



An Analysis of the Phenomenon of Violence and Violent Actions in Qajar-Era Iran Based on Slavic Žižek's Theory

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Abstract

Violence is a historical phenomenon for which evidence can be found in all societies and historical periods. The vast amount of literature that addresses the concept of violence, as well as the diversity of fields explored by researchers, highlights the significance and position of this issue as an interdisciplinary topic. Sociological, psychological, anthropological, and other approaches have examined various aspects of the phenomenon of violence, offering answers to the questions raised in this domain.

The lack of evidence and historical examples in the typology of the phenomenon of violence is one of the shortcomings in existing studies. For this reason, the present article, relying on examples and historical evidence from the Qajar era, seeks to provide an overview of the patterns, manifestations, and effective mechanisms behind violent acts during this period, as well as analyze the reasons and roots of this phenomenon. To achieve this goal, the study aims to answer the following questions in a descriptive-analytical manner:

- What are the main examples and manifestations of violent acts in Iranian society during the Qajar era?
- What factors contributed to the occurrence of violence in the Qajar era?

The current research is based on the theoretical approach of Slavoj Žižek, a critical theory thinker, toward the concept of violence. Žižek, influenced by Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis, offers a new perspective on this concept. He divides violence into two types: overt violence, which is active (such as crime and intimidation), and hidden or systemic violence (the catastrophic effects of economic and political systems), which manifests as active forms of racism, hatred, and discrimination. He further classifies violence into two additional categories: mythological violence and divine violence. In other words, Žižek distinguishes different forms of violence by blending philosophical concepts with everyday life. According to Žižek, the types of violence are: activist, reactive, symbolic, systemic, divine, and mythic violence, with systemic violence being a combination of both physical and symbolic violence.



The violent actions of the Qajar kings were manifestations of activist violence. These acts of violence are evident during the succession crises, the punishment of power claimants, and the phenomenon of executing viziers, such as the murder of the prime minister, Amir Kabir (Sephehr, 1377:2/645; 3/1155), and the killing of rebellious soldiers who sought to claim their unpaid wages (Serena, 1362: 286-287). Many examples of the violence and cruelty of the Qajar kings are also documented in the works of foreign travelers (Pollak, 2008: 269; Curzon, 2010: 530; Benjamin, 2013: 233). The reasons for such violent behavior can be traced to the political structure of Iran during the Qajar era, the tension between the Sultan and his subjects, and the need to maintain the Sultan's authority and sovereignty over the populace.

Mythological violence has a legislative aspect, serving as a means of imposing guilt and punishment, and establishing law and social order. It has a legal dimension. Among its manifestations during the Qajar era were various forms of capital punishment, such as beheading, live burial, sawing, burning, dismemberment, tying the criminal to the mouth of a cannon, live plastering, and decapitation. Public executions included torturing and throwing misbehaving women from the top of a minaret (Diolafowa, 1361: 196), as well as the method known as "death by a thousand cuts," which involved prolonged physical pain and suffering (Khazaei, 1395: 110-111).

Active violence, in Žižek's view, is linked to the discursive space governing the subject. The fundamental pillar of this definition is discrimination. In fact, the ruling discourse of a society both creates and justifies this type of violence. The discursive environment in Qajar society was based on patriarchal and divine discourse. In this discourse, the king's glory is above any law, and he is the source of legislation, with the law being the will of the king. Therefore, those close to the royal circle are shown respect, while those distant from it incur the king's wrath.

Therefore, punishment was not proportional to the crime, and a form of discrimination and inconsistency in penalties was evident. On the other hand, within patriarchal discourse, women, considered weak, held no significant status and were placed in a subordinate position. Generally, in the Qajar family system, women had a lower status than men.

Žižek considers systemic violence a form of hidden violence that results from the disastrous effects of political, economic, and cultural systems. Violence against women and economic exploitation fall under this category.

According to Žižek's theoretical model, in activist violence, violence is used as a tool to consolidate power by repressive and disciplinary institutions. In this form of violence, the violence itself becomes a manifestation of law enforcement, employed by the apparatus of repression to impose discipline on society. In mythological violence, violence serves as a form of legislation and a means of inflicting guilt and punishment within society. By depriving the subject of the power to think, double violence turns the subject into its own critic. In active violence, the subject is influenced by the discourse atmosphere of the Qajar era and two sub-discourses: patriarchal and divine. In these smaller discourses, women are defined as the secondary and weaker gender in the former, and people are defined as subjects deprived of citizenship rights in the latter.



God's violence is a form of violence that operates beyond any law. The goal of the perpetrators of this type of violence is to disrupt the social order and challenge the status quo, with these individuals often positioned outside the circle of power. Systemic violence is also a result of the disastrous political, economic, and cultural conditions of Examining examples and manifestations of violence in the structure of Qajar society reveals the existence of various forms of individual and group violence, government violence towards subjects, family violence, and violence against women and children. The occurrence of each of these types of violent acts has several underlying reasons. The Qajar sultans and their agents maintained their rule over the subjects and displayed their awe and authority through the use of violence, which is rooted in the political culture of Iran that does not establish a kingdom without politics (where politics involves punishment and violence). At other levels of Qajar society, gender socialization led to the acceptance of male dominance and submissiveness towards women, resulting in an escalation of violence against women.

In addition to these reasons, factors such as deprivation, material poverty, unemployment, ethnic tendencies, and religious prejudices also played a significant role in the prevalence of violence during the Qajar era. this era, manifesting in two forms: violence against women and economic violence.

Keywords: violence, Qajar, Slavic Žižek.

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