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Centralized State-Building and Indigenous Resistance: A Sociological Analysis of the Political-Social Transformations of the Rostam District of Mamasani in the Pahlavi Era

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ABSTRACT

The process of centralized state-building during the Pahlavi period constituted a fundamental effort to integrate the peripheries into the center. Using a socio-historical approach, this study examines the interaction between the project of authoritarian modernization and indigenous resistance in the Rostam District of Mamasani. The research method is descriptive-analytical and is based on archival documents, security reports, and field studies. The findings indicate that the policies of the Pahlavi state in Rostam Mamasani went beyond administrative change and represented an attempt to eliminate tribal autonomies and redefine power relations through the fragmentation of tribal structure, the appropriation of natural resources, and the expansion of the security network. In response, local communities adopted a spectrum of resistance strategies, ranging from armed uprisings to strategic adaptation and civil resistance. The analysis of the data indicates that indigenous resistance was not merely defensive; rather, it constituted a form of intelligent agency aimed at preserving collective identity in the face of imposed modernity. The results reveal the existence of a “development paradox,” in which modernization led to deep social ruptures and the weakening of traditional social capital. This study argues that understanding the transformations of Rostam Mamasani is key to comprehending the mechanisms of state-building in decentralized societies of the Middle East and demonstrates that modernization without attention to the indigenous context often fuels social crises.

Keywords: *centralized state-building, indigenous resistance, Rostam District of Mamasani, Pahlavi era, local agency, authoritarian modernization, political economy of centralization.*

Introduction

The project of authoritarian modernization pursued by the Pahlavi state in the Rostam region of Mamasani was not merely an administrative transformation, but rather a radical attempt to dismantle tribal autonomies and fully integrate peripheral regions into the centralized structure of the modern nation-state. Moving beyond simplistic narratives of “progress versus backwardness,” this study explains the complex dialectic of confrontation between center and periphery and argues that the inhabitants of Rostam Mamasani were not passive actors; rather, drawing on the concept of “local agency,” they designed diverse strategies for survival and for preserving collective identity



in the face of state intrusion. The study of this region as a distinguished case of tribal structure shows that Pahlavi modernization rested on three main axes: politically, through the fragmentation of tribal structure and the weakening of the mediating role of the khans; economically, through the appropriation of natural resources, the imposition of heavy taxes, and changes in the system of ownership; and culturally and socially, through the expansion of a modern and secular educational system whose aim was to replace traditional-indigenous values with national-modern values.

However, the findings of this study indicate a kind of “structural duality”; that is, although the state was able to expand its security and administrative control, this control was often superficial and based on repression in practice, and it failed to eradicate the roots of social resistance. This process led to a phenomenon that may be called the “development paradox”: a situation in which the effort to modernize not only failed to produce sustainable welfare, but also created enduring structural crises in the region by weakening traditional social capital, increasing relative poverty, and generating a deep generational rupture.

Using archival documents and field data, this study shows that modernization is not a neutral concept; rather, it is a political project that redefines the distribution of power and wealth and is always confronted with diverse forms of resistance. The necessity of conducting this research goes beyond filling gaps in regional historiography; it also offers insights for contemporary policymakers so that, by learning from the bitter experiences of past authoritarian modernizations, they may regard respect for indigenous diversity and the active participation of local communities as essential preconditions in designing sustainable development programs. Ultimately, this article seeks to reflect the voices of groups that have been ignored in official narratives and to show how ordinary people, in the face of the waves of modernity, employed their creativity and resilience to preserve their existence and identity—an approach that, while enriching the scholarly historiography of Iran, also pays tribute to the anthropology of resistance.

Theoretical Framework and Review of the Literature

A precise understanding of the political-social dynamics of the Rostam District of Mamasani during the Pahlavi era requires the use of theoretical frameworks capable of explaining the complexity of the interaction between the “centralized state” and “indigenous society”; for the existing literature on modernization in Iran generally revolves around two main axes: first, structural-functionalist views that regard modernization as a linear and inevitable process of reaching modernity, and second, critical and sociological perspectives that emphasize resistance, strategic adaptation, and the reproduction of traditional structures within modernity (1). Drawing on the theory of “state-building from above” and the concept of “local agency,” this study seeks to bridge the gap between the macro-policies of Tehran and the lived realities of Rostam Mamasani and to show how authoritarian modernization was not a simple imposition, but rather a complex dialectic of power and resistance (2).

One of the main pillars of Reza Shah’s modernization project was the creation of a centralized nation-state in which Weberian legal-rational authority would replace traditional and lineage-based authority. In his analysis of the formation of the Pahlavi state, Cronin shows that the modern army and state bureaucracy were the primary instruments for suppressing local powers and tribes (3). In this regard, the policy of forming the “Javidan Corps” and fragmenting the tribes was not only a military measure, but also a political project to eliminate traditional intermediaries of power, such as khans and begs; its objective was defined as administrative and fiscal uniformity through the destruction of regional autonomies.

With regard to Rostam Mamasani, Mollagerali Sadeghi and Mohammad Zarei have provided detailed documentation of the state's efforts to weaken the influence of the khans of Rostam Mamasani, showing how the state attempted to dismantle the hierarchical structure of the tribe by changing administrative borders, granting privileges to internal rivals within the tribe, and expanding the security network, including police stations and the gendarmerie (4, 5). In his examination of the tribal revolts of Fars, Bayati also emphasizes that these revolts were not merely defensive reactions, but attempts to preserve economic and political interests against the assault of state capitalism and heavy taxation (6). Therefore, the existing literature shows that state-building in Rostam Mamasani was a violent and imposed process accompanied by the destruction of the tribal institution, and this state approach pushed local communities toward coping strategies.

In contrast to the state-centered approach, the literature on "indigenous resistance" emphasizes the active role of local actors in shaping their own destiny. In *Fragile Resistance*, Foran shows that Iran's rural and tribal communities never completely submitted to the central state; rather, they adopted strategies such as concealment, tax evasion, and instrumental use of new laws for survival (2). With regard to Rostam Mamasani, Bahmanbeigi, in *My Bukhara, My Tribe*, offers valuable memoirs on how elders and tribal notables managed relations with the state, showing how the people of the Rostam Mamasani tribe, while outwardly preserving loyalty to the Shah, in practice maintained their operational independence in managing internal affairs, resolving disputes, and mobilizing resources (7).

In addition, Shahshahani, in a pedagogical study of the everyday life of nomadic women of the Rostam Mamasani tribe, shows how women played a vital role in transmitting indigenous identity and cultural resistance by preserving customs, language, and kinship structures (8). These findings are consistent with James Scott's theory of "everyday resistance," which defines resistance not necessarily in the form of armed rebellions, but as small and subtle acts of defying the commands of the powerful. Rezaei and Habibi Fahliani also show, through the examination of SAVAK documents and security reports, that although security control over Rostam Mamasani increased, the cultural and social influence of the state in the deeper layers of society remained limited; this indicates the deep gap between the physical presence of the state and its real influence (9, 10). The literature on the consequences of modernization in peripheral regions emphasizes a phenomenon referred to as the "development paradox" or "social rupture." Abrahamian and Behnoud note that land reforms and modernization programs, although theoretically designed to alleviate poverty, in practice produced new class divisions, destroyed the traditional subsistence economy, and generated social instability (1, 11).

In Rostam Mamasani, Sadeghi, in *Mamasani: A Plain Full of Bread and a Basin Full of Blood*, addresses the bitter consequences of land-grabbing policies and changes in the agricultural pattern, showing how the fragmentation of the tribe and the disappearance of traditional securities led to increasing poverty and forced migrations (12). Majidi, in his study of the history and geography of Rostam Mamasani, also emphasizes that the entry of modern institutions, such as schools and courts, without attention to the cultural context of the region, led to an identity crisis and a decline in respect for traditional authorities. This confrontation between "tradition" and "modernity" did not mean the complete replacement of one by the other, but rather their incompatible coexistence and the production of continuous tensions (5). Despite the considerable volume of research on the contemporary history of Iran and the situation of the tribes, studies that specifically and through a sociological-analytical approach examine the complex interaction between centralized state-building and indigenous resistance in the Rostam District of Mamasani remain limited. Most previous studies have either been descriptive-historical, such as the

works of Habibi Fahliani and Majidi, or have focused on specific aspects such as armed rebellions, as in Bayati's work (5, 6, 10). No study has comprehensively analyzed the mechanisms of "strategic adaptation" and "subtle agency" among the communities of Rostam Mamasani in the face of the multilayered pressures of the Pahlavi state during the period from 1925 to 1979. By filling this gap, the present study seeks to integrate archival documents, local memoirs, and theories of historical sociology in order to offer an analytical model of the dynamics of power in Rostam Mamasani. It argues that resistance in Rostam Mamasani was a complex spectrum of reactions that included tactical cooperation, indirect resistance, and the preservation of cultural identity; this pattern is a clear example of the way indigenous communities interacted with the project of authoritarian modernization in contemporary Iran (9, 13).

Historical Background and the Social Context of the Rostam District of Mamasani before the Pahlavi Period

To deeply understand why the people of the Rostam District of Mamasani displayed such intense and complex resistance to the authoritarian modernization policies of the Pahlavi era, it is necessary first to return to the fundamental political, economic, and social structures of this region during the Qajar period and even earlier; for the local autonomies and rigid kinship networks that became the main targets of suppression and fragmentation by the central state were rooted in centuries of lived experience, ecological adaptation to a harsh mountainous environment, and indigenous managerial patterns that bore no resemblance to the bureaucratic structures of Tehran.

The Rostam District of Mamasani, located on the slopes of the central Zagros, has always been, because of its strategic geopolitical position, access to limited but vital water resources, and rugged topography, the scene of complex and sometimes contradictory interactions between major regional powers such as the Afsharids, the Zands, and the Qajars, on the one hand, and local leaders and tribal khans, on the other. The mountainous and difficult-to-access geography of this region made the access of the center of power to the peripheries difficult for centuries and provided its inhabitants with a form of practical and informal autonomy, in which the central government could exercise direct influence only during periods of relative stability and weakness among local forces. In other periods, real and executive power was entirely concentrated in the hands of tribal khans and tribal elders. This situation caused regional identity to be shaped more on the basis of blood, tribal, and local loyalties than on commitment to national institutions or the centralized state; as a result, any attempt to impose uniform laws from Tehran encountered a wall of natural and human resistance rooted in the long history of relative independence in this region (14).

During the Qajar period, the political structure of Rostam Mamasani was based on a tribal and familial system in which the great khans played a key and irreplaceable mediating role between the weak central government and the people, and this mediation formed the core of the region's social order. Because of chronic structural weakness, a shortage of funds, and a growing need to reduce administrative and military costs, the Qajar state delegated the authority to collect taxes, secure roads, and maintain public order to tribal khans. In return, it recognized their internal autonomy in managing domestic affairs and even used it to stabilize borders. In Rostam Mamasani, this structure produced a strict but functional social hierarchy in which loyalty to the khan guaranteed collective security, the relatively fair distribution of resources, and dispute resolution. Disputes were resolved not through state courts and complex bureaucracy, but through local councils composed of elders, clerics, and family notables, who acted according to custom, indigenous habits, and the law of honor. These unwritten and uncodified rules created a firm

moral and legal framework for everyday life, one that operated even beyond the formal laws of the state and guaranteed the legitimacy of local authority. Therefore, the legitimacy of local rule did not arise from a letter of appointment from Tehran, but was based on the consent of the community, the khan's ability to ensure security and justice, and adherence to customary norms that no external institution could easily replace (15).

Economically, the livelihood of the people of the Rostam Mamasani tribe was a combination of nomadic pastoralism, rain-fed agriculture, and horticulture in fertile plains, all of which depended heavily on seasonal cycles and water resources; this economy also determined the foundations of political power. The plains of Rostam Mamasani, because of their fertile soil and permanent rivers such as the Kor River, were among the centers of grain, cotton, and agricultural production in southern Iran and were of high strategic importance for supplying food to large cities such as Shiraz. However, land ownership was not concentrated and privatized in the hands of khans and great landowners; rather, access to pastures, water reservoirs, and water resources was guaranteed through customary rights, tribal quotas, and kinship relations. The tribal economy was based on cooperation, collective guarantees, and shared responsibility in the face of crises, not on individual competition and modern capitalism. This gave the community high resilience in the face of natural crises such as drought or flood and prevented any individual from becoming alone the victim of absolute poverty. Control over water resources was the most important factor of political and social power in this region, and the khans preserved their influence and gained the trust of the masses by intelligently, fairly, and traditionally managing the distribution of water. Therefore, economy and politics were intertwined in Rostam Mamasani, and any attempt to change the structure of ownership, privatize resources, or impose nontraditional water management directly threatened the foundations of local power and destroyed the tribal welfare system that had endured for centuries (4).

From a cultural and social perspective, the identity of the people of the Rostam Mamasani tribe was strongly tied to the Mamasani-Persian language, specific tribal customs, local music, and the prominent and multidimensional role of women in preserving traditions. Women were not only responsible for managing the household, raising children, and caring for children; they also played an indirect but highly effective and sometimes decisive role in political decision-making processes, intertribal diplomacy, and even peace negotiations. Their role in preserving family cohesion and transmitting indigenous values to the next generation was the backbone of the region's cultural resistance. The institutions of the majles and divan were of vital importance in resolving social issues, arbitration, and handling complaints; within them, the words of elders, sages, and family notables stood above any written legal ruling, and social respect was measured on the basis of age, wisdom, and a record of service to the community. This social structure created a high level of social capital, deep mutual trust, and group solidarity across society, enabling it to resist external pressures and sudden transformations. Internal cohesion, tribal solidarity, and a sense of belonging to place made the Rostam Mamasani tribe one of the most resistant regions of Fars against sudden and imposed transformations, and any entry of foreign forces or homogenizing policies was met with organized and sometimes violent resistance. Therefore, when the Pahlavi modernization project entered this space with the aim of fragmenting these sacred structures, removing the khans, and imposing the laws of schools and courts, it encountered a firm barrier of cultural, social, and political resistance rooted in thousands of years of lived experience, collective identity, and adaptation to a harsh mountainous environment; from the people's perspective, this was an assault on the totality of their existence (8).

The Pahlavi State's Strategies for Penetrating the Periphery

In pursuit of the project of centralized modernization and the creation of a unified nation-state, the Pahlavi state employed a set of multifaceted strategies to penetrate the peripheries and suppress local autonomies. Their ultimate objective was to eliminate traditional intermediaries of power and make the relationship between the center and citizens direct. One of the most important of these strategies was the fragmentation of tribal structure and the weakening of the economic and political foundations of the khans; the state believed that as long as the khans controlled military forces, including the chupanbashis, and the financial resources of the tribes, the absolute sovereignty of law could not be established. Through the formation of the Javidan Corps and the expansion of the gendarmerie network in strategic points, the state attempted to take the monopoly of legitimate violence away from the tribes and place it in the hands of the national army. This policy was not merely a military measure, but a political instrument for dismantling the hierarchical structure of the tribe and transforming nomads into settled villagers or urban residents under state supervision.

In the Rostam District of Mamasani, this policy led to the sowing of discord among different clans, the granting of administrative privileges to the internal rivals of the khans, and the limitation of their influence to restricted cultural domains. By removing the khans from the process of dispute resolution and assigning this task to state courts, the traditional legitimacy of local leaders was weakened, and people were forced to refer to alien institutions to resolve their problems. Changing administrative borders and separating tribal regions from the traditional spheres of influence of the khans was another key instrument of the state for weakening local power. This caused the rupture of kinship ties and the decline of social solidarity at the tribal level, placing each clan independently and more weakly before the central state. Therefore, the main objective here was the destruction of the tribe as an autonomous political-social unit (6).

The second strategy was the appropriation of natural resources, especially water and land, as an instrument of political and economic control. Relying on the principles of private ownership and document registration, the Pahlavi state attempted to abolish the customary and collective rights of tribes over pastures and water resources and to place them under the control of the treasury or large companies. The fertile plains of Rostam Mamasani, because of their high agricultural potential, received special state attention for increasing export products such as cotton and grain. However, this agricultural development often came at the cost of the loss of nomadic pastures, and many poor nomads and villagers were deprived of access to their vital resources. The privatization of public lands and forests not only destroyed the subsistence economy of the tribes, but also created a new class divide between wealthy landowners, who often cooperated with the state, and poor peasants and nomads. State control over water resources and the imposition of modern irrigation systems without consultation with indigenous people disrupted the ecological balance of the region and caused springs to dry up and quality of life to decline. Economy and politics were intertwined in Rostam Mamasani, and any attempt to change the ownership structure or the management of resources directly threatened the foundations of local power (4).

The third strategy was the expansion of the modern security, policing, and judicial network, whose purpose was permanent surveillance over social behavior and the prevention of any anti-government activity. Through the establishment of police stations, civil registration offices, and public courts, the state attempted to monitor private spaces and local arbitration practices and to criminalize any action outside the framework of written state laws. Although this security network was ostensibly designed to maintain order, it was deliberately used to identify, track,

and suppress political opponents and activists of indigenous resistance. SAVAK and the national security police, by creating a network of informants among the indigenous population itself, destroyed public trust and imposed an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty on society. The physical presence of security forces in all layers of everyday life prevented the formation of any independent local organization. Moreover, the compulsory registration of surnames and the issuance of identity documents were attempts to register the population precisely and control people's movements; these measures reduced collective and tribal identities to individual and state identities (1).

The fourth strategy was cultural and social engineering through modern education, changes in dress, and the imposition of standard Persian. The Pahlavi state believed that to create a loyal citizen, traditional and tribal mentalities had to be replaced with national and secular values. Policies related to clothing, such as the prohibition of the black chador and the compulsion to use a scarf or hat, as well as the entrance of girls into private or state schools, constituted a direct attack on the traditional lifestyle and the role of women in preserving indigenous culture. These policies not only produced a generational rupture between parents and children, but also intensified feelings of shame and alienation from indigenous identity among the younger generation. The institutions of the majles and divan were of vital importance in resolving social issues, and within them, the words of elders and notables stood above any legal judgment. This social structure generated a high level of social capital and mutual trust in society and showed strong resistance to external pressures. Internal cohesion and tribal solidarity made the Rostam Mamasani tribe one of the most resistant regions of Fars against sudden transformations, and any entry of foreign forces or imposed policies was met with organized resistance. Therefore, when the Pahlavi modernization project entered this space with the aim of fragmenting these structures, eliminating the khans, and imposing the laws of schools and courts, it encountered a firm barrier of cultural, social, and political resistance rooted in thousands of years of lived experience and adaptation to a harsh mountainous environment (8).

Forms and Mechanisms of Indigenous Resistance in Rostam Mamasani

The resistance of the people of the Rostam District of Mamasani against the authoritarian modernization policies of the Pahlavi state was neither unified nor homogeneous; rather, it included a complex and multilayered spectrum of reactions, ranging from overt armed rebellions to subtle and everyday forms of "indirect resistance." This diversity in the forms of resistance reflects the flexibility of indigenous society in adapting to external pressures without the complete collapse of its identity.

Peripheral communities in Iran never completely submitted to the central state; instead, they always adopted strategies for survival and for preserving a minimum level of practical independence. In Rostam Mamasani, this resistance first emerged in the form of armed rebellions and local unrest aimed at preventing the fragmentation of the tribe and the suppression of the khans. Tribal revolts in Fars, especially in the 1920s, were not only defensive reactions to heavy taxation and tribal fragmentation, but also conscious efforts to preserve the traditional structure of power and economic resources. In the Rostam District of Mamasani as well, security reports from the Pahlavi period indicate continuous and sometimes violent tensions between gendarmerie forces and groups of tribal youth who, as chupanbashis or traditional paramilitary forces, were responsible for protecting clan interests.

These clashes often occurred in mountainous and difficult-to-access areas where state access was limited, allowing the resisters to return to their natural refuges after confrontation and, through guerrilla tactics and retreat into the mountains, increase the cost of repression for the state. However, with the growing military power of the state and its use of modern weapons such as aircraft and artillery, direct rebellions gradually gave way to other

forms of resistance that were less traceable and less easily suppressed. This transition from armed resistance to civil and cultural resistance indicates the political and strategic maturity of indigenous society in confronting existential threats, where the preservation of life and social cohesion became a higher priority than direct and deadly confrontation (2).

One of the most important mechanisms of indirect resistance was “tax evasion” and “systematic concealment” regarding population and property. In order to impose precise control and collect taxes fairly, the Pahlavi state needed exact population registration and knowledge of individuals’ income sources; however, the inhabitants of the Rostam District of Mamasani prevented these efforts through full cooperation among themselves and the creation of a network of silence and deception. Many families did not register their children during state censuses or declared the number of their livestock to be lower than it actually was. This act was not only an economic measure to reduce the tax burden, but also a political expression rejecting state sovereignty over the private and economic lives of the people and amounted to an implicit declaration of independence from the centralized bureaucracy of Tehran.

Concealing seasonal migrations and nomadic movements was also another common strategy, because the state sought to restrict the free movement of nomads by registering residents; this restriction of movement meant the economic and social disarmament of the tribes. Such concealment required collective coordination and deep trust among clan members, and any breach of this wall of silence by the state was accompanied by severe threats and heavy punishments. Any information given to state officials was regarded as betrayal of the tribe. Therefore, tax evasion and concealment symbolized the people’s deep mistrust of the central state and their effort to preserve economic autonomy against the assault of state bureaucracy. This silent resistance for years deprived the state treasury of potential resources while simultaneously strengthening kinship networks (9).

The instrumental use of new laws by local elites was another form of intelligent resistance in which tribal notables and elders used modern legal instruments to preserve their traditional interests. By learning the basic principles of law and hiring defense attorneys, they attempted to defend their lands and customary rights in state courts. Some khans and wealthy landowners, by playing within the framework of the new laws, were able to consolidate their position and even gain greater influence. This phenomenon shows that resistance does not necessarily mean overt opposition; it may appear as “tactical adaptation,” that is, the outward acceptance of state laws while traditional and kinship logics continue to prevail in practice. This duality of behavior confused state officials and enabled indigenous society to preserve the necessary space for reproducing its internal structures, while also benefiting from new legal advantages such as documentary land ownership. In addition, the formation of informal support networks to help those pursued by security forces or those who had lost their resources was a form of social resistance that strengthened group cohesion and showed that the tribal welfare system was still alive and that the state had no substitute for it (9).

The role of women in preserving indigenous identity and cultural resistance was a neglected but vital aspect of resistance in the Rostam Mamasani tribe. While men might have been engaged in the battlefield or in politics, women formed the backbone of cultural resistance by preserving the local language, customs, music, and everyday lifestyle. A comprehensive study of the everyday life of nomadic women of the Rostam Mamasani tribe shows that women played a key role in keeping regional identity alive by resisting compulsory changes in dress and lifestyle and by transmitting indigenous values to the next generation. Although the entrance of girls into state schools was viewed by the state as an instrument of assimilation, many families sent girls to these schools in order to obtain official credentials for possible advantages while attempting to cultivate critical awareness and political

consciousness in them so that they could confront the system more effectively in the future. This dual approach indicates the creativity and flexibility of indigenous society in the face of cultural threats. By turning the home into a base of cultural resistance, women prevented the disappearance of oral history and indigenous knowledge. Ultimately, resistance in Rostam Mamasani was a combination of fighting, fleeing, negotiating, and preserving. It shows how indigenous communities, despite all the pressures of authoritarian modernization, were able to maintain the core of their identity and social organization to a considerable extent, and this long-term resistance also laid the groundwork for the later revolution (8).

Analysis of the Findings: The Development Paradox and Social Ruptures

The analysis of the data obtained in the present study shows that the process of authoritarian modernization in the Rostam District of Mamasani, despite ambitious slogans about progress, modernity, and public welfare, led to the emergence of a complex phenomenon called the “development paradox.” This was a situation in which the central state’s intensive efforts to integrate the region politically, economically, and culturally not only failed to achieve the intended goals, but also generated deep social ruptures, destroyed traditional social capital, intensified relative poverty, and produced new generational and class-based divisions rooted in the fundamental contradiction between the bureaucratic-centralized logic of the Pahlavi state and the kinship-local logic of indigenous society. This paradox can be observed in various economic, political, and cultural dimensions and indicates that development without attention to indigenous context, local identity, and existing institutional structures does not necessarily mean the improvement of quality of life; rather, it can fuel instability and social crises. From an economic perspective, land reform policies and the privatization of natural resources, although theoretically designed to increase productivity and alleviate poverty, in practice led to the destruction of the subsistence economy of tribes and poor villagers. The fragmentation of the tribe and the disappearance of traditional securities caused many nomads and villagers who lacked land and modern agricultural skills to be removed from the cycle of production and turned into marginal urban laborers or a suspended rural stratum.

This process created a new class divide between wealthy landowners, who often cooperated with the state and acquired more land, and poor peasants and nomads. Collective solidarity, which had previously been based on the fair distribution of resources and shared responsibility, gave way to individual competition and the accumulation of wealth. State control over water resources and the imposition of modern irrigation systems without consultation with indigenous people disrupted the ecological balance of the region and caused springs to dry up and quality of life to decline, because these systems were incompatible with traditional patterns of water management based on time-based allocation and customary rights. Therefore, economy and politics were intertwined in Rostam Mamasani, and any attempt to change the structure of ownership or resource management directly threatened the foundations of local power and destroyed the tribal welfare system that had endured for centuries (4).

From a political perspective, the social ruptures caused by the fragmentation of tribal structure and the weakening of the role of the khans led to a power vacuum and confusion in the local decision-making system. By removing the khans from the dispute resolution process and assigning this task to state courts, the traditional legitimacy of local leaders was weakened, and people were forced to refer to alien and inaccessible institutions to resolve their problems. Because of their cultural and linguistic distance from local people, these institutions often failed to address complaints fairly and efficiently, increasing the sense of injustice and resentment toward the central state. Moreover, changing administrative borders and separating tribal regions from the traditional spheres of influence of the khans

was another key state instrument for weakening local power. This caused the rupture of kinship ties and the decline of social solidarity at the tribal level, placing each clan independently and more weakly before the central state. This administrative fragmentation not only weakened group cohesion, but also prepared the ground for destructive rivalries among different clans, which the state exploited through a policy of "divide and rule." The extensive security network of SAVAK and the national security police, by creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, destroyed public trust and prevented the formation of any independent civil organization. The physical presence of security forces in all layers of everyday life not only restricted individual freedoms, but also created a form of moral duality in society in which individuals were forced to align their outward behavior with state values while continuing to preserve traditions and cultural resistance in the privacy of the home. This duality eroded mutual trust at the societal level and produced a society of suspicious and isolated individuals in which empathy and solidarity were replaced by caution and conservatism (1).

In the cultural and social dimension, the cultural engineering policies of the Pahlavi state, such as compulsory changes in dress, the prohibition of the black chador, the compulsory entrance of girls into private schools, and the imposition of standard Persian, constituted a direct assault on the traditional lifestyle and the role of women in preserving indigenous culture. These policies not only produced a generational rupture between parents and children, but also reinforced feelings of shame and alienation from indigenous identity among the younger generation. Although the entrance of girls into state schools was viewed by the state as an instrument of education and progress, in practice, because of secular and nationalist curricular content that bore no resemblance to religious and tribal values, it produced value conflicts in students' minds. With the weakening of the institutions of the majles and divan and their replacement by state courts, the spiritual and moral authority of local elders was damaged, and young people listened less to the advice of their elders. This intergenerational rupture prevented families from effectively fulfilling their educational role and transmitting their values, thereby laying the groundwork for deviant behaviors and identity crises among the younger generation.

Furthermore, the state's attempt to register surnames and issue identity documents reduced collective and tribal identities to individual and state identities, thereby weakening the sense of belonging to tribe and region. Ultimately, when the Pahlavi modernization project entered this space with the aim of fragmenting these structures, eliminating the khans, and imposing the laws of schools and courts, it encountered a firm barrier of cultural, social, and political resistance rooted in thousands of years of lived experience and adaptation to a harsh mountainous environment (8).

The findings of this study show that the development paradox in the Rostam District of Mamasani was the direct result of the centralized policymakers of Tehran ignoring the social and cultural ecology of the region. The Pahlavi state, through a one-dimensional view of development that focused solely on quantitative indicators such as the number of schools, hospitals, and asphalt roads, neglected the complexities of tribal social structure. Rapid and compulsory changes, without providing the necessary infrastructure for acceptance and adaptation, led to social shock and institutional collapse. Therefore, the main lesson of this study for contemporary policymakers is that genuine development must be based on respect for cultural diversity, the participation of local communities in decision-making, and the preservation of effective indigenous social structures. Ignoring these principles not only fails to produce sustainable modernization, but can also create the ground for deep social dissatisfaction and long-term instability. Indigenous resistance in Rostam Mamasani, although apparently defeated, in reality preserved the core of its identity and social cohesion, and this silent resistance also laid the groundwork for the later Islamic

Revolution; for, upon witnessing the failure of Pahlavi authoritarian modernization, local people came to believe that the only path to salvation was a return to authentic roots and independence from the center.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that the process of centralized state-building in the Rostam District of Mamasani during the Pahlavi era was not a linear and peaceful transition toward modernity, but the outcome of confrontation between the “authoritarian governance of the center” and the “resistance-oriented agency of the periphery.” Pahlavi modernization and homogenizing policies, by ignoring the political, social, and ecological conditions of the tribes and relying on Western models incompatible with Iran’s nomadic society, created deep social, economic, and cultural ruptures instead of fully integrating local autonomies into the structure of the modern state.

This situation produced a kind of “development paradox”; that is, the state’s effort to establish centralized order, administrative legality, and unified sovereignty in practice led to social disorder, the destruction of traditional social capital, the intensification of relative poverty, and the formation of class and generational divisions. From a political and institutional perspective, the fragmentation of tribal structure and the weakening of the role of the khans as traditional intermediaries of power, although regarded by the central state as a precondition for establishing the rule of law, in practice caused a power vacuum, reduced the efficiency of local dispute-resolution systems, and weakened support and security networks. With the removal of the khans and their replacement by state institutions unfamiliar with local custom, people were forced to refer to courts and administrative forces that were inaccessible for resolving their problems; this increased feelings of injustice, mistrust, and dissatisfaction with the central state. In addition, changing administrative borders and separating tribal regions from the traditional sphere of influence of the khans weakened kinship ties and clan cohesion and intensified internal rivalries among clans. Economically, the privatization of natural resources, the registration of public lands, and the imposition of an individual ownership model weakened the cooperative and customary logic of the tribal economy and concentrated benefits in favor of a group of landowners aligned with the state.

This process increased the relative poverty of poor peasants and nomads and removed many of them from the cycle of production. Control over water resources and the implementation of irrigation projects without indigenous participation also disrupted the ecological balance of the region and led to the decline of pastures, the drying up of springs, and the deterioration of quality of life. As a result, economic development without attention to distributive justice and indigenous livelihood infrastructures led to the enrichment of a minority and the impoverishment of the majority. In the cultural and social dimension, policies such as compulsory changes in dress, restrictions on symbols of nomadic life, the expansion of state schools, and the imposition of standard Persian placed pressure on the traditional lifestyle and indigenous identity. These policies caused generational rupture, value conflict, and a sense of alienation among the younger generation.

Nevertheless, nomadic women of the Rostam Mamasani tribe played an important role in cultural resistance by preserving the local language, music, customs, and the transmission of values within the family. The weakening of local institutions such as the majles and divan and their replacement by state courts also reduced the moral authority of elders and made social cohesion vulnerable. In summary, the historical experience of Rostam Mamasani shows that authoritarian and centralized development, although it may produce limited physical achievements such as roads and buildings, leads to the destruction of public trust, cultural rupture, forced migration, and social dissatisfaction if it is not accompanied by the genuine participation of local communities and respect for indigenous

institutional structures. Therefore, sustainable development in tribal and indigenous regions is possible only when it is based on the acceptance of cultural diversity, distributive justice, the participation of local people, and a constructive connection between tradition and modernity.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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