, and uncovered phenomena that required further investigation. Physicians worked with instruments as partners, and their behavior affected clinical decisions.

Instruments also served as a means of expressing authority. Owning advanced tools indicated one's expertise and scholarly standing. These instruments were exchanged among physicians as gifts or objects of prestige, strengthening social connections. Their depiction in manuscripts—through illustrations—highlights their conceptual significance (Brown et al., 2019; Ganchy, 2009). Illustrated surgical instruments in al-Zahrāwī's *al-Taṣrīf* demonstrate that instruments themselves became objects of scholarly transmission. Their depiction in manuscripts allowed techniques to circulate together with the material forms through which medical practice was organized. Thus, instruments played a role in a relational system and framework where objects influenced authority, trust, and identity.

Viewed through the analytical framework employed in this study, medical instruments exhibit several structural characteristics associated with epistemic objects. Their effective use depended upon sustained practical engagement, interpretive judgment, and continual refinement rather than passive application. By organizing interactions among physicians, apprentices, patients, and material devices, instruments participated in historically specific object-centered relational configurations. This comparison does not imply that medieval Persian medicine constituted a postsocial society in Knorr Cetina's historical sense; rather, it demonstrates that analogous forms of object-mediated epistemic relations emerged within a distinct premodern context.

#### **4.7. Pedagogy and the Formation of Professional Identity**

The formation of the medical profession in the traditional Persian world was equally dependent on relationships with people and with objects. Manual reading of manuscripts, observing substances, and participation in hospital routines were all part of the pedagogy process essential to professional formation (Asad et al., 2024; Dajani, 1989). Medical education in the Persian tradition was structured around authoritative texts such as Ibn Sīnā's *Canon of Medicine*, which students copied, memorized, annotated, and discussed under the supervision of experienced physicians. Mastery of medicine therefore depended not only upon interpersonal instruction but also upon sustained engagement with material objects, including manuscripts, medicinal substances, diagnostic instruments, and clinical practice within the bīmāristān. The objects

helped in the learning process by providing focal points around which interactions unfolded. Through the process of annotation, memorization, and recitation, students interacted with the texts and formed relationships with them. The manuscript functioned not merely as a medium of transmission but as an enduring focus of intellectual engagement through which professional competence was progressively developed. Directly, through their senses, students acquired knowledge of substances, and at the same time, they developed relational dependencies with pharmacological objects. Instruments served as the means of training in the skills of perceiving and interpreting (Hamarneh, 2021; Pocock & Rezaeian, 2016). The hospital was an environment that facilitated relationships among objects, spaces, and bodies.

Viewed through the analytical framework adopted in this study, professional identity in medieval Persian medicine emerged through sustained interaction with manuscripts, hospitals, pharmaceutical substances, and medical instruments as well as through interpersonal instruction. These material engagements organized learning, stabilized professional authority, and structured medical expertise (Kasule, 2013; Wahid et al., 2021). Rather than demonstrating the existence of postsocial professions in the medieval world, this analysis suggests that the formation of medical identity relied upon historically specific object-centered relational configurations that are analytically comparable to those described by Knorr Cetina for contemporary knowledge societies.

## **5. Discussion**

The historical analysis presented in this study suggests that medieval Persian medicine was characterized by sustained forms of object-centered engagement that played a constitutive role in the production of medical knowledge, the organization of professional authority, and the formation of scholarly communities. Manuscripts, hospitals, pharmaceutical substances, and medical instruments functioned not merely as passive tools or repositories of information but as material entities around which intellectual activity, clinical practice, and pedagogical relationships were organized. Examined through the analytical framework developed in this article, these objects display several structural characteristics associated with Knorr Cetina's epistemic objects, including openness,

incompleteness, relational productivity, and the capacity to organize sustained epistemic engagement. This comparison should be understood as an analytical interpretation rather than a claim of historical identity. The findings do not suggest that medieval Persian medicine constituted a postsocial society in the strict historical sense proposed by Knorr Cetina for late modern knowledge environments. Rather, they demonstrate that historically distinct object-centered epistemic configurations may exhibit relational dynamics that are structurally comparable to those described within contemporary postsocial theory.

These findings also contribute to broader theoretical conversations within Science and Technology Studies. By emphasizing the active role of material entities in organizing knowledge, the analysis resonates with Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory, which rejects rigid distinctions between human and non-human actors and instead conceptualizes knowledge as emerging through heterogeneous networks of relations. Likewise, the interpretation presented here parallels Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's concept of *epistemic things*, according to which scientific objects remain productive precisely because they are incomplete and continuously generate new questions. At the same time, the historical perspective adopted in this study complements Michel Foucault's archaeology of knowledge by illustrating how material arrangements participate in the constitution of epistemic orders rather than merely reflecting them. Similarly, Ian Hacking's notion of historical ontology provides a useful framework for understanding how forms of knowledge emerge through historically contingent practices instead of timeless conceptual categories. Finally, Annemarie Mol's emphasis on the multiplicity of objects reminds us that medical objects acquire different identities through diverse practices of observation, diagnosis, teaching, and therapeutic intervention. Rather than replacing these theoretical perspectives, the present study demonstrates their combined usefulness for interpreting premodern epistemic cultures while simultaneously extending their geographical and historical scope.

From the perspective of the history of medicine, the findings encourage a reconsideration of Persian medicine as a material epistemic culture rather than solely as a collection of canonical texts or intellectual doctrines. Previous scholarship has understandably concentrated on the

transmission of Greek medicine, the achievements of major physicians, or the development of medical theories. While these dimensions remain fundamental, the present analysis shifts attention toward the material infrastructures through which medical knowledge was historically produced and maintained. Manuscripts were continually transformed through copying, annotation, and commentary; hospitals organized relationships among physicians, students, patients, and therapeutic spaces; pharmaceutical substances required ongoing experimentation and sensory engagement; and medical instruments mediated diagnostic perception and professional expertise. These material practices reveal that knowledge emerged through continuous interaction between people and objects rather than through abstract intellectual activity alone.

The implications of these observations for postsocial theory should, however, be stated with appropriate caution. The evidence presented here does not establish that postsocial relations originated in medieval Persia, nor does it invalidate Knorr Cetina's argument that postsociality characterizes late modern knowledge societies. Instead, the historical evidence suggests that several structural features associated with postsocial relations—including sustained engagement with open-ended knowledge objects, the organization of expertise through material entities, and the centrality of object-mediated epistemic practices—can also be identified within a historically distinct medical culture. The comparison advanced in this article is therefore based upon structural similarity rather than historical equivalence. Medieval Persian medicine should be understood as an analytically productive historical case that enables a reconsideration of the temporal and geographical boundaries within which postsocial theory has traditionally been applied. In this sense, the article seeks not to replace Knorr Cetina's conceptualization but to broaden its analytical horizon through historical investigation.

More broadly, this study contributes to current efforts to globalize Science and Technology Studies by demonstrating that historical knowledge traditions outside Europe can serve not merely as empirical illustrations of existing theories but as productive sites for theoretical refinement. Medieval Persian medicine offers an example of how concepts developed within contemporary sociology may be critically re-examined through historical analysis. Rather than treating non-Western scientific traditions as peripheral cases, this approach recognizes them as important

sources for testing, extending, and qualifying sociological concepts. Such a perspective encourages a more pluralistic understanding of the history of science in which theoretical innovation emerges through dialogue between contemporary social theory and historically diverse epistemic cultures.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. The present study is based primarily on conceptual historical analysis and published historical scholarship rather than direct examination of manuscripts, archival materials, or institutional records. Although this approach is appropriate for the theoretical objectives of the article, future research could strengthen and refine these arguments through detailed manuscript studies, analyses of individual hospitals, investigations of specific pharmacological traditions, or examinations of particular medical instruments. Comparative research involving other premodern medical traditions may further clarify which dimensions of object-centered epistemic relations are historically widespread and which remain specific to particular cultural settings. Such investigations would contribute not only to the historiography of medicine but also to the continuing development of Science and Technology Studies by providing a richer historical basis for evaluating the scope and applicability of concepts such as epistemic objects and postsocial relations.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study has examined medieval Persian medicine through the analytical lens of postsocial theory to explore the historical significance of object-centered epistemic relations. Rather than treating manuscripts, hospitals, pharmaceutical substances, and medical instruments as passive supports for medical practice, the analysis has shown that these material entities actively organized the production, transmission, and stabilization of medical knowledge. Viewed through the conceptual framework developed in this article, these objects display several structural characteristics associated with Knorr Cetina's epistemic objects, including openness, incompleteness, relational productivity, and sustained engagement. The comparison advanced here is analytical rather than historical; it does not suggest that medieval Persian medicine constituted a postsocial society in the strict sense proposed for late modern scientific environments.

The findings instead indicate that historically distinct epistemic cultures may develop object-centered relational configurations that share important structural similarities with those described in contemporary postsocial theory. Medieval Persian medicine therefore provides a historically productive case for reconsidering the temporal and geographical boundaries within which postsocial concepts have generally been applied. Rather than challenging Knorr Cetina's account of late modern knowledge societies, this study extends the analytical conversation by demonstrating how historical investigation can contribute to refining sociological concepts.

More broadly, the article contributes to ongoing efforts to globalize Science and Technology Studies by demonstrating that non-Western histories of science can serve not merely as empirical illustrations of existing theories but also as sources of theoretical development. Persian medicine is presented here not simply as a historical tradition of medical knowledge but as a rich material epistemic culture through which the relationships among objects, knowledge, and social organization may be reconsidered from a global historical perspective.

The present study therefore argues not that postsocial relations originated before modernity, but that several relational features associated with postsocial theory possess a broader historical genealogy than is commonly recognized. Future research based on manuscript studies, archival evidence, hospital records, and comparative analyses across other premodern scientific traditions will be essential for further evaluating the historical scope and explanatory potential of object-centered approaches within Science and Technology Studies and the history of medicine.

#### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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## Original Research Paper

# Algorithm and text: Challenges of artificial intelligence in the humanities with an emphasis on german law and imami jurisprudence

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## Abstract

The emergence of artificial intelligence as a semi-autonomous agent has challenged the classical paradigms of knowledge production in the humanities. This study aims to address how the legal and ethical components of responsibility for works produced with AI participation are redefined within the frameworks of Imami jurisprudence and the German legal system. This research employed a comparative-analytical approach and qualitative methodology. Data were collected through the study of authoritative jurisprudential sources, German codified laws, and scholarly articles, and analyzed using inductive reasoning. The findings reveal that the shift from a purely instrumental paradigm to one recognizing AI's relative agency has intensified three structural crises: the crisis of attribution (ambiguity regarding authorship and ownership); the crisis of originality (erosion of human creativity and scientific credibility); and the crisis of accountability (conflict in determining final responsibility). The research proposes the Proportional Responsibility model as an interdisciplinary solution, distributing responsibility among the researcher, developer, and academic institutions. By integrating foundational jurisprudential principles from Imami jurisprudence (*la darar, daman, tasbib*) with the advanced doctrines of German civil liability (particularly § 280 BGB and producer liability principles), the model establishes a coherent framework designed to preserve scientific integrity in humanities research in the age of artificial intelligence.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, Imami Jurisprudence, German Law, Algorithm and Text, Proportional Responsibility

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## مقاله پژوهشی

# الگوریتم و متن: چالش‌های هوش مصنوعی در علوم انسانی با تأکید بر حقوق آلمان و فقه امامیه

سیدمحمد حیدری خورمیزی<sup>\*</sup>

دریافت: ۱۴۰۴/۷/۲۳ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۴/۹/۲۵

## چکیده:

ظهور هوش مصنوعی به مثابه کنشگری نیمه خودمختار، پارادایم‌های کلاسیک تولید دانش در علوم انسانی را با چالش مواجه ساخته است. این پژوهش با هدف بررسی بازتعریف مؤلفه‌های مسئولیت حقوقی و اخلاقی در قبال آثار تولیدشده با مشارکت هوش مصنوعی در چارچوب فقه امامیه و نظام حقوقی آلمان انجام شده است. این پژوهش با رویکرد تطبیقی-تحلیلی و روش کیفی انجام شده است. داده‌ها از طریق مطالعه منابع معتبر فقهی، قوانین مدون آلمان و مقالات علمی گردآوری و با روش استدلال استقرایی تحلیل شده‌اند. یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد گذار از الگوی صرفاً ابزارمحور به الگوی عاملیت نسبی هوش مصنوعی، سه بحران ساختاری را دامن زده است: بحران انتساب (ابهام در تعیین نویسنده و مالک اثر)، بحران اصالت (فرسایش خلاقیت انسانی و تهدید اعتبار علمی) و بحران مسئولیت‌پذیری (تعارض در تعیین مسئول نهایی). الگوی «مسئولیت سهمی» به عنوان راهکاری بین‌رشته‌ای پیشنهاد می‌شود که مسئولیت را میان پژوهشگر، توسعه‌دهنده و نهادهای علمی توزیع می‌کند. این الگو با تلفیق قواعد فقهی لازم‌الزمان و تسبیب با اصول مسئولیت مدنی آلمان (به‌ویژه ماده ۲۸۰ قانون مدنی و مسئولیت تولیدکننده)، چارچوبی منسجم برای حفظ سلامت علمی در پژوهش‌های علوم انسانی عصر هوش مصنوعی فراهم می‌آورد.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** هوش مصنوعی، فقه امامیه، حقوق آلمان، الگوریتم و متن، مسئولیت سهمی

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## Original-Forschungsarbeit

# Algorithmus und Text: Herausforderungen der Künstlichen Intelligenz in den Geisteswissenschaften mit besonderem Schwerpunkt auf deutschem Recht und imamitischer Rechtswissenschaft

Seyyed Mohammad Heidary Khormizi <sup>1\*</sup>

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Angenommen: 16. Dez. 2025

### Zusammenfassung:

Das Auftreten Künstlicher Intelligenz als semi-autonomer Akteur stellt die klassischen Paradigmen der Wissensproduktion in den Geisteswissenschaften in Frage. Diese Studie untersucht, wie die rechtlichen und ethischen Komponenten der Verantwortlichkeit für durch KI mitproduzierte Werke innerhalb der Rahmenbedingungen der imamitischen Rechtswissenschaft und des deutschen Rechtssystems neu definiert werden. Die Forschung folgt einem vergleichend-analytischen Ansatz und einer qualitativen Methodologie. Die Daten wurden durch die Analyse maßgeblicher rechtswissenschaftlicher Quellen, kodifizierter deutscher Gesetze sowie wissenschaftlicher Fachartikel erhoben und mittels induktiver Argumentation ausgewertet. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass der Übergang von einem rein instrumentellen Paradigma hin zu einem Ansatz, der der KI eine relative Akteursqualität zuschreibt, drei strukturelle Krisen verschärft hat: die Zurechnungskrise (Unklarheit hinsichtlich Urheberschaft und Eigentum), die Originalitätskrise (Erosion menschlicher Kreativität und wissenschaftlicher Glaubwürdigkeit) sowie die Verantwortlichkeitskrise (Konflikte bei der Bestimmung der finalen Haftung). Die Studie schlägt das Modell der proportionalen Verantwortung als interdisziplinäre Lösung vor, das die Verantwortung zwischen Forschenden, Entwicklern und akademischen Institutionen verteilt. Durch die Integration grundlegender Prinzipien der imamitischen Rechtswissenschaft (la darar, daman, tasbib) mit zentralen Doktrinen des deutschen Zivilrechts (insbesondere § 280 BGB sowie Grundsätze der Produzentenhaftung) wird ein kohärenter Rahmen geschaffen, der darauf abzielt, die wissenschaftliche Integrität der geisteswissenschaftlichen Forschung im Zeitalter der Künstlichen Intelligenz zu wahren.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Künstliche Intelligenz, imamitische Rechtswissenschaft, deutsches Recht, Algorithmus und Text, proportionale Verantwortung

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## **1. Introduction**

Knowledge production in the humanities has entered an unprecedented era with the emergence of artificial intelligence. This transformation is not merely a technological innovation but has given rise to a fundamental confrontation between “text” as the achievement of human consciousness and reflection, and “algorithm” as the manifestation of mechanical and computational knowledge. Artificial intelligence, by claiming “authorship,” “analysis,” and “critique,” has transcended the margins of auxiliary tools and emerged as a semi-autonomous research partner, and this new status confronts the foundational concepts of knowledge production—including originality, authorial intent, attribution, and ethical responsibility—with radical questions.

The transition from a purely instrumental model to one in which artificial intelligence possesses relative autonomy has intensified three fundamental crises in the realm of humanities research. The first is the crisis of attribution, where the presence of AI-generated content makes it increasingly difficult to determine the author and owner of a scholarly work, since what is at stake is not merely the mechanical arrangement of words but analytical reasoning that blurs the boundary between assistance and participation. The second is the crisis of originality, in which the longstanding criteria of innovation, creativity, and human added value are overshadowed by the capacity of algorithms to reproduce, synthesize, and represent existing data, thereby contributing to an erosion of originality and threatening the intrinsic credibility of academic production. The third is the crisis of accountability, which represents the most complex challenge, as it introduces ambiguity and conflict in determining legal and moral responsibility for produced works; when confronted with errors, distortions, algorithmic bias, or unintentional plagiarism generated by systems, traditional legal frameworks—founded on the unquestioned centrality of the human agent—appear insufficient for adjudicating and allocating responsibility.

In order to systematically address these intertwined crises, reliance on a single legal or intellectual tradition is not sufficient. The present study is grounded in the assumption that sustainable solutions must emerge from collective wisdom and diverse intellectual traditions. Accordingly, its main objective is to develop an analytical and practical framework

through a comparative approach between two distinct but intellectually rich legal systems. On the one hand, the German legal system, as a leading model of modern European law, provides precise mechanisms of civil liability, particularly non-contractual liability, along with data protection regulations and principles of transparency that can be adapted to the complex regulatory demands of the age of artificial intelligence. On the other hand, Imami jurisprudence offers a rich repository of legal and ethical principles such as *la darar* (no harm), *daman* (liability), *itlaf* (causing loss), and broader foundations of moral and legal responsibility, all of which demonstrate significant capacity for extension and adaptation to emerging technological phenomena.

Against this background, the central research question is how the components of legal and ethical responsibility for works produced with the participation of artificial intelligence are redefined within the frameworks of Imami jurisprudence and the German legal system, and how this redefinition can contribute to the design of a model for the equitable distribution of responsibility among different stakeholders.

## **2. Literature Review**

Research at the intersection of AI, humanities, law, and ethics falls into three categories. The first includes unidimensional jurisprudential-legal studies examining responsibility within a single legal system (Tabatabaei Hakim, 1988; Mousavi Khomeyni, n.d.; Haydari Khourmizi, 2024). The main weakness of this category is the lack of a structured comparative approach between two distinct systems (e.g., Imami jurisprudence and German law), as well as neglect of the specific challenges of "scholarly production in the humanities" with AI participation.

The second category comprises studies in the philosophy of technology and AI ethics (Ramezani & Fayzi Derakhsh, 2013; Farajpour et al., 2024). While these works effectively outline major ethical challenges such as transparency and accountability, they fail to design concrete legal frameworks or mechanisms for distributing responsibility among multiple actors (researcher, developer, academic institution). In other words, they address the ethical "why" but neglect the legal "how."

The third category focuses on the impact of AI on research and the

humanities (Bahmanabadi, 2023; Rajabi & Darabi, 2024; Zeyn al-Dini & Ghandaqi, 2024; Mostafavi Ardabili et al., 2023). The common weakness here is generalization and one-sided focus on opportunities and effectiveness, while risk-based analysis and legal solutions for managing negative consequences (e.g., academic misconduct) are largely absent.

Despite the richness of sources in all three areas, a clear research gap exists: no comparative, interdisciplinary, and problem-oriented study extracts the common and complementary foundations of Imami jurisprudence and German law to design an operational "responsibility distribution" model for scholarly production in the humanities. The present article aims to fill this gap.

**Research Methodology:** This research employs a qualitative approach with an applied purpose. The method is comparative-analytical, and data were collected through library research and analysis of primary sources (jurisprudential texts, German codified laws, scholarly articles, and authoritative reports). Data analysis uses deductive reasoning and the extraction of congruent concepts from the two systems under study.

### **3. Theoretical Framework of the Research: Foundations of Responsibility in Imami Jurisprudence and German Law**

#### **3.1. The Necessity of a Comparative Theoretical Framework**

The emergence of artificial intelligence as a semi-autonomous agent has confronted classical concepts of responsibility with an unprecedented challenge. Traditional legal systems, founded on the exclusive centrality of the "conscious human agent," appear incapable of explaining and distributing responsibility arising from the actions of this emerging technology. The central question is: "In light of which theoretical foundations can the boundaries of ethical and legal responsibility in collaborative scholarly production with artificial intelligence be redefined?"

To answer this question, this article builds its theoretical framework upon a comparative approach between two profound and distinct systems: Imami jurisprudence, with its rich treasury of responsibility-creating rules based on justice and ethics, and modern German law, with

its precise and progressive mechanisms in the field of civil liability and risk governance. The combination of these two perspectives enables the analysis of the issue from ethical-social and legal-compensatory dimensions and establishes a solid foundation for designing the operational model of "Proportional Responsibility."

### 3.2. Foundations of Responsibility in Imami Jurisprudence

Imami jurisprudence, relying on comprehensive rules rooted in revealed sources and practical reason, offers a flexible framework for deriving rulings on emerging phenomena. In the matter of responsibility arising from the act of another (such as the operation of an intelligent system), the following rules are of fundamental importance:

The Rule of La Darar (No Harm): This rule, based on the prophetic tradition "*la darara wa la dirara fi al-islam*" (there is no harm nor injurious reciprocation in Islam) (Koleyni, 1987, Vol. 5, p. 292; Mousavi Khomeyni, 2004, Vol. 2, p. 625), prohibits any harmful action, whether material or spiritual. This principle constitutes the cornerstone of ethical and legal responsibility and necessitates the compensation of any unjust harm and the regulation of relations in a manner that prevents the occurrence of harm (Tabatabaei Hakim, 1988, Vol. 2, p. 373).

The Rule of Daman (Liability): The jurisprudential rule of *daman*, based on the tradition "*ala al-yadi ma akhazat hatta tu'addi*" (one is responsible for what one has taken until it is returned), known as the rule of *daman yad*, which will be explained further.

The Rules of *Itlaf* (Direct Causation) and *Tasbib* (Indirect Causation): The distinction between "direct causation" (*itlaf*) and "indirect causation" (*tasbib*) in determining the cause of responsibility is highly effective (Sanhoury, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 750). If an AI system is considered a "tool" under the direct command of the user, the user may be deemed the direct causer (*mutlif*). However, if the error originates from the system's design or training, the developer can be held accountable as the indirect causer (*musabbib*).

The fundamental principle regarding the limitation of compensation in German law is the causal relationship. German courts are more inclined toward the theory of "adequate cause." According to this theory, if a person's fault has specifically increased the probability of a type of

damage, they are responsible for the damage. For the proportional model, the theory of adequate cause provides a precise tool to measure the share of each actor (developer, user, institution) in the occurrence of damage. If a design error increases the probability of damage, it is considered an adequate cause.

It is important to note that these rules, along with jurisprudence's emphasis on intention and knowledge in certain responsibilities and the obligation according to one's capacity (wus'), provide a rich framework for analyzing the different shares of responsibility in the chain of scholarly production with AI participation. The requirements and conditions of knowledge production can be examined both in the individual domain and the governance domain. The individual domain includes: spirituality-orientation, responsibility, etc. The governance domain includes: jihadi management, national resolve, free thinking, development of basic sciences, transformation in the humanities, etc. (Zeyn al-Dini & Ghandaqi, 2024, p. 281). The present discussion concerns humanities knowledge production in the individual domain, where the ethical and legal responsibility for the produced work is distributed in a share-based manner among three main actors: the researcher (human: responsible for supervision and verification of accuracy), the developer (AI creator: responsible for transparency and warning), and academic institutions (university: responsible for standardization and oversight).

### **3.3. Foundations of Responsibility in German Civil Law**

The German legal system, with its precise codification and risk-oriented approach, has developed advanced mechanisms for distributing responsibility in the age of complex technologies. The key foundations relevant to the present study are:

Non-Contractual Civil Liability (Tort Law): Section 823 of the German Civil Code (BGB) is one of the most important and fundamental provisions concerning civil liability in German law. This provision states that if a person, through fault (intentional or negligent), injures the right or property of another, they must compensate for the damage.

Section 823 has two main paragraphs listing the protected rights:

**Paragraph 1:** A person who, intentionally or negligently, unlawfully injures the life, body, health, freedom, property, or any other right (such

as intellectual property rights, business rights) of another is liable to compensate for the resulting damage.

**Example:** If a company produces defective software (negligence) and this software causes damage to a customer's financial systems (financial loss), it falls under this paragraph.

**Paragraph 2:** A person who violates a statute that is intended to protect others is liable for any damage arising from such violation.

**Example:** Violation of specific data protection laws or product safety regulations. If a company discloses user data (violation of a protective law), it is liable for the resulting damages.

Thus, developer liability: If damage (e.g., dissemination of false information or a discriminatory decision) results from fault in design, training, or failure to warn about system limitations, the developer may be held liable under Section 823 of the German Civil Code (Wagner, 2023, § 1, para. 1).

Similarly, user/researcher liability: If a researcher negligently (e.g., without any review) accepts and publishes an erroneous AI output, and this action damages academic or individual credibility, they may bear personal responsibility.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) mandates the principles of transparency, accountability, and the right to an explanation for automated systems (European Parliament and Council, 2016, Articles 13-15, 22).

Therefore, this German legal principle aligns with the jurisprudential rule of *daman* or *la darar* in Imami jurisprudence. Both seek to compensate for unjust damage and determine responsibility. In the case of artificial intelligence, the developer may be subject to a standard of "stricter liability" due to their expertise. The principle of fault is one of the foundational principles of German law, its main point crystallized in Section 276 of the German Civil Code. According to this provision, "a person is liable for their intentional acts and omissions unless a stricter or milder standard of liability is stipulated..." (Hoseyni, 2020, p. 140).

A famous and fundamental case from the German Federal Court (BGHZ 3, 261–1951), concerning damage and non-contractual

relationships, clarifies important points regarding damages (Hoseyni, 2020, p. 144).

1. If the developer, through defective design, provides sufficient conditions for the occurrence of error or damage by AI, they are responsible.

2. If the user, through reckless use or input of incorrect data, completes the sufficient conditions for an erroneous result, their share in the responsibility is established

#### **4. The Triple Challenges of Artificial Intelligence in the Humanities: Instances and Implications**

The entry of artificial intelligence into the realm of intellectual creation has confronted classical questions about the nature and legitimacy of intellectual property with new complexity. Determining the "owner" and "creator" of a work directly impacts the issue of attribution of responsibility, as accepting the right of ownership for a person or institution is usually accompanied by the burden of responsibility for that work. In the tradition of Imami jurisprudence, there are different views regarding the legal nature of works such as authorship and invention, ranging from the complete denial of any legal right (Mousavi Khomeyni, 2004, Vol. 4, p. 477) to the full acceptance of intellectual property similar to material property. Some intermediate views also consider these matters as non-financial rights or respectable moral preferences.

However, the main focus of this research is on the aspect of "compensatory and supervisory responsibility" (daman, civil liability) for works and consequences produced with the participation of artificial intelligence, rather than definitively determining the proprietary ownership rights over those works. Therefore, in the present analysis, this broader discussion is mentioned as background, and the proposed "Proportional Responsibility" model – independent of the acceptance or rejection of any of these views on ownership – will focus on the equitable distribution of supervisory duties, transparency, and compensation among various actors. In other words, whether the produced work is considered "property" or not, the unjust harm arising from the dissemination of error or fraud within it requires compensation and

accountability of those at fault, which the present model seeks to regulate.<sup>1</sup>

#### **4.1. The Crisis of Attribution and Ambiguity in Intellectual Ownership**

When a system generates a substantial portion of an article or tools like DALL-E create an artistic work, determining the "author" or "creator" becomes ambiguous. This directly leads to challenges in granting authorship rights and determining the ultimate responsible party for the content.

#### **4.2. The Crisis of Originality and the Erosion of Human Creativity**

Over-reliance on artificial intelligence can lead to methodological reductionism and the weakening of critical thinking and genuine innovation. For example, using algorithms to automatically extract "research trends" may result in the repetition of pre-existing formulas and undermine academic credibility.

#### **4.3. The Crisis of Accountability and the Distribution of Error**

The most complex challenge is determining responsibility for errors. A concrete example: Suppose a historical analysis algorithm, due to incomplete data, reaches an incorrect and discriminatory conclusion that is published in an article. Who bears responsibility for this harm—the developer, the researcher, or the academic institution? Traditional legal systems are incapable of answering such multi-actor questions.

The combination of the above frameworks shows that although the foundations of Imami jurisprudence and German law are distinct historically and philosophically, they are aligned in practical goals: preventing unjust harm and equitable compensation. Imami jurisprudence, with rules such as *la darar*, provides a comprehensive ethical-legal framework emphasizing the prohibition of injustice and the

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1. Imam Khomeini explicitly states in Tahrir al-Vasileh: "What is called by some 'copyright' is not a legal right; thus, depriving people of their dominion over their property without contract and stipulation is not permissible. Therefore, merely printing a book and recording therein that the right of publication and reproduction is reserved for its owner does not create any right and does not constitute an agreement with others. Hence, it is permissible for others to publish and reproduce it, and no one may prevent them from doing so. The common practice of registering an invention for its inventor and prohibiting others from imitating and reproducing it has no legal effect, and preventing others from imitating it and trading in it is not permissible, and no one has the right to deprive another of their dominion over their property and themselves" (Mousavi Khomeyni, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 625; Mousavi Khomeyni, 2004, Vol. 4, p. 477). Even writing the phrase "copyright reserved" does not in itself create a right or obligate others.

pursuit of justice. German law, with institutions such as producer liability, has designed precise executive mechanisms for distributing risk and responsibility among multiple actors (producer, user, supervisor).

The proposed "Proportional Responsibility" model in this research is the outcome of this theoretical synthesis. This model combines the principle of harm prevention and compensatory justice (derived from jurisprudence) with the mechanism of share-based distribution of responsibility among multiple actors (derived from German law) to provide a practical response to the triple crises of attribution, originality, and accountability.

Artificial intelligence can accelerate research processes, facilitate the analysis of massive data, and improve access to resources. However, limitations such as algorithmic bias, infrastructural costs, and the reduction of philosophical depth in human thinking are among the challenges facing this interaction (Rajabi & Darabi, 2024, p. 61). The use of artificial intelligence in research carries its own specific challenges and risks. Plagiarism, error or bias in text, manipulation or distortion of scientific records, intellectual property of the produced work, and occupational risks are among these issues (Bahmanabadi, 2023, p. 33).

The agency of artificial intelligence refers to the emerging role of intelligent systems as a semi-autonomous actor that has transcended the status of a passive tool and acquired the ability to act, influence, and even initiate action. This transition is not merely a technical advancement but signifies a transformation in the very nature of the human-machine relationship. Artificial intelligence is no longer simply an executor of commands; rather, by utilizing capabilities such as deep learning, natural language processing, and machine vision, it has to some extent gained the ability to interpret situations, make decisions under conditions of uncertainty, and even propose novel solutions.

This transformation raises fundamental questions in the fields of philosophy of technology, ethics, and governance—questions about responsibility in conditions of distributed agency, transparency in algorithmic decision-making processes, and the preservation of human will and control. Today, artificial intelligence appears in arenas such as advanced recommendation systems, intelligent assistants, medical diagnosis, and algorithmic trading, in the role of a semi-autonomous

partner capable of dynamic and adaptive interaction with users. This new level of agency necessitates the development of new regulatory and ethical frameworks that both support the transformative potential of this technology and protect human values and the privacy of human agency, while simultaneously ensuring accountability and transparency. This matter not only helps improve the quality and efficiency of artificial intelligence systems but also reduces social and ethical concerns. This issue encompasses ethical aspects in science (Farajpour et al., 2024, p. 48).

## 5. Capacities of Imami Jurisprudence and German Law

### 5.1. Capacities of Imami Jurisprudence

Within the system of Imami jurisprudence, foundational concepts such as "daman" (liability), "itqan al-amal" (precision in action), "haqq al-mo'allef" (author's right), and the "rule of la darar" (no harm) can serve as theoretical supports for formulating responsibility in the age of artificial intelligence.

The rule of daman, based on the tradition "'ala al-yadi ma akhazat hatta tu'addi" (narrated in Sunan al-Bayhaqi and Kanz al-Ommal), provides a solid foundation for civil liability. In terms of chain of transmission, the mentioned narration in Kanz al-Ommal by Allameh Ali al-Mottaqi al-Hendi (Ibn Housam al-Din al-Mottaqi al-Hendi, 1979, Vol. 1, p. 45) and in Tarikh al-Bayhaqi by al-Bayhaqi (Bayhaqi, 2019, Vol. 1, p. 285), as prominent texts in history and literature, demonstrates the importance of authenticity and narration. Within this framework, any exploitation or possession that leads to damage requires compensation. Regarding artificial intelligence, the question arises whether the developer or user can be considered a "possessor" (mutasarriif) and, in the event of damage, be recognized as "liable" (damin). This concept can encompass damages arising from decisions or mistakes of intelligent systems (Haydari Khourmizi, 2024, p. 210).<sup>1</sup>

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1 Sunan al-Kobra (or al-Sunan al-Kabir) is the most significant hadith work of the Shafi'i scholar Ahmad ibn Husayn ibn Ali al-Bayhaqi al-Naysaburi (d. 458 AH) and constitutes a comprehensive compendium of hadith jurisprudence. Researchers consider al-Bayhaqi's motivation for composing al-Sunan al-Kobra to be the defense of the authenticity of al-Shafi'i's opinions and the demonstration of their narrative foundations. This work has been published in eleven volumes under the editorship of Mohammad Abd al-Qader Ata (Bayhaqi, 2019, Vol. 1, p. 285). Kanz al-Ommal fi Sunan al-Aghval

The principle of *itqan al-amal*, derived from the tradition "But God Almighty loves a servant who, when performing an action, performs it with precision" (Isfahani (Majlesi II), 1990, Vol. 79, p. 49), necessitates accuracy, correctness, and adherence to technical standards in the production and application of tools. In the context of artificial intelligence, this principle can be interpreted as a technical obligation for developers, requiring them to guarantee the accuracy, reliability, and safety of intelligent systems before market release. Any negligence in observing these standards will incur liability.

Regarding the author's right (*haqq al-mo'allef*), although this concept does not exist in its modern form in classical jurisprudential texts, its jurisprudential infrastructure can be observed within the framework of discussions on "right of usufruct" (*haqq al-ente'fa'*), "right of invention" (*haqq al-ekhtra'*), and the "prohibition of acquisition through falsehood" (*hormat al-kasb an tariq al-batel*). In a general classification, property is divided into two categories: corporeal property and incorporeal property. Corporeal property has physical existence and can be touched, such as tables, chairs, and houses (Emami, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 19). Incorporeal property has no physical existence, but society recognizes its existence and the law protects it (authorship rights, composition rights, patent rights). When confronting AI-generated outputs, the question arises whether textual, artistic, or scientific productions created by artificial intelligence fall under these rights. It seems that by invoking the rules of "*la darar*" and "*maslahah*" (public interest), one can utilize the "author's right" as a protective tool to encourage innovation and prevent unfair use of AI-generated productions. The main point concerns the nature of the "author" in traditional jurisprudence. In jurisprudence, the "author" is a human being. However, regarding works independently created by artificial intelligence, identifying the "right-holder" becomes problematic (the programmer, the owner of training data, the hardware owner, or the user themselves?).

The rule of *la darar*, crystallized in the tradition "*la darara wa la dirara*"

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va al-Af'al is one of the most important hadith sources of Sunni Islam, authored by Ala al-Din Ali ibn Abd al-Malik Ibn Qadi Khan al-Qaderi al-Shadhili al-Hindi, known as al-Mottaqi al-Hindi (888-975 AH). He compiled this work as a reorganization and rewriting of important books by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, such as *Javame' al-Jame'*, *al-Jame' al-Saghir*, and *Zava'ed al-Jame' al-Saghir* (Ibn Housam al-Din al-Mottaqi al-Hindi, 1979, Hadith: 4563).

(no harm nor injurious reciprocation), is one of the most key foundations for regulating artificial intelligence. This rule prohibits any action or technology that causes unconventional harm to individuals or society. Accordingly, intelligent systems that lead to discrimination, privacy violation, dissemination of false information, or any systematic social harm are unacceptable from a jurisprudential perspective. This rule imposes a heavy preventive and supervisory responsibility upon the government and relevant institutions to prevent the emergence and spread of such harms.

Summary: These concepts together form a coherent jurisprudential framework that addresses "compensatory responsibility" (*daman*) after the occurrence of damage, emphasizes "precautionary responsibility" (*itqan al-amal*) before the introduction of technology, pays attention to "economic and moral rights" (*haqq al-mo'allef*), and establishes the "preservation of public interests and prohibition of harm" (*la darar*) as an overarching red line governing all areas.

## 5.2. Capacities of German Law

Claiming damages for breach of contractual obligations has common roots in common law and Romano-Germanic systems (Hoseyni, 2020, p. 136). A rule in Roman law – "everyone is responsible for the damage caused by their act" – is the origin and basis of claiming damages in these legal systems (Jansen, 2016, p. 234; Gotanda, 2006, p. 3).

In the field of intellectual property, one of the most key capacities of German law is the explicit recognition of text and data mining (TDM) as a legitimate activity and the creation of a "special exception" for it in intellectual property laws. The German legal system regulates data protection as a fundamental right, primarily based on the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and its national implementing law, the Federal Data Protection Act (BDSG). In the field of intellectual property, by creating a mandatory TDM exception within the framework of copyright law, the German legal system has opened a clear legal pathway to overcome the fundamental challenge of the conflict between protecting works and the necessity of research utilization of texts. A prominent feature of this solution is its non-waivable nature, which prevents rights holders from prohibiting or restricting this research right. This pioneering approach demonstrates how the necessary foundation for

advancing humanities research in the age of AI can be provided without weakening the rights of creators.

In the field of liability, one of the most profound concerns is the "ambiguity in allocating responsibility." The German legal system, understanding this challenge, has designed a transparent and multi-level framework for allocating responsibility based on the "principle of algorithmic transparency" and "responsibility based on the level of influence." Within this framework, algorithm developers are required to observe "security and fairness by design" principles. Humanities researchers, as end-users, bear the responsibility of active supervision over algorithm outputs and critical interpretation of results. Research institutions are also obligated to establish supervisory systems to ensure the ethical use of AI. This preventive approach assures humanities researchers that while benefiting from AI's analytical capabilities, the limits of their responsibility are clearly defined.

## **6. Comparative Analysis: Examining the Capacities of German Law and Imami Jurisprudence for Overcoming the Challenges of Artificial Intelligence**

In the domain of data and privacy, fundamental concepts in Imami jurisprudence such as the "prohibition of spying" (*hormat al-tajassos*) and the "necessity of preserving secrets" (*lozoum hefz al-asrar*), which are rooted in Imami hadiths, can function equivalently to the "right to data privacy" in German law. In particular, the "rule of *la darar*" (no harm) – which, in final analysis, renders the processing of personal data without consent impermissible due to the unjust spiritual harm it causes – together with the "principle of enjoining good and forbidding wrong" (*al-amr bi al-marouf wa al-nahy an al-munkar*), which justifies social oversight over data privacy, makes possible the formation of a comprehensive ethical-legal framework.

In the domain of intellectual property, through the conceptual development of the "right of invention" (*haqq al-ekhtra*) and the "right of authorship" (*haqq al-ta'lif*) in Imami jurisprudence, and by invoking the "rule of dominion" (*qa'edat al-taslit: al-naso mosallatona ala amvalihem* – people have dominion over their property) on one hand, and considering

"public interest" (al-maslahah al-ammah) and the "rule of no hardship" (qa'edat la haraj) on the other, a permission similar to the "TDM exception" for research purposes can be established. Particularly by distinguishing between "material ownership" and the "moral right of the creator," and by adhering to the inclusion of "religious governance" (hokumat al-shar') for public interests, reasonable limitations on intellectual property rights can be defined in pursuit of scientific progress.

In the domain of liability, by integrating jurisprudential rules such as "la darar" (no harm), "daman" (liability), and "itlaf" (direct causation), a transparent framework for allocating responsibility can be designed. The "rule of daman yad" (liability of the possessor) explains the responsibility of the user, the "rule of itlaf" explains the responsibility of the producer, and the "rule of la darar" explains the supervisory responsibility of research institutions. Furthermore, the "principle of innocence" (asalat al-bara'ah) in cases of doubt regarding the attribution of damage, and the "rule of tasbib" (indirect causation) in distributing responsibility among multiple factors, enable the creation of a stratified system of liability.

Final Summary and Outlook: Although German law speaks the language of "positive law" and Imami jurisprudence speaks the language of "deduction of rulings," both systems ultimately seek the "realization of justice," "repulsion of harm," and "achievement of public interest." This research demonstrates that Imami jurisprudence, with its thousand-year heritage of jurisprudential deduction and its possession of a "flexible" and "rich" capacity, is not only capable of responding to the emerging challenges of artificial intelligence but can also offer distinct "indigenous and ethics-oriented solutions." Therefore, "overcoming the challenge of the AI revolution" in humanities research is not only possible but, by relying on these two legal systems and with a proper understanding of the capacities of each, can be achieved in a manner that is "responsible, balanced, and grounded in human dignity." This path is not a "repetition of the past" but a "new ijtihad" in re-reading the jurisprudential heritage to respond to the needs of the present age.

## **7. Conclusions**

The artificial intelligence revolution has confronted the research paradigm in the humanities with three fundamental challenges: ambiguity in the attribution of works, the erosion of scientific originality, and conflict in accountability. Through a comparative study of Imami jurisprudence and German law, this research has demonstrated that an effective confrontation with these challenges requires the formulation of a novel framework for the equitable distribution of responsibility.

In response to the main research question, the "Proportional Responsibility" model was presented as an innovative solution. By distributing responsibility among three main actors—the researcher (responsible for supervision and verification of accuracy), the developer (responsible for transparency and warning), and academic institutions (responsible for standardization and oversight)—this model provides a comprehensive response to the present challenges.

The integration of the capacities of Imami jurisprudence (relying on rules such as *la darar*, *daman*, and *tasbib*) and German law (with systematic mechanisms of civil liability and data protection) provides solid foundations for this model. This integration demonstrates how the challenges of artificial intelligence in humanities research can be overcome.

This research has practical implications for academic institutions: the development of ethical charters for the responsible application of artificial intelligence, the establishment of supervisory mechanisms to ensure the originality of works, and the definition of transparent protocols for disclosing AI participation in content production. Therefore, overcoming the present challenges is possible by relying on this integrative model, and it provides an opportunity to enhance the quality of research in the humanities.

The proposed model, by integrating the aforementioned foundations, defines responsibility in a share-based manner among three actors:

**The Researcher (Human):** Bears the primary responsibility for active supervision, editing, review, and final verification of the accuracy and authenticity of the content. Their share in the ultimate responsibility is realized through negligence in fulfilling this duty.

**The Developer/Creator:** Bears the primary responsibility for

transparency regarding limitations, potential errors, and the system's operational mechanisms. This responsibility arises from the principle of itqan al-amal (precision in action) in jurisprudence and producer liability in German law.

**Academic Institutions (University/Journal):** Bear the primary responsibility for formulating clear standards and establishing supervisory mechanisms. This role is the manifestation of the supervisory duty arising from the rule of la darar and principles of governance.

By rejecting the traditional model of "centralized responsibility," this model enables a more equitable distribution of responsibility and creates a balance between innovation and academic integrity.

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The author declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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