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Abstract

This study entails a theoretical reading of the Iranian modern history and follows an interdisciplinary agenda at the intersection of philosophy, psychoanalysis, economics, and politics and intends to offer a novel framework for the analysis of socio-economic development in Iran in the modern era. A brief review of Iranian modern history from the constitutional revolution, to the oil nationalization movement, the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and the recent Reformist and Green movements demonstrates that Iranian people travelled full circle. This historical experience of socio-economic development revolving around the bitter question of “why are we backward?” and its manifestation in perpetual socio-political instability and violence is the subject matter of this study. Foucault’s conceived relation between the production of truth and production of wealth captures the essence of hypothesis offered in this study. Michel Foucault (1980: 93-4) maintains that “In the last analysis, we must produce truth as we must produce wealth, indeed we must produce truth in order to produce wealth in the first place”. Based on a hybrid methodology combining hermeneutics of understanding and hermeneutics of suspicion, this study proposes that the failure to produce wealth has had particular roots in the failure in the production of truth and trust. At the heart of the proposed theoretical model is the following formula: The Iranian subject’s confused preference structure culminates in the formation of unstable coalitions which in turn leads to institutional failure, creating a chaotic social order and a turbulent history as experienced by the Iranian nation in the modern era. The following set of interrelated propositions elaborate further on the core formula of the model: Each and every Iranian person and her subjectivity and preference structure is affirmatively or negatively the site of three distinct warring regimes of truth and identity choice sets (identity markers) related to the ancient Persian Empire (Persianism), Islam, and modernity. These three historical a priori and regimes of truth act as conditions of possibility for social interactions, and are unities in multiplicities. They, in their perpetual state of tension and conflict, constitute the mutually exclusive, contradictory, and confused dimensions of the prism of the Iranian subject. The confused preference structure prevents Iranian people from organizing themselves in stable coalitions required for collective action to achieve the desired socio-economic change. The complex interplay between the state of inbetweenness and the state of belatedness makes it almost impossible to form stable coalitions in any areas of life, work, and language to achieve the desired social transformations, turning Iran into a country of unstable coalitions and alliances in macro, meso and micro levels. This in turn leads to failure in the construction of stable institutions (a social order based on rule of law or any other stable institutional structure becomes impossible) due to perpetual tension between alternative regimes of truth manifested in warring discursive formations, relations of power, and techniques of subjectification and their associated economies of affectivity. This in turn culminates in relations of power in all micro, meso, and macro levels to become discretionary, atomic, and unpredictable, producing perpetual tensions and social violence in almost all sites of social interactions, and generating small and large social earthquakes (crises, movements, and revolutions) as experienced by the Iranian people in their modern history. As such, the society oscillates between the chaotic states of socio-political anarchy emanating from irreconcilable differences between and within social assemblages and their affiliated hybrid forms of regimes of truth in the springs of freedom and repressive states of order in the winters of discontent. Each time, after the experience of chaos, the order is restored based on the emergence of a final arbiter (Iranian leviathan) as the evolved coping strategy for achieving conflict resolution. This highly volatile truth cycle produces the experience of socio-economic backwardness and violence. The explanatory power of the theoretical framework offered in the study exploring the relation between the production of truth, trust

and wealth is demonstrated via providing historical examples from strong events of Iranian modern history. The significant policy implications of the model are explored.