

## **An Anthropological Study of the Shift from Ritual, Embedded Economy to Shapeless, Disembedded Economy**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Folkways and Rituals as one of the central aspects of culture in every society have entertained the minds of anthropologists and sociologists. Researchers have analysed rituals in religious and mythological frameworks, but the current article has taken a different approach toward the phenomenon by articulating it within the important sphere of economy, hence ritual economy. The analytical framework of the current research is based on the formulation of two embedded and disembedded economies as scaled on the ideal type economy. The specification of ideal type market in the present study is a combination of Karl Polanyi's theoretical approach toward the embeddedness of economic activities within the pre-modern economy and its disembeddedness toward the modern one, with a glance at Weber's ideal type of traditional and modern economies. The findings of the study show that the economic action of bazaaris has transformed from the ritual, embedded economy toward a disembedded one. The inherent changes could be analysed to have resulted from the conventional order, action orientations, conventional forms of interaction, and the logic behind action in bazaar. The findings indicate that modern economy is imposing its logic onto non-modern economies.

*Keywords:* Bazaar, disembedded economy, economic anthropology, economic action, embeddedness, ritual economy

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the interests of anthropologists from early on was the understanding of material specificities of cultures and societies. It is, however, a few decades since the interest has been systematically pursued in the

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economic anthropology discipline. The subject of this field of inquiry is the study of events and techniques of production, distribution, and consumption, various models of consuming material and symbolic commodities, the predominant economic order in each society, norms of social exchange activity, and different models of economic embeddedness in society and culture (Depuy, 2006, p. 8). Despite all the recent transformations in Iran's traditional economy, in the face of modernity, the consequential emergence of new economic forms that have their own, sometimes contradictory, mechanisms, the scientific inquiry into the issue is even more necessary. Still, the discipline has been glossed over in Iran. The mentioned transformation in the Iranian traditional economy, including Iran's market, increasingly challenges the idea of an economic order exempt from cultural, social, and political constraints, and counterposes economy as interwoven with diversifying cultural contexts and social structures. In this way, economy, economic activity, and its requirements are defined and understood within social and cultural constraints with all their varieties. What is concerning in economic anthropology is the traditional institutional mobility of the society and the encounter with a series of inevitable modern elements that are defectively internalised to create or become replaced by interrelated, hybrid products, urging scientific studies more than ever before. The current article acknowledges the demand and intends to analyse the qualitative transition of a crucial socio-

economic phenomenon in Iran, the grand bazaar, that has long been one of the most powerful and influential social fields and whose tradesmen used to stand as the front, leading social and economic agents of contemporary Iran. The analysis takes place with an economic anthropological approach aiming to understand the economic action based on a systemic backdrop.

The central concern of this article is whether Iranian tradesmen action is an area independent of socio-cultural constraints. To answer the question based on ritual economy, it tried to demonstrate that economic activity is not an independent activity from the rest of social life aspects, including culture; it is, rather, an activity embedded with the social structure and cultural models, however unstable it seems to be nowadays. As a result, the main questions of the study are "what socio-cultural principles affect the bazaaris' action as an instance of ritual behaviour?" and "what changes have these patterns undergone within the past few decades?"

The significance of the present study lies in its analysis of one of the most important economic fields of Iran with a long historical background and as a main importing and distributing economic pole. Resulting from modern transformations, bazaar is detached from its original logic without yet adopting the requisites of modern economy. The analysis of bazaar demonstrates how traditional economies shift to modernity, discharging a series elements and replacing new ones.

## METHODS

The present study is methodologically influenced by Bourdieu's research program in which ontological, epistemological, and methodological layers are different from the usual conventions of social sciences. Ontologically, the approach toward social reality is relational. Here, the study of social facts requires evading the reductionist mentality of structure/agency, subject/object, and objective/subjective dualities. As such, the method of the present study is synthetic. In this way, statistical data can be combined with direct observation and through interactive, discursive, and documentary interpretation. The significance of synthetic methodology comes from the usual holistic approach of anthropological studies that necessitates the consideration of bazaar as an entire social phenomenon. Unlike the quantitative methods, the holistic approach attempts to promote the process of breaking off and diagnosis of the social phenomenon, unify various and farfetched aspects of phenomena, and present a holistic panorama for enhancing observation and diagnosis. Synthetic methodology provides the scope of rich data and information for the researcher.

The data for the current research are gathered by qualitative methods such as constant observation, in-depth interviews and conversations, and documentary analysis, especially of bazaar activists' media interviews, print material about bazaar, and the available information and statistics about bazaar and Iran's economic

field regularities. In the following, these methods are concisely reviewed.

- a) Observation: this technique is used for "the discovery of new lands" (Rafipoor, 2003, p. 56). The aim at this stage is gaining an initial understanding of the environment in bazaar. For constant observation, the researcher frequented bazaar for a duration of six consecutive months. This method of somewhat temporary living in bazaar could be called "encamping". With this method, all events and observations about the stream of daily life in bazaar are recorded. The technique here has been a combination of participant and non-participant observations. The understanding of bazaar, and that the traditional bazaar with its specific formal structure and resulting complexities and relationships, seems so improbable that pure observation becomes unavoidable. Gradually, by observationally confronting it, the awe of bazaar disappears, and the alien atmosphere becomes research friendly. Without this observational experience, the analysis of bazaar regularities and activities was almost impossible.
- b) Interview: the interviewees of this article are divided into two groups. The first group includes persons who have stable positions in bazaar and are trading there. These are inclusive of and retail bazaaris in various guilds (textile, carpet, blanket, gold, etc.) who are informed about everything that goes on

in bazaar. They are selected randomly, and it was attempted to include different age groups. The second group consists of persons who are apprenticed in bazaar. The dialogue with this group who were introduced by a middleman was so beneficial for the study and produced a knowledge that could not be attained through the interviews with first group bazaaris.

The form of interview was decided by the interviewer and interviewee's limitations, and was, therefore, changing between predetermined questions, semi-determined questions, free chats, and conversations. The last item was a sort of un-determined question that allowed for the untold and shadowy points to be revealed and new hints to be made.

- c) Document analysis: since a proportion of questions in the current study had a historical outlook, document analysis seemed inescapable. "Document" indicates the bazaaris' interviews archive, surveys conducted on bazaar and bazaaris, and the rulings and principles running in bazaar.

This research relies on qualitative content analysis. "The qualitative content analysis is a method that applies a qualitative approach and uses various techniques to systematically analyse the data gathered through interviews, diaries, observational records, and documents" (Hariri, 2012, p. 264). Qualitative content analysis fitted the flexible nature of the research plan in this study best because, in comparison with

other qualitative analytical methods, it is well structured and always allows for the review of categories in accordance with the accumulating data. Here, the purpose of analysis is not counting predetermined, exact categories, but reaching deep interpretive and cognitive layers of texts. Therefore, the authors tried to divide the text into analytical units in a systematic and step-by-step manner, so that categories emerge based on the theoretical grounds under consideration. The category extraction was done based on summarisation technique, where the inductive categories were reached by reducing, interpreting, and generalising the inter-related parts of texts. The parts with less relativity and the phrases with similar content were ignored, and the identical descriptions were grouped then summarised; lastly, the analysis was performed on the extracted categories and according to the theoretical concepts. Constant observation, extended contact with the environment, and evaluating the many aspects of the subject are the main strategies for improving the validity of the survey.

### Review of Literature

Bazaar is a term with a variety of meanings including a physical space for the exchange of goods and an abstract concept suggesting a whole economic system. Various researchers have studied bazaar based on these two dominant understandings without presenting a certain definition in the majority of cases. Farbia Adelhah (2000) is among such researchers. Skocpol (1982) defines bazaar as a socio-economic

world, while Keshavarzian (2007) gives four images of bazaar including bazaar as the traditional market, bazaar as a class, bazaar as an informal network, and bazaar as the product of informational dearth. Ashraf (1988) defines bazaar in the Islamic cities of Iran as shopping centers placed in old neighbourhood, a platform for social interaction outside of family, a socio-cultural atmosphere in traditional urban life, a quarter for Shiite religious conglomeration, and a front for political mobilisation. Slater and Tonkiss (2002) divides bazaar into geographic and abstract forms, the latter of which is attached with theorizing functionality in modern social thought. Classic economists hypothesized bazaar as equivalent to the physical and geographical space, and in consequence, with underscored productive, as against the exchange aspect of bazaar, to come to its abstract conception (Swedberg & Granovetter, 1992, p. 257).

The review of literature leads us to the conclusion that bazaar has been grasped in three main definitions: bazaar relations as a practical pattern of exchange, geographic bazaar as a socio-cultural platform, and bazaar as a rather formal pattern of economic order and the centrepiece of studies. In the present article, by bazaar is meant a socio-cultural space in which exchange takes place.

Empirically, in Iran, the traditional market of Tehran is understood as the geography of exchange. Such studies generally view bazaar in an anthropological approach and as a geographic space for

exchange, where, at the same time, certain features like architecture, material skeleton, merchants' moral system and their relations with the state, the condition of each guild like the sale rates of carpet sellers or gold sellers, are not out of sight. The general body of studies indicate that the economics of traditional bazaar is an aspect of the general traditional economy. In these studies, bazaar is understood as a socio-cultural institution in connection with tradition and a manifestation of traditional economy. The association of economy with religion and state manifested in form of the skeletal conjunction of bazaar with the Jame' mosque and Arg square are particularly under consideration - although it has changed as a result of the transformation of traditional order. The outlook of bazaar is functional and founded on integrity and convergence among bazaaris.

### Theory

The rationality of market order and personal action is a shared concept adopted by economics and social sciences. Anyhow, the historical background of the two disciplines shows a divergence between the two in the distinction they made between rational and irrational behaviour, back in the early twentieth century (Samuelson, 1955, p. 90). Rationality was, by then, defined as the rational calculations that were allegedly to be found in the marketplace, hence making the subject of economics different from that of social sciences. Economics occupied itself with the rational action, or the optimisation of profit in the market, and

left the irrational to the sociologists and anthropologists. This reductionist definition was severely challenged by those within sociology and economic anthropology.

Although there is hardly a consensus over a unitary definition of the nature and function of the market in economics, there is a single general principle therein that says the market functions in a distinctive realm and enjoys acceptable degrees of autonomy from other socio-political structures. Sociologists and anthropologists, however, hesitate to inform the idea. The two define the market as a social institution and its relationships as a prolonged chain of mutual social actions. With this perspective, economic activity is constrained in a web of non-economic networks, institutions, and interactions that produce a kind of fundamental relationship between social and economic processes; therefore, market interactions are born to the wider social networks and inclinations (DiMaggio, 1994; Granovetter, 1985; Polanyi, 1992). In addition, interactions are formed within more durable social frames, as “economic institutions are built via the mobilisation of resources through social networks” (Swedberg & Granovetter, 1992, p. 18). Numerous congregational bodies like financial institutions, corporations, banks, malls, fairs, and more prepare tools for producing and maintaining social interactions. Economic action is irreducibly a social action and economic organisations are similarly the same as social formations.

“The model that uproots the market is challenged in two ways. First, the

interpretation that alleges the market as a distinctive alternative of provisioning and exchange is criticised. In this group, the work of well-known anthropologist Karl Polanyi is remarkable. Second, is questioning the logic by asking if the modern market economy is multidimensionally estranged from its roots more seriously than other types of economic structuring in other societies are” (Slater & Tonkiss, 2002, p. 157).

Plani’s reading of economic roots provides an anthropological interpretation of market relationships, according to which market exchanges are rooted in the grander social exchanges, while market behaviour is connected to the more general cultural models and norms of integration. The social and cultural roots of the developed market economy have been noticed in later works as well. Although the social roots of economy are turned to the centrepiece of sociology and anthropology, the idea is being replaced by another valuable concept, namely the “economy as instituted process” (Polanyi, 1992, p. 33). This interpretation of market as an instituted process presumes that market interactions should be explained based on certain social institutions and legal and political strategies (Slater & Tonkiss, 2002, p. 175).

### **Theoretical framework**

The current article uses the ritual economy approach to analyse the shift of the Tehran bazaar from the ritual to the shapeless

economy<sup>1</sup>. Within economists' established approaches, economy is declared to be independent of religion, rituals, worldview, and social morality, just the way politics and science are independent of these. Economic principles are not considered embedded in cultural, historical, and social structures and specificities, but are fathomed to be fixed, universal, timeless, and all-encompassing. Its rules are assumed to be as physical and mathematical as natural and biological rules are. This perception is challenged in sociology and anthropology, where an attempt is made to invent theories to analyse the economy in substitutive systematic studies. One such theoretical approach is ritual economy. Ritual economy is a theory of economic anthropology according to which worldview, economy, power, and human agency are interconnected rather than distinct spheres, independent of each other. Ritual economy demonstrates the process of how worldview becomes material; therefore, according to this approach, ritual activity shapes the economic behaviour without determining it (McAnany & Wells, 2008, p. 1). The idea of ritual economy is not a new one, especially when it is used for explicating economic motives and choices. Anthropologists and

sociologists such as Firth (1939); Godelier (1978); Malinowski (1922); Weber (1978), and Rappaport (1984) earlier elaborated on the connection of economic choice with religion and mythical behaviour under the debates of ritual behaviour (McAnany & Wells, 2008, pp. 1-16). Christian Wells tried to explain three common understandings of ritual economy:

- 1) Provisioning, storage, and consumption which Douglas (1979); Karl Polanyi (1944); Malinowski (1922); Marcel Mauss (1925); Weber (1978) and held. The emphasis in this approach is on the embeddedness of economy in social institutions. Here, it analyses provisioning and consumption not based on the common standards and norms of price and income, but by the informal requirements of culture and society. These thinkers postulate that the analysis of provisioning based on feelings, meanings, habits, heritage, traditions, attitudes, social, and economic consciousness precede the formal and normative assumptions held by economists.
- 2) Materialising the worldview through rituals either formally or informally; Bourdieu (2000); Rappaport (1984); Wells and Salazar (2007) and are in this camp. They highlight the transformation of habitus because of economic conditions; Bourdieu created the term *economic habitus* to explain the structural role of situations, preferences, and regulations in shaping the economic choice and action. Economic habitus

<sup>1</sup>The author has invented *shapeless economy* to describe the current patterns and order of Tehran bazaar as an unregulated market exempt from ritual and traditional economy where tradesmen activity was entirely embedded inside culture, politics and society, and *simultaneously* remain devoid of the characteristics of disembodiedness. Therefore, bazaar is referred to as *shapeless economy* until it is settled in either extreme.

are internalised through family, social participation, social class, and personal experiences of daily life.

- 3) Constructing meaning and interpretation. In Well's opinion, ritual economy tells about the decisions people make and motives that push them to do so. In other words, ritual economy problematizes the structural causation of meaning and interpretation construction. Althusser's structural causation (1970) and Eric Wolf (1990), and Marshal Sahlins' structural power (1981) fall under this category. (McAnany & Wells, 2008, pp. 1-16).

The theoretical framework of the present study is influenced by the research program of Karl Polanyi (1944). His main teachings could be summarized as follows. In his opinion, the economic life, when it is not based on market, is formed around social institutions, giving way to values and norms other than those ruling the market economy. Polanyi's second teaching is the rejection of essentialist modern economy relying on the idea that the behavioural pattern of avidity due to the restriction of resources is *not* human nature, but arises from the adaptation of methods that institutionalise economic activity. From this, Polanyi's third teaching evolves stating that the world is transitional; we are not destined to thrive in narrow avaricious and materialist societies as it is perceived based on some

superstitious beliefs about natural order and human essence. This situation is brought about by changes in social structuration and the linearity of development. Polanyi's last teaching is that earth, work, and capital are three components of societies and necessary in people's subsistence and functioning of family and persistence of society and social order. When the three transform into commodity (or pseudo-commodity), the whole society, including individuals and communities, and moral norms and values are determined by market determinants. The market-based economy transform into the market-based society (Sedaghat, 2010, pp. 36-45).

The analytical framework of the current research is based on the formulation of two embedded and disembedded economies with reference to the ideal type economy. The specification of ideal type market in the present study is a combination of Karl Polanyi's theoretical approach toward the embeddedness of economic activities within the pre-modern economy, and its disembeddedness from the modern one, with a glance at Weber's ideal type of traditional and modern economies. The ideal type composed of the embedded and disembedded economies are configured as Table 1 shows. The table could be inclusive of further specifications but the idealisation processes of distinction, unification, abstraction, and generalization, restricts us to the following.

Table 1  
*The characteristics of the embedded and disembedded economies*

Categories	Embedded Economy	Disembedded Economy
Skeletal order	Identity giving and meaning giving to space	Pragmatic function
Institutional order	Institutional ethical regulations	Institutional competition-based regulations
Action orientation	Economic orientation	Economic orientation
Action quality	Economic action embedded in Social structure	Economic action disembedded from social structure
Social structuration of bazaar	Pluralist, based on powerful group and network	Individualist, based on weak group and network

## FINDINGS

### Definition of Bazaar

The historical study of the skeletal development of Tehran city shows that the growth of Tehran texture is determined by the skeleton of bazaar. Tehran bazaar is the space-based concentration of main economic, social, and cultural bodies. Today, 52 percent of wholesale units, five percent of retail units, seven percent of production units in Tehran are located within bazaar in an area of 110 acres. The daily traffic of approximately 400 thousand people in it has made Tehran bazaar the urban centre of the city (Yousefifar, 2011, p. 50). As a result, even the widespread transformation in the economic, social, and cultural structures of Iran have not undermined the role and function of bazaar in the urban life of Tehran citizens.

Presently, bazaar is located in the 12<sup>th</sup> municipal region of Tehran in an area of about 110 acres surrounded by 15 Khordad in the North, Khayam in the West, Molavi in the South, and Mostafa Khomeini in the East.

Reportedly, there are more than 37,240 units including shops, hojreh<sup>2</sup>, workshops, and warehouses in bazaar. These units are active in both wholesale and retail forms. In wholesale, textile and clothing claim the highest share of bazaar exchanges with 49.5 percent, followed by home appliances (12.1 percent), bags and shoes (10.1 percent), foodstuffs (8.4 percent), and stationary (6.9 percent). In retail, textile and clothing takes the first rank with 31.2 percent of total exchanges, followed by 27.5 percent in carpet retail, 11.5 percent in home appliances, and 11.5 percent in stationary.

### Tehran Bazaar Skeleton: The Skeletal Order Embedded in Socio-Cultural Structures

Tehran bazaar's outward is built upon a thoughtful order that suggest its compliance with the constraints of society, culture, and economy. The location of rudimentary

<sup>2</sup>The business area of tradesmen and merchants (Dehkoda, 1995: 7706), a small space usually placed within sara, tims and timchehs.

urban elements of the central mosque, Arg historical complex, and bazaar, all beside each other, represents the interlink between three religious, political, and economic areas. The contemplation on Tehran bazaar skeletal specificities indicates the importance of social, cultural, and political significance of the bazaar beyond the perceptive economic import.

The evolution of the skeletal form and economic nature of Tehran bazaar from the date of its construction in early 13<sup>th</sup> hijri century (late 19<sup>th</sup> century) up until now, shows that it has undergone up and downs during its history, the gravest of which took place during the Pahlavi era. In this era, the escalation in urbanisation and the need for new urban interactions of trade guilds separate from Tehran main area urged the government and its affiliate organisation to pay attention to it. The scatteredness of the Tehran trade centres began from the bazaar at this time. Pahlvis favoured modern models of urban development, hence the indifference toward the Tehran bazaar and its skeletal development. As the Pahlavi era modernisation progressed, the urban communities, including that of the bazaar, witnessed structural changes; the construction of modern streets adjacent to the bazaar transformed its general structure and disturbed the social and cultural integrity of the bazaar and its neighbourhood. Because of these changes, the natural process of guilds expansion and positioning of trade elements therewith paused, and bazaar trading activities in the surrounding streets diminished. Several crucial guild line-

ups, like Lab-e Khandaq Bazaar, Chicken Bazaar, and Tobacco Bazaar, disappeared in this period (Yousefifar, 2011, p. 29). The other major transformation of the period was the relocation of Arg as the heart of the political power to another part of the city, thus disrupting the traditional bazaar-politics interconnectedness. The skeleton of Tehran bazaar transmuted once again under second Pahlavi, when industrial and semi-industrial workhouses either migrated into the existing bazaar building or were annexed to it. The changes gradually gave a new character to parts of the bazaar. The economic boom of 1340s (1960s) entailed the demand for greater areas inside the bazaar and demolished the residential neighbourhood by giving them commercial functionality. Modern public and administrative constructions soon erected in the adjacent areas and space transitions for the sake of improving access to urban facilities and utilities--with all the emerging values accompanying them--took precedence (Sultanzadeh, 1991, p. 444).

The skeleton of the Tehran bazaar possesses an inward character, too. The inward atmosphere of the Tehran traditional market maintains an order that administers the bazaaris' action. This very skeletal order has brought the bazaar its distinction and individuation and created identities appropriate to each guild and profession. The identity might have faded during the interactive and structural changes of the bazaar; yet, it maintains its significance and identification repute by constituting parts of the bazari historical memory. The

architecture of the bazaar and the methods of locating guilds, like *rasteh*<sup>3</sup>, *charsouq*<sup>4</sup>, *tim & timche*<sup>5</sup>, etc., gave it an inward environmental order and functionality that claims meaning and is vital for understanding the bazaaris' action. Enclosed, maze spaces imply complexity, ambiguity, conservatism, originality, and traditionalism of the bazaar, by which the bazaaris' particular action system is influenced. Along with functional changes in the bazaar, its texture tends to dispossess of meaning. This clearly signifies the nature of changes in the bazaar, its inherent currents, the general traditional market of Tehran, and its actors. Even though the traditional bazaar of Tehran has endured in skeleton, it has lost its habitual meaning.

### **Peculiarities of Embedded Economic Action in Tehran Bazaar**

This research sketches the characteristics of ritual economy by referring to issues of the institutional order of the bazaar, the bazaaris' worldview, and the social structure stemming from ethnic, religious, kinship, and local rationality. The totality

<sup>3</sup>Rasteh (direction): is a main street or pathway in the traditional market on two sides of which rows of retailshops are placed. The term has several meanings in bazaar including, for example, guild. (Yousefifar, 2011, p. 31)

<sup>4</sup>Charsouq (intersection): is a Persian word applying to parts of bazaar where two *rastehs* meet (ibid: 35).

<sup>5</sup>Tim and timche: are two major bazaar trading elements that imply the concentration of several trade offices and wholesale merchandise centers in which expensive and voluminous exchanges take place (ibid, p. 35).

of peculiarities shows that the analysis of the bazaaris' actions—with emphasis on economic action—based on the established economic analytical frameworks of modern economics is by no means viable; therefore, the economics of the Tehran traditional market could, leastways, be analysed based on its once ritual economy. The concession is made because structurally, the Tehran bazaar has not attained an independent structure from the community, politics, and culture; this is informed by its performance and functionality throughout the years. In action, bazaaris, as the main body of the Tehran economic actors, have not been economically rational humans whilst chasing optimal profits, particularly the way the established economics purports economic action. Evidences show the shift from this traditional approach.

### **Shift from Customary Institutional Order to Quasi-Formal Institutional Order**

Institutional order in the bazaar indicates trends that rule the bazaar through informal conventions and formal regulations, and guide bazaar interaction norms. This institutional order is constructed in two models. The conventional, customary model is an order that is generated with the bazaar by adhering to the traditions; it is constitutive of a set of indicators and aspects including trust and morality, as the ones concentrated on in this study. A major reason for the strength of the bazaar in the past has been the confidence and trust system

of bazaaris among themselves and toward customers. This characteristic has nowadays disappeared among bazaaris except for carpet sellers, who continue to observe the traditional professional requirements. The belief in informal regulations that shaped bazaaris' relationships together and made up their social capital has transformed with the passage of time. It is, thereby, included that the Tehran bazaar is shifting from a worldview that is built on trust and moral adherence, to earning halal and taking each other's hand, to one that cherishes legal mechanisms of credence and optimisation of profit.

*Earning is bestowed by God and He considers all when He hands out. Formerly, bazaaris used to pass customers to each other. Nowadays it is interrupted, and things are not like before (garment seller, 54 years old, 30 years bazaari).*

*The former bazaar was a bazaar that concerned people and was trusted by them, it participated in social activities like building underground cisterns or schools. If you see, most old schools were situated beside bazaar because the founders were bazaaris. But nowadays, to earn, and that at any rate, comes first. Money is everything for today bazaaris (bazaari, 79 years old, more than 60 years bazaari).*

An element in the endurance of the Tehran bazaar was the protective guild relationships founded on seniority. Guild relationships adjusted the self-regulation of the bazaar and protected it against crises; if a problem emerged, it took moral grounds resembling the seniority system to resolve it. This system, most of the time, prevented the bankruptcy of individual bazaaris. In contests and clashes, the elderly society played their unrivalled role in preventing the escalation of problems. The exemplary attention of the senior bazaaris to the sick or troubled, taking the lead in visiting or pooling assistance, spontaneous moves in facilitating youth's marriage ceremonies, valuing kinship in the bazaar, and celebrating national and religious occasions prospered the morale for cooperation and intimacy, and discouraged clashes. The traditional market of Tehran was respectable to people and its dominating moral system was reproduced into the whole society. Thanks to the guild societies, self-regulation was an unwritten rule of the bazaar that invited all bazaaris to respect principles that countermanded formal institutions' intervention. Today, this is changing in the bazaar to take on formal dispositions. Contrary to the past, the transforming bazaar of Tehran is replacing intimate, informal, kin relationships with formal strangeness.

Bazaaris relationships with customers were, by then, centred on informal, moral approaches that normalised relationships by encouraging truthfulness in exchange and observing mutual interest. The persistence of this system among some guilds, like

carpet sellers, has guaranteed them a stable atmosphere of healthy rivalry. The principle for prominent bazaari tradesmen is mutual trust. Trust is best exemplified in the regulation of trade and financial relations inside gold and carpet guilds. Here, an individual's word supersedes any formal agreement, and many contracts, payments, and loans are carried out verbally. In the Tehran carpet bazaar, high-volume exchanges are accomplished only by phone contact. Such incidences, for better or for worse, are being substituted under circumstances where formal demands of bank notes guarantee the health of the exchange. Sometimes, even bank notes could not guarantee the health of the exchange. The emerging mechanisms are symptomatic of the shift from outward, trust-based, moral social capital into a closed, restricted, and inward condition within the bazaar.

### **Shift from a Potent Group-Potent Network to an Impotent Group-Impotent Network**

For systematising inter-cultural analyses, Douglas (1996) has taken advantage of concepts like group and network. He divided the inter-relation between the two into four conditions of potent group-potent network, impotent group-impotent network, potent group-impotent network, and impotent group-potent network. "Group" means the experience of a consistent social unit and "network" means a set of regulations that link individuals on a self-relying basis (Moore, 2010, p. 333). In the current article,

the classification of Tehran bazaar relations and transformations is put to analysis based on this conceptual framework. A group-network analysis is a method for finding out a spectrum of beliefs that are interlinked inside a framework of relational patterns. These beliefs should not be considered, per se, but they do cause action. The Tehran bazaar is experiencing a shift from the potent group-potent network condition into an impotent group-impotent network. In conditions with the former specifications, individuals' social experience is defined first by the social border between the group and the outside world, and second by terms of the well-established behaviour norms among members. Individual behaviour is controlled in the name of group and there are completely defined fractions inside each group that might possess expert roles and have, thereby, varying degrees of access to resources. There is also a set of mechanisms to get out of problems in the event of a disagreement. Such a combination could endure longer in the case of internal fissure. It also enacts restrictions upon members for optimising survival. However, there are occasions applying to impotent groups and networks when, under no circumstance, individuals' social experience is lined up by external forces, and neither does the assigned class base confine individuals. In such situations, interpersonal relations become vague, their duties get implicit, and individuals interact in void; as a result, a demand for the supervision of some personal behaviour, like the regulations for the prohibition of the violation of contracts,

evolves. The benchmark of the success is the number of its followers and customers. Cruel rivalry and struggle for survival purported by individuals is demonstrated in worldviews that show symptoms of anxiety and cherish rewards and benefits as characteristics of rivalry. The Tehran bazaar has moved away from a structure that was founded on ethnicity, religious identity, and kinship networks, and is transforming to shaped atomic identities and producing an impotent network. Ethnic, local, religious, and kinship devotions are determining social factors that regulated bazaaris. As the national hotspot of capital and commodity, the Tehran bazaar has always entertained guild activists, and, during the migration of regional and ethnic groups, has established networks of lingual, dialectical, and local associations incorporated by the larger socio-economic body of bazaaris; the presence of ethnic minorities with different dialects has always been substantial in the bazaar and throughout guilds. Intimate, face-to-face relations of people in the bazaar created social, cultural, and economic associations inside guilds or among shareholders and, as such, one could speak of the ethnic and local identities of the bazaar. Traditionally, potent group and network identity led to the formation of the bazaari identity in pursuance of shared interests, and whose function against state and political structures more indicated their group and network might. Without doubt, these identities played crucial roles in maintaining trade between the Tehran bazaar and bazaars of other major

cities of Iran. Nonetheless, the permanence of traditional trading functions in Iran has assisted the tradesmen in utilising lingual and local resources for fulfilling their needs and distributing commodities inside Tehran and beyond. The bazaaris' economics and interactions both together and outside of Tehran were obviously facilitated in a socio-cultural backdrop of shared lingual, historical, and cultural grounds.

The other powerful element strengthening the idea of the bazaar as a potent group and a potent network was the social interchanges through kinship. The importance of this factor has diminished during the presumable shift to the impotent group-network. In the past, trade relations in the bazaar were consolidated by strong kinship links. The bazaar was of a larger kinship network than today; among bazaaris, endogamy was preferred to exogamy. Endogamy turned bazaaris into the human capital of a single family. Trade relations and economic exchanges prospered, and new marriages were entailed (Karimi, 2008, p. 114). The preference of bazaaris for enriching their family's professional skills in managing the chamber, accumulating wealth within the family, and improving a social face in the marketplace were all effective in the embrace of endogamy. Although the rich social environment of the bazaar still demands endogamy and kinship, the past three decades' multi-faceted changes have undermined the system (Keshavarzian, 2004, p. 25). In the passage from the potent group-network to

the impotent group-network situation, the shape and type of relations have altered. Today's bazaaris prefer to not supersede the professional relations with guild colleagues and evade extra-guild interactions. Formerly, networks of social relationships in bazaar took place through patterns of kinship expansion in form of endogamy or by attendance in civil and religious occasions of charities, mosques, tekiyeh, and the like. Not only were these networks the source of individual interactions with each other, they also provided frameworks for resolving problems, reaching consensus, facilitating cohesion within the bazaar, awareness-raising, widespread coordination in matters, bargaining with authorities, and exerting influence over power relations. Consequently, the traditional market of Tehran shaped its own social network through various institutions and administered its activities therein, too.

### **Shift from Social Orientations of Action to Economic, Instrumental Ones**

A major issue that the established economics takes with sociologists and anthropologists is the logic behind the action of economic actors. Ritual economy approach as an alternative within anthropology aims to analyse this logic in socio-cultural terms. For this reason, it emphasises the diversity of the actors' choices in different settings to highlight specific rationalities as the logics of action. Based on this approach, one can hardly expect rational (in the sense of calculating) behaviour from the side of actors by always assuming they rely on the

provision of ultimate profit. Social structures and relations have a significant share in economic decision-makings and, in many cases, the actors' choices cannot be explained by the frameworks the established economy suggests; this is because action orientation does not concern the optimisation of profit, but the social motives of maintaining a social face and preserving social capital. Bazaaris used to maintain an ideology, meaning that they were not calculating their profits all the time; beside economic gains and by adhering to traditions, they fulfilled their social duties of assistance to peers, passing customers to each other, public benefit activities, running charities, participation in religious delegations, feeding the poor, etc. These were generally performed during rituals and did not necessarily pertain to economic orientations; as a result, this part of bazaaris' actions could not be analysed with instrumental rationality tools—even though evidences indicate a turn in the bazaaris' action-orientation toward instrumental rationality. The following conversation clearly points to the transformation, taking place in the action logic among the Tehran bazaaris:

*Author--how are things going regards with charity in bazaar?*

*Interviewee--it is not like before. These have faded away. These have polluted bazaar.*

*Author--who do you assist and whom do you invite to assist?*

*Interviewee--whenever there is the need, we ask others to participate to help.*

*Look, this is a roster we made some day ago and helped a needy family. Haj Agha called me and said me about a needy family and asked me to assist. I referred to colleagues and gathered 430 thousand Tomans. Two persons from this guild and the rest from other guilds. These are all youthful and fresh. They don't care.*

Contemporary bazaaris' action-orientation in Tehran is egoistic and individualistic. Under these circumstances, personal profit and the optimisation thereof is the goal. The following quotation shows the shift in orientations among bazaaris:

*"Earning is bestowed by God and He considers all when He hands out. Formerly, bazaaris used to pass customers to each other. Nowadays it is interrupted, and things are not like before"* (garment seller, 54 years old, 30 years bazaari).

## CONCLUSION

The Tehran traditional market has not been merely an economic institution but has maintained social, cultural, and political missions, besides economic functions; that is why it is called "the institution of the bazaar". Recent evidences indicate the mitigation of the bazaar institutional function. The Tehran traditional market as the epitome of the traditional economy of Iran has witnessed changes in the past decade and evidences

indicate orientations other than what ruled it previously are emerging as the dominant mode of action. The current article tried to analyse the transformation of the Tehran bazaar by using the ritual economy approach and the theory of embedded economy. Accordingly, the traditional specificities of the Tehran bazaar, presumably under the influence of elemental ritual economy factors, were conceptualised. The main idea among such specificities are the bazaar's wholehearted embeddedness in social, political, cultural realities, and currents. The observed currents, however, are indicative of the incomplete disembeddedness from non-economic realms of society, politics, and culture. The new situation could not be understood as a fixed condition. What goes on in the Tehran bazaar and how it conducts its orientation is a question that remains to be answered in future studies. The traditional bazaar with its powerful history embedded in kinship, ethnicity, religion, and the like is a unique instance that needs adaptation methods for modern requisites in a way that entails the least economic damage.

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