

Revised model of social change and acceleration: the case of Iranian society in the 1960s and 1970s

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to address the processes of social changes in terms of the theory of social acceleration. It begins with an outline of the theory of social acceleration and discusses how an investigation into the driving forces of social acceleration can be used to explain the dynamics of social stability and change. It criticizes the acceleration theory because its focus is merely on high-industrialized western societies as well as the neglect of normative and religious aspects in the processes of social acceleration and change. This article proposes a revised model of social acceleration and applies it to Iranian society. It identifies the main features of acceleration-cycle formed in Iranian society in the 1960s and 1970s to answer the question of why the cycle of acceleration could not establish a self-propelling acceleratory formation as a prime requirement for preserving social stability.

KEYWORDS: social acceleration, social stability and change, stability through dynamization, Iranian society

INTRODUCTION

Theorizing social changes from a sociological perspective deems highly relevant studying the social dynamics of societies, including the economic regime of production and consumption, the formation of new social groups and strata, changes in cultural patterns and action (Foran, 1993a; 2005; Kurzman, 2004; Opp, 2009; Mann, 2013; Beck, 2018). The theory of social acceleration developed by Hartmut Rosa (Rosa, 2005, 2010) makes it possible to investigate underlying economic and socio-cultural mechanisms of social change and stability in modern society. However, this theory lays its focus mainly on highly industrialized West-European and North-American societies, analyzing the processes of social acceleration and deceleration, their social,

cultural, and economic roots, and consequences for the individual and collective life of subjects in *accelerated societies*. So, the question arises here “what about other societies that cannot easily be put into the category of accelerated societies?”, “Is the acceleration theory relevant to non-western societies, at all?” To answer these questions, it serves the theory, seeking to shed new light on the processes of social change in Iranian society as a non-western society. Hence, this article follows aims. First, it criticizes the acceleration theory for its western-centrism and suggests an analytical strategy that makes it relevant for other societies. Second, it insists on the role of religion and religious practices in social changes, showing religious promises appeared to be key sources of social mobility. It shows that religious promises functioned as a revolutionary ideology in the case of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The last point presents a critique of the theory of social acceleration that basically is about a secular society and maintains the cultural motor of social acceleration “the promise of eternity through acceleration” (Rosa, 2010, p. 29). Third, by applying the acceleration theory, it explains the social, cultural, and economic processes that led to the 1979 Iranian revolution.

Therefore, firstly I outline the theory of social acceleration and the three driving forces of social acceleration. Then, I suggest that an analysis of social accretion in other societies might be undertaken by focusing on the modus operandi of each motor of social acceleration and the ways they are interlocked. Finally, I use this suggestion for the case of Iranian society in the period leading up to the revolution of 1979, arguing that the certain cycle of acceleration established in the 1960s and 1970s was no longer capable of preserving stability through constant dynamization and growth.

1. UNDERSTANDING OF MODERN SOCIETIES: A BASIC MODEL

Despite a wide range of definitions and conceptualizations about modernity and modernization processes, as Van der Loo and Van Reijn (1997) suggested, modernization is definable as four central processes of individualization, rationalization, differentiation, and domestication nature, which in turn run in four relevant spheres of personality, culture, social structure, and stance toward nature. These processes have been the main objects of analysis of the founders of sociology, too. Specifically, they have been interested in the paradoxical flipsides of modernization processes. For example, Simmel argued that the individualization processes lead to profound changes in the personality and psychic aspects of the modern man. Weber was concerned with “the iron cage” as a paradoxical consequence of rationalization. The disintegration that goes hand in hand with the processes of differentiation was the focus of analysis by Durkheim. Similarly, in the context of the development of capitalism, Marx argued that the instrumental domestication of nature could lead to a backlash with enormous catastrophic consequences for the entire civilization (Van der Loo and Van Reijn, 1997; Rosa, 2009, p. 79). This way of reconstructing the core ideas of the classics of sociology provide us with a conceptual scheme through which the main processes of the social change and stability of modern society can be analyzed without falling back into old categorizing terms, such as traditional vs. modern societies, developed vs.

developing societies, and so on.

Now, in this light, Rosa claims that adequate understanding of modernization processes requires to add a temporal perspective to our analysis (Rosa, 2009, p. 79). Based on the assumption that acceleration is inherent in modernity and modernization processes, the theory of social acceleration proposes an analytical model for understanding the underlying dynamics of modern societies (Rosa, 2005; 2010, Rosa et al., 2017). According to this, a society is *modern* “when it shifts towards a mode of dynamic stabilization, i.e. when it systematically requires growth, innovation, and acceleration for its structural reproduction” (Rosa et al., 2017, p. 54; Döre et al., 2009). This article draws on two assumptions, that is, modern society is an accelerating society (1), and it perseveres its stability though dynamization (2), focusing on the relationships and interactions between the three dimensions of social acceleration and the processes of social changes.

Applying the above definition to explain the mechanism of social stability and change needs to restore to the three dimensions of social acceleration, as Rosa suggested, namely, “technological acceleration”, “acceleration of social change”, and “acceleration of pace of life” (Rosa, 2009, p. 80ff).

1.1. Three motors of social acceleration

As mentioned above, *technological acceleration* is the most obvious form of acceleration and refers to the acceleration of transport, communication, and production. Therefore, this dimension is measurable through increasing the average speed of relative processes (Rosa, 2009, p. 82).

The acceleration of social changes describes as “acceleration of society itself”, specifically, the speeding-up of the rate of changes in a wide variety of social phenomena and spheres, from the patterns of behavior and action, the dynamization of social relationships and associations, gender relations, to fashion and lifestyle, and social values (Rosa, 2005, p. 179ff; 2010, p. 17-18). To grasp it, Rosa draws on the ideas of German philosopher Hermann Lübbe who claims that Western societies experience increasing “the contraction of the present” as a “consequence of the accelerating rates of cultural and social innovation” (Rosa, 2009, p. 83). In this context, Rosa defines also the acceleration of the pace of life as „*an increase in the decay-rates of the reliability of experiences and expectations and by the contraction of the time-spans definable as the ‘present’*” (Rosa, 2010, p. 18-19, emphasis in original). The processes of “contraction of the present” can be empirically measured, as Rosa suggested, by investigating the changes in the two key institutions of production and reproduction of society, namely the family and the occupational system. Accordingly, the idea is that changes in the realms of family and work have accelerated in the course of modernity from a *generational* pace in classic modernity to an *intragenerational* pace in late modernity (Rosa, 2009, p. 84). The high rates of change can also be seen in the considerable generational mobility and transformation in terms of occupation and social status, as well as in the profound changes in family structure (Rosa, 2010, p. 44ff).

Finally, with *the acceleration of the pace of life* completes the cycle of social accel-

eration, as illustrated in figure 1. This dimension is directly related to everyday life in modern societies already addressed by scholars from Simmel to Robert Levine to John Thonlinson. In Rosa's terms, the acceleration of the pace of life is "the speed and compression of actions and experiences in everyday life" (Rosa, 2009, p. 85). Again, this dimension can be empirically measured by adopting a subjective or an objective approach: the subjective dimension is measured by the time experiences that individuals have in their everyday life; such as the familiar perception that time is passing faster than usual, as well as the tensions and pressures result from time scarcity. The objective dimension, on the other hand, is measurable in two ways: 1) The count of the number of completed actions in a given time unit, and 2) The exploration of strategies that people use to speed up their activities in their everyday life, for example through multitasking skills (Rosa, 2010, p. 22; 2005, p. 114ff).

Along these lines, "the external key accelerators" or "motors" which lay behind each of the dimensions of social acceleration, are technological innovation and capitalist competition for the technological acceleration, functional differentiation—as a strategy to reduce social complexities and time pressures—for the acceleration of social change, and the secular promise of acceleration –eternal life due to speeding-up- for the acceleration of the tempo of life (Rosa, 2009, pp. 90-93; 2010, p. 13ff.).

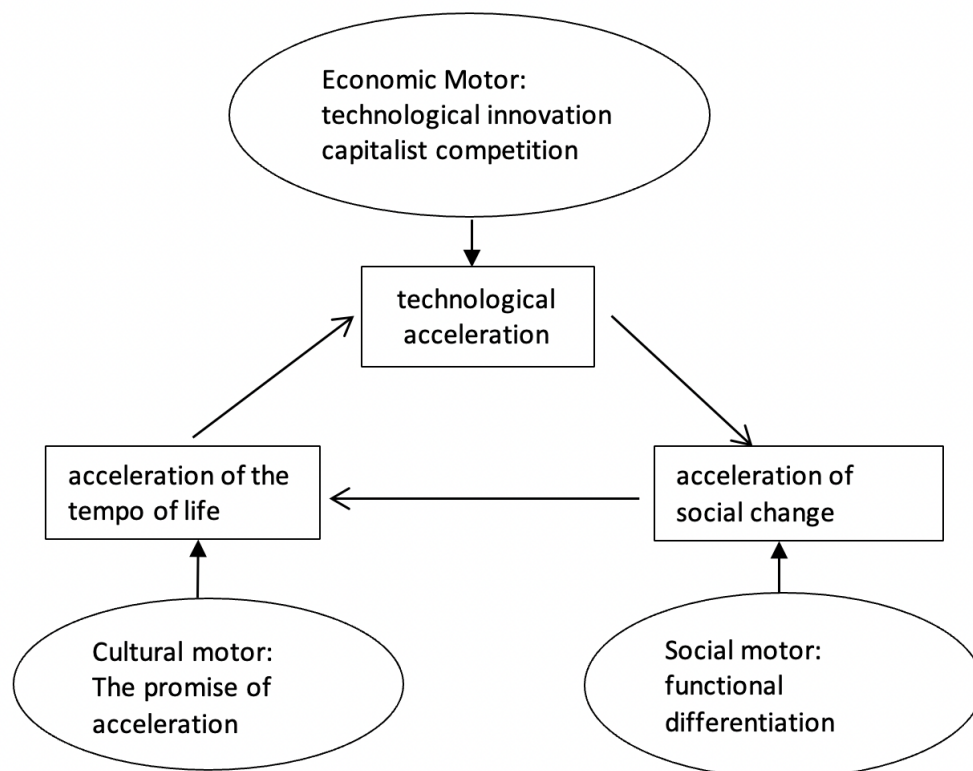


Figure1: Cycle of acceleration and its driving forces (Rosa, 2005, p. 309; 2009, p. 93)

Source: own elaboration.

As the figure above shows, the three dimensions of social acceleration are interlocked and form a cycle of acceleration. Thus, Rosa claims that in modern societies are expected to establish a kind of a self-propelling acceleration cycle that no longer

requires external driving forces (Rosa, 2005, pp. 308-9; 2010, p. 31ff). In fact, in this context is the thesis on modern societies comprehensible that they only can maintain their stability through dynamization, i.e. through constant acceleration, innovation, and growth.

Therefore, the outlined acceleration cycle can be taken up and reevaluated in a critical vein to develop an acceleration model that is more relevant to the social and cultural conditions of other forms of social life.

2. ACCELERATION IN NON-WESTERN SOCIETIES: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

The theory of social acceleration has developed Eurocentric assumptions based on the social, cultural, and economic conditions of highly industrialized Western societies. Thus, it makes the theory vulnerable to the accusations of eurocentrism as well as to naïve accounts in the face of diverse social formations and heterogeneous cultural contexts. To study social change and stability, hence, this article suggests a reconsideration of the requirements and conditions of social acceleration by placing focus primarily on *the three driving forces of social acceleration*. In doing so, we need to determine the modus operandi of each motor of social acceleration and ask how they are interrelated.

Thus, an analysis of the processes of social change and stability can be undertaken in the three interrelated fields as follows:

(1) *Functional analysis* or the analysis of tensions and the (dys)functionalities of sub-systems *within* the driving forces of social acceleration. In this context, several studies have already carried out which contributed radical social changes to the dysfunctionalities of social systems, for example, due to the rapid implementation of modernization plans in a top-down, autocratic way (Huntington, 1968; McDaniel, 1991; Tazmini, 2012; Ritter, 2018). Apart from political reasons, from the perspective of social acceleration, dysfunctionality may occur when a highly accelerating sector develops within the economic motor of social acceleration without establishing adequate functional linkages with other sectors. Thus, economic relations that emerge under such conditions may impede acceleration due to the different tempos of activities and the conflicting economic logics between traditional and speed-oriented sectors. Furthermore, this may exert a negative impact on entire society, for example, in the form of the emergence of parallel societies, the rapid increase of economic inequality, etc.

(2) *Analysis of discrepancies and (potential) desynchronizations between three motors of social acceleration*. This can follow the assumption that establishing a self-propelling cycle of acceleration is a precondition of maintaining social stability. According to this, mismatches and conflicting relations *between* the three dimensions of social acceleration may lead to certain forms of deceleration and even social instability. For example, in “Rentier states” capitalist competition, technological innovation—as underlying preconditions for technological acceleration—may be replaced by the processes of the economization and commer-

cialization of natural resources (Mahdavi, 1970; Skocpol, 1982; Mitchell, 2013). Economically, such conditions may lead to the emergence of a high-technological industrial sector as well. With its own beneficiaries and experts functions this sector on the basis of its own logics without complex functional interconnections to other dimensions of social acceleration. Socially, it is also expected to arise a small group of political and economic elites with especial privileges.

With regard to the conditions depicted above, therefore, it would be unrealistic to consider the strategies of functional differentiation as a leading solution for the increasing pressures of social acceleration—as proposed by the theory of social acceleration (Rosa, 2005, p. 186ff). Rather, many societies may apply other strategies, such as centralized planning in the economy and the imposition of restrictive controls over the processes of social differentiation, as seen in authoritarian regimes (see below).

(3) *Focus on the components of the cultural motor of social acceleration.* A worldly endless life through increasing acceleration is obviously a secular promise, while religious promises in many societies are still attractive for a large number of people. Moreover, influential conservative social groups can use moral and normative arguments to mobilize believers against the processes that lead to social acceleration. This can happen when the various processes of modernization reach so a rapid tempo that people see their previous meaningful social and cultural lives eroding and their orthodoxy of the native way of life in jeopardy. As we shall see, the rapid social and cultural changes imposed on Iranian society led to a majority of people with traditional and religious beliefs adopting a skeptical attitude to (social and cultural) modernization plans. Nevertheless, this should not lead to the general conclusion that the religion and the normative order of society act as a factor of social deceleration or cultural conservation. On the contrary, religious beliefs are open to alternative interpretations, and some allow to release the enormous kinetic energies of religion, as in the case of the 1979 Iranian revolution.

Hence, the critical considerations can apply to offer a revised model appropriate for understanding various societies beyond those of the West. Figure 2 illustrates the points discussed above; a cycle of acceleration based on a different logic of self-propelling.

According to the critical assessment, the connections between the three spheres of acceleration are loose and vulnerable to collapse. The dash lines in the model above indicate that the alternative economic, social, and cultural constellation is enabled to shape a self-propelling cycle of acceleration, operating on the logic of “stability through acceleration”.

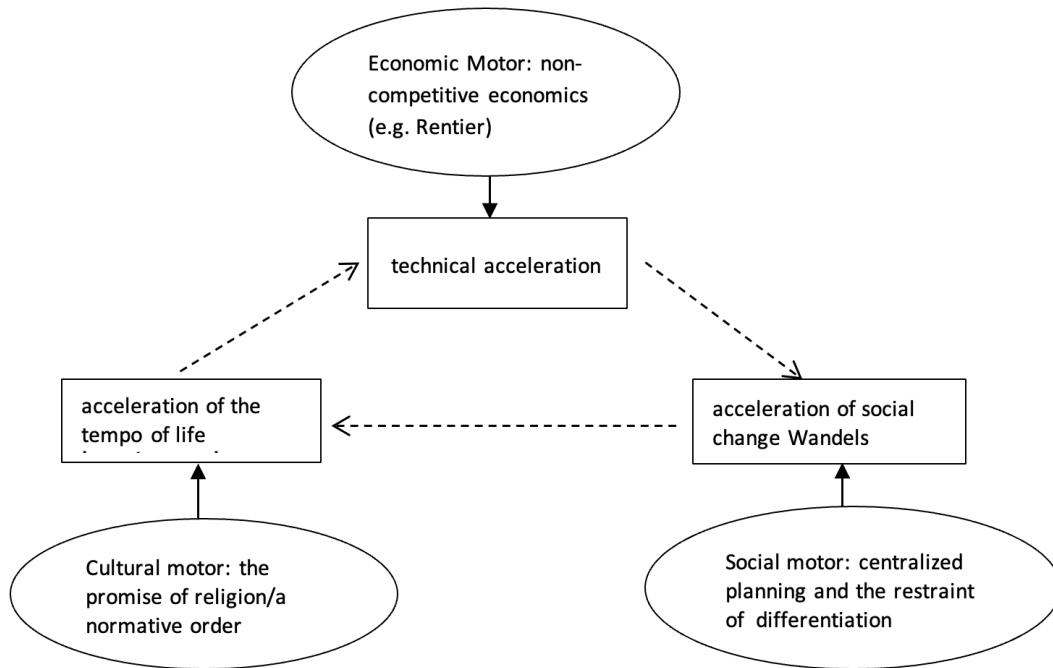


Figure 2. Revised acceleration-cycle with different driving forces

Source: own elaboration.

Model also can be used to answer the question “why societies sometimes become unable to keep their stability?”. To prove the model, here points to the social conditions of Iranian society in the years preceding the 1979 Revolution; that is, it investigates the formation of driving forces of social acceleration formed during 1954-1978, interaction between the dimensions of social acceleration, and the respective processes of social, economic, and cultural changes. It determines also incongruities and tensions within and between the driving forces of social acceleration. Finally, it argues that the cycle of acceleration formed at that time could not operate self-propelling to ensure social stability.

3. THE ECONOMIC MOTOR: RENTIER INSTEAD, INNOVATION, AND COMPETITION

Concentrated in the hands of an autocratic political system, oil revenues became the main economic resource in the period under discussion. So, it allows Iranian government to design and launch modernization plans, and social and cultural reforms. Particularly, a radical social and economic program of land reform was implemented in 1962-3 which swept away a long-standing system of agricultural production, belonging to it a complex hierarchical social system in rural areas (Katouzian, 1981, p. 297ff; Ashraf, 1995, p. 23ff; Hooglund, 1982, p. 56ff). It also set off the waves of internal migrations toward urban areas, especially big cities, with far-reaching socio-cultural and political consequences. Therefore, the developments of two social processes are important here to consider as the consequences of rentier economy: population

movement from rural areas toward big cities (1), and rapid economic modernization (2).

3.1. Migration and social acceleration

By implementing the land reform, indeed, government accelerated the rates of economic and social changes in rural areas. In this context, the modernization of agricultural sector and the undermining of long-standing social and cultural relations led to flow the millions of agricultural workers into the cities in a few years. To provide an example of the far-reaching consequences of structural changes in rural areas, it may be very useful to point at social, cultural, and economic conditions in Tehran in the years following land reform. Consequently, the population of Tehran increased from 2.5 million in 1972 to 5 million in 1976. So, it is not surprising that urban areas, especially Tehran, suffered from a housing crisis and overloaded urban infrastructures, communication, and electricity.

The economic indicators of urban life did not show positive trends as well: rental costs rose fifteen times between 1965 and 1975; by 1977 about 43% of urban families lived in a single-room house (Foran, 1993b, pp. 331-2), and numerous slums in Tehran appeared in the mid-1970s in which about 1 million people lived (about 30% of the total urban population) (Bayat, 1997, p. 29). Likewise, the inflation of the urban livelihood index increased from 12.7% in 1972 to 15.7% in 1977 (Walton, 1980, p. 280; Hakimian, 1988, p. 24ff).

From a cultural perspective, this kind of rapid population movement brought up identity crisis or alienation for a large number of rural migrants in big cities. Under various urban conditions, they experienced the breakdown of their former social bonds and family ties, and had to live up to discredit their attitudes, social dignities, and abilities for problem-solving in everyday life. The increasing orientation of social and cultural life in big cities towards western values and behaviors exacerbated the alienating conditions, too. Therefore, many people with religious backgrounds faced moral anxiety regarding the spread of a hedonistic culture and the sexualization of their everyday life (Kazemi, 2017, p. 109ff). Thus, as a way of bridging the unbearable conflictual condition, they began to establish their own social networks and create the settings in which they found themselves and their behaviors intimate and fully comprehensible. In doing so, religion and religious practices provided them with very appropriate frameworks for preserving their traditions and cultural norms and values as well as gave them a strong sense of solidarity (Mirsepassi, 2004, p. 75).

From a social perspective, conflictual situations arose between the established state apparatus with its bureaucratic procedures and the way of life of the migrants. Indeed, they regarded the governmental organizations and procedures as oppressive and in confrontation with their living conditions, and the routines of their everyday lives. However, the sense of helplessness they fell under such conditions sometimes turned into rage and even violent actions against officials. For example, there were several urban riots during the 1970s by immigrants against officials who wanted to destroy their illegal buildings. Nevertheless, in many cases, women and men decided

to overcome the divergent situations by creative collective actions. So, they began to improve their living conditions and build their own necessary infrastructures, such as streets, hospitals, libraries, and mosques (cf. Bayat, 1997).

3.2. Rapid industrialization and the problem of dysfunctionality between economic sectors

Owing to increasing oil revenues in the 1960s, the rates of economic growth and industrialization accelerated, too. Nevertheless, a quadrupling of the budget of the fifth development plan (1973-77) of Iran after increasing the oil revenues—from \$5.6 billion in 1973 to \$20 billion in 1977—soon led to a series of tensions within economic sectors as well as misbalances with other motors of social acceleration. Along these lines, *mismatches* appeared between a highly developed oil sector as well as a high-tech assembly industry and many other economic sectors which continued to work within the frameworks of traditional and semi-traditional economic production relations.

The diverse rates of the acceleration of activities in the main sectors of the economy exacerbated *the problem of dysfunctionality*. While increasing oil incomes allowed the government to launch the ambitious industrialization programs, the distribution sector (the bazaar) remained largely excluded from modernization plans. However, the bazaar controlled about two-thirds of the domestic trade and about 30% of the country's total imports (Keshavarzian, 2007, p. 6). Moreover, it developed its own trade organizations, social ties with traditional social strata, and influential social groups, such as the clergy, and functioned based on the traditional and religious code of conduct. In fact, the people of bazaar demanded at that time a restriction of increasing interventions of state officials in bazaar mechanisms as well as the consideration of the religious code of conduct by women in society (Ashraf, 1995, p. 32). As the future events demonstrated, therefore, in the last years leading up to the revolution, besides the universities, the bazaar became a bulwark of protests against the monarchy system, and the people of the bazaar played an important role in organizing protests and supporting revolutionaries financially.

4. SOCIAL MOTOR: THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL GROUPS, STRATA, AND THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

From the perspective of the theory of social acceleration, rapid urbanization (from 31,4% to 46,9% of the Iranian population between 1956-1976), and the implementation of various modernization plans accelerated the society itself in two respects: the formation of new social groups and strata (1), and the considerable changes in social statues of a growing proportion of the population *within* a generation—i.e. the inter-generational pace of life movement (2).

Owing to the rapid industrialization and the centralized plans of modernization, has been emerged a new modern working-class swiftly—i.e., from 1372 thousand in 1962-3 to 3.3 million in 1977-8 (Katouzian, 1981, p. 259; Bayat, 1987, p. 60f). Addition-

ally, rural migrants formed the majority of the labor force; for example, a sociological survey on industrial workers in the modern plants in Tehran in 1981 showed that only 7% of the sample came from a family with industrial worker background, and the rest reported their former occupation as a small peasant or agricultural worker (Bayat, 1983, p. 22; 1987). Accordingly, we can note here a kind of the intergenerational pace of life in terms of social mobility and status change from peasantry to working-class. Instead of traditional social and labor relations, they engaged in modern economic relations based on modern labor contracts and wage labor as well as expanding social relations and contacts specific to live in big cities. An interesting trend noticed the emergence and activities of women in the various spheres of social life as well. Along these lines, economic development and cultural reforms favored also Iranian women to enter the labor market and begin to occupy key social positions. For example, the participation rate of women in the labor market increased in 1977 about 13.8% of the total workforce, the highest rate among Middle East countries at that time (Najmabadi, 1991, p. 59ff; Sedghi, 2007; Halper, 2011, p. 15ff).

Furthermore, cultural reforms and the development of the education system accelerated the pace of social and cultural changes. In this way, illiteracy significantly reduced from 67.2% of men and 87.8% of women over 15 in 1966 to 44.2% and 53% in 1979, respectively (in quantitative terms, the country's education system grew about threefold within 15 years). In addition, unfolding a modern educated middle class considerably changed the cultural life in urban areas (Moeini et al., 2018). In the high-education sector about 170,000 students were educated at domestic universities and about 80,000 abroad in 1978-9. By the same token, the proportion of women enrolled in higher education institutions in the academic year of 1976/7 reached 30% (cf. Sabahi, 2004).

Thus, the modernization of the education system led to forming a small but influential social group of students in cities, who actually acted as a cultural motor of social change by carrying and spreading new ideologies and ideas. They also organized and led the massive protests against the Shah's Regime hand in hand with the people of the bazaar and the mosque in the days of the revolution (Ashraf, 1995, p. 32), playing a decisive role in the success of the revolution, hand in hand with other modern social groups and classes—educated middle-class, women, and the working-class.

As discussed above, the constant process of social differentiation in various social systems is simple solution to reduce the pressures of accelerating forces. However, it seems that this assumption is based on narrow observations primarily concerned with Western capitalist societies. So, the question arises that “what about a social system wherein the political system response to the pressures of social acceleration by centralized plannings in autocratic manners?”. The same was the situation of Iranian society in time under discussion, where the political system attempted to put down, or, at least, control the processes of social differentiation by means of various legislative, regulatory, and administrative tools, police measures, juridification processes, etc. In this context, some measures are mentionable, such as the establishment of the secret service police (SAVAK), imposing restriction upon political activists and the opposition parties, the declaration of a one-party system in 1975, the control of NGOs,

the suppression of independent labor unions, the execution of the Employee Stock Ownership Program, etc. (cf. Abrahamian, 1982, 2008). Indeed, the imposed measures enormously contributed to transforming a highly dynamic society into a *mass society*, which, in turn, paved the way for rising charismatic figures in the years to come.

5. CULTURAL MOTOR: RELIGIOUS PROMISES INSTEAD OF THE PROMISE OF ACCELERATION

According to the theory of social acceleration, the promises of religion in an accelerating society are replaced by the secular promises of acceleration. It claims that subjects can reach *eternal life* by accelerating the pace of their lives. Consequently, people in secular Western societies serve the various strategies for speeding up their actions in everyday life, such as multitasking, and the technologies of speed to take ever more available options in a shorter period of time (Rosa, 2010, p. 29ff). However, secularism and mundane values in many societies are still viewed with suspicion, let alone the secular promises of acceleration. Additionally, in many cultures, “haste” interprets as something diabolic, appearing in everyday conversations phrases such as “haste makes waste” frequently. This matches the core social and cultural mechanisms of social stability in a pre-modern society, where “moderation” is valued, and society ensures its stability through adaptation (Safir, 2019, p. 36ff).

Indeed, today, even in a high-speed society, the so-called “Slow Movement” presents an alternative cultural attitude, demanding a slower tempo of life. However, this doesn’t mean that people in globalized late modern societies enable to follow such alternative interpretations and values in the main areas of their social and personal lives without paying for it. And, as Rosa argues, staying behind in an acceleration society may be too costly - where the logic of competition and achievement is a central driving force (Rosa, 2010, p. 56). The question of “whether people consenting and approvingly adopt the strategies of acceleration in their everyday life *or* they are *urged* to accelerate the pace of their life under pressures of the imperatives of accelerating society?” should be answered elsewhere (For an answer by Rosa cf. Rosa, 2010, 2015). In Iranian society at that time, a set of cultural, mythical, religious elements can be conceived as the cultural motor that officially endorsed and fostered by the promise of economic prosperity and welfare. At the core of the promoted cultural system lied the monarchy system which officially represented as a natural development in the social-cultural and economic context of Iranian society. the Shah also was portrayed as an iconic figure with charismatic characteristics having the duties of leading the nation, supporting the official religion (Shia), and preserving the country’s stability and security (Marashi, 2008, p. 5ff; Afkhami, 2009, p. 405ff). These official ideas and promises, however, met a series of challenges when in the mid-1970s in the world markets oil prices began to fall, and consequently, the economic situation began to deteriorate, the inflation rates rose, and many ambitious projects had to be shut down. The promises of “great civilization” rang ever more hallow, while in reality, the society was experiencing a widening economic gap, the social and economic exclusion of the millions of uprooted rural migrants, social and cultural tensions in urban areas,

and political oppression. It is also notable that the Shah's regime Ideologically had to grapple with a set of chronic challenges, above all, an insoluble legitimacy crisis since the coup 1953 (cf. Abrahamian, 2013).

As an alternative to secular promises in general, religion has adequately had the persuasive power to convict the believer to act in specific ways. Thus, the lines of conflict can be drawn between traditional and religious layers and officially propagated values and norms. For example, the replacement of the Islamic calendar by a secular calendar in 1975 interpreted by believers as a bold act of an infidel regime against faith and beliefs of a significant number of traditional and religious people (cf. Keddie, 2006). In particular, Shia Islam in Iranian society has always offered an *alternative utopian society based on a consistent value system and Islamic laws*. These alternative ideas were adequately persuasive that attracted even secular intellectuals at that time (Chehabi, 1990, p. 56ff; Rajaei, 2007, p. 127ff; Safir, 2019, p. 323ff).

As the coming events showed, religious beliefs also provided energies for collective actions and offered the source of ideas for future utopian projects on both personal and collective levels. In anthropological studies on Shiism in Iran, Fischer (2003, 2010) identified certain meaning-laden cultural elements in Shiite rituals and symbols expressed during revolutionary protests, which he called the "Karbala paradigm". He understands it as a symbolic structure in a historical context that "its coherence depended in part, for one set of meaning, upon certain political and cultural contingencies" (Fischer, 2003, pp. 10-11; 2010). As a "cultural structure" the Karbala paradigm consists of certain cultural elements, (Muharram) rituals, feelings, and passions -related to the martyrdom of the third imam of Shiites "Imam Hossein" in 680 AD and multiple uses. Moreover, it offers "models for living and a mnemonic for thinking about how to live" (Fischer, 2003, p. 21).

The cultural and political dynamics of Shiism fascinated Michael Foucault as well, who traveled to Iran twice, in September and November 1978, during the heyday of revolutionary events, and reported his observations on the streets of Tehran (see Foucault, 1978 in Afary and Anderson, 2005: Appendix). Foucault recognized that the specific dynamics of Shiism, expressed in vocabulary, ceremonies, and religious dramas, had utopian energy and offered people an ideal for radical change and a different way of life rather than that prescribed by Western culture. In an interview a year after the revolution, he commented on this view as follows: "As far as their way of life was concerned, religion was for them like a promise and a guarantee of finding something that would radically change their subjectivity" (Foucault, 1988, p. 218).

Similarly, Foucault was fascinated by how the people rose up with their bare hands against a terrible regime whose police forces were among the most powerful in the world. Thus, he saw in the political and cultural dynamics of religion a way to resist the autocratic forms of modernization imposed on us (Foucault, 2020, pp. 122-3). He noted that martyrdom in Shia is closely linked to the struggle for justice and a long history of victory in death, which is related to the martyrdom of "Imam Hossein." In this sense, he saw in the confrontation of the armed soldier with the demonstrators with his bare hands a kind of spirituality that was still untouched by Western thought and promised an alternative form of collective and personal life (Foucault, 1978a, p.

201). Against this background, he defined *political spirituality* as follows:

I think it's a certain practice by which the individual is displaced, transformed, disrupted, to the point of renouncing their own individuality, their own subject position. It's no longer being the subject that one had been up to that point, a subject in relation to a political power, but also the subject of a certain mode of knowledge [savoir], subject of an experience, or subject of a belief. It seems to me that that possibility of rising up from the subject position that had been fixed for you by a political power, a religious power, a dogma, a belief, a habit, a social structure, and so on— that's spirituality, that is, becoming other than what one is, other than oneself. (Foucault, 2020 [1979], p. 124)

Political spirituality, Foucault argued, led to a kind of insurrection of subjects who did not want to be subjected to the subject of history (ibid., p. 134; cf. Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2016, p. 3f). He also hoped that though “political spirituality” would emerge another form of collective life, a “utopia” of social life based on religious values and divine order (Foucault, 1978b, p. 206; Kurzman, 2004, p. 165ff).

The major social events of Iranian society in the modern period, therefore, point to the power of religious beliefs and normative prescriptions to the acceleration of social changes and shape personal and collective life in alternative ways.

Social acceleration theory needs to acknowledge the social and cultural power of normative and religious factors in social acceleration if it aims to address the processes of social change and stability in non-Western societies. Reducing the normative promise of acceleration to a mundane eternal life limits the analytical power of social acceleration theory and makes it vulnerable to the charge of Eurocentrism.

CONCLUSION

This article argued that the patterns of social stability and social change in society can be explained by analyzing the mechanisms of social acceleration and the formation of the acceleration cycle. Thus, an analysis of the social conditions of Iranian society in the 1960s and 1970s showed that the cycle of acceleration formed at that time was no longer able to maintain stability through dynamization. The motors of social acceleration at that time brought about the diverse tempos of social change and interacted with social reality in multiple forms. Certain sectors of the economy (modern industries and the oil sector) ran at high speed, while others, for example, the bazaar (distribution sector), followed the traditional rhythm of activities and operated according to their own traditional-religious logic. The political system also tried to curb the dynamics of unfolding modern social groups and strata and bring under control the processes of social differentiation through various measures. It thus disrupted the dialectical relationships between acceleration and social systems and subsystems.

This article suggested that the normative order, for example, what is offered by religion, can be substituted for the promises of acceleration. Drawing on Foucault's interpretation of the Iranian Revolution and his concept of “political spirituality,” it demonstrated the role of religion (Shiism) in social change and insisted on its utopian

content and energies for mobilizing people. Contrary to the secular promises, Shi'a Islam promised utopian social order based on inner—and other—worldly teachings and theology of Islam.

This article also showed that how a social theory developed in the social contexts of highly industrialized Western acceleration societies can be reconstructed and contextualized to analyze social events in other societies with different social and cultural parameters.

Since the theory of social acceleration claims that “the acceleration process is inseparable from the concept and essence of modernity,” to prove this claim, more empirical data and field studies are needed, especially in non-Western societies where the logic of economic activities, social development, and cultural order may be established and function in different ways compared to highly dynamic Western industrial societies.

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