

Concept Paper

Social Theory and Navigating Indeterminacy: A Configurational Analysis of Iranian Youth's Identity Construction in Contemporary Iran

Abbas Jong ^{1,2} 

¹ Department of Social Sciences, Humboldt University of Berlin, 10117 Berlin, Germany; abbas.jong@hu-berlin.de or jong@islam.uni-kiel.de

² Seminar für Orientalistik, Christian-Albrechts-Universität Kiel, 24118 Kiel, Germany

Abstract: An emerging disparity within contemporary social science highlights a disconnection between the world in the process of metamorphosing and cosmopolitanization and the knowledge of the social world that is still trapped in the cognitive assumptions of modern episteme, which provided the conditions for the emergence of modern social sciences a century ago. This divide inhibits the efficacy of social analysis in comprehending and elucidating contemporary phenomena. This article advocates for a shift in the ontology of social theory and science towards the cosmopolitanization of the world, characterized by the prioritization of indeterminacy and fluidity in the construction of social phenomena. It investigates the epistemological implications and prerequisites of this ontological transformation, favoring a post-foundationalist approach as the most suitable epistemological framework. In response to the challenges posed by the uncertainty and indeterminacy of cosmopolitanization, after reviewing some of the existing theoretical efforts to address and provide alternatives to this challenge, the article proposes the examination of social configurations as the most fitting subjects for study. This approach necessitates the suspension of conventional, given, regulated categories, and trans-historical theories. It underscores the importance of recognizing configurations as incomplete, contingent units shaped within specific historical contexts and moments. The fluidity, relationality, and indeterminacy of configurations situated between the universal and the singular make them suitable for analysis at the level of particular. After elaborating on the most important features of social configurations, finally, by employing the proposed theoretical framework, this article aims to investigate its effectiveness in analyzing the process of identity construction among Iranian youth in Tehran in the context of the cosmopolitanization of reality, particularly in the face of the Islamist regime of Iran's official politics of identity. Through a review and revision of selected empirical studies on youth identity construction in the consumer spaces of Tehran, based on the idea of social configurations within the framework of cosmopolitanization, it is argued that the genuine understanding of identity politics in contemporary Iran is not rooted in conventional analytical norms and categories but rather in a comprehensible conceptual apparatus characterized by fluidity and indeterminacy, capable of effectively making sense of the conflict between the politics of determinacy and indeterminacy in Iranian everyday life.

Keywords: cosmopolitanization; indeterminacy; post-foundationalism; social configuration; Iranian youth; Iranian everyday life; IRI's politics of identity; the politics of hybridity



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1. Introduction

Ulrich Beck begins his last book, which is perhaps the culmination of all his works, with the question, why do we no longer understand the world [1]? The contemporary world has been affected more than ever before by accelerated transnational and global developments and forces, developments that touch different cultural, political, and economic layers of societies and have imposed the characteristics of fluidity, interdependency, indeterminacy,

uncertainty, and unpredictability on social realities [2–11]. The death of an innocent young girl from the subaltern and marginal classes in Iran in the custody of the Islamic Republic of Iran's morality police for women in September 2022, in addition to a nationwide uprising inside Iran, became the source of the largest solidarity movements around the world; the regional conflict between Russia and Ukraine has an impact on national, regional, and global politics and economies, as well as laying the groundwork for one of Europe's largest migration waves since World War II; in the aftermath of a terrorist attack by Hamas in Southern Israel in October 2023, which led to the loss of several thousand lives in Israel and Palestine, the ground has been prepared for both the Middle East and the whole world to enter into an indescribable political and human crisis; the Brazilian presidential elections could directly influence the global economic and environmental equilibrium; the far-right groups are celebrating their political victories one after another, climate change and global warming have fundamentally changed the economic and social structures of many societies; a contagious viral disease in a city in China could shut down the world for two years; global inequalities leads to mass migrations, the formation of human and drug trafficking cartels; the rapid expansion of communication technologies, IT, and social networks have not left any part of the globe out of their reach. The list can go on and on.

It seems that the contemporary world is on the verge of a new configuration. Ulrich Beck calls this process the metamorphosis of the world, a process that “implies a much more radical transformation in which the old certainties of modern society are falling away and something quite new is emerging. To grasp this metamorphosis of the world, it is necessary to explore the new beginnings, to focus on what is emerging from the old, and to seek to grasp future structures and norms in the turmoil of the present” [1] (p. 22). In this process, we are experiencing the emergence of new phenomena that the dominant sociology, due to being caught in the trap of methodological nationalism, Eurocentrism, various types of foundationalism or anti/non-foundationalism, essentialism, metaphysics of reproduction, etc., is not able to grasp and explain at a high level, an unknown situation that remains in constant transformation and indeterminacy [1,12–14]. Although the metamorphosis of the world embraces all human realms, it seems that sociology and social theory are left out of its influence. The emergence of cosmopolitized spaces of action, according to Beck [1,15–17], is the most important realm of crystallization of the world's metamorphosis; spaces in which new social realities, by suspending boundaries, institutions, ideas, categories, relationships, and the existing order in general, lead to a transformation of the way of seeing the world, being in the world, and imagining and doing politics. The process of metamorphosis, while swallowing the world, has brought a kind of widespread indeterminacy that has caused many theories and social categories to be incapable of making sense of these phenomena and become what Beck called “zombie categories” [18,19].

This paper posits that contemporary social theory and sociology are facing challenges in their ability to effectively elucidate and conceptualize the complexities of the social sphere within a climate of uncertainty and indeterminacy. Consequently, it is argued that a substantial epistemological transformation is required within the domain of social science to uphold its historical commitments. The inception of sociology can be situated in an epoch characterized by determinism, rationalization, and human agency, arising in response to various philosophical and societal quandaries [12–14,20]. Simultaneously, sociology came into existence within a historical and intellectual milieu where the natural sciences held preeminence [21,22]. In the ontological framework of the natural sciences, the existence of an objective reality distinct from the observing subject was postulated. This reality was perceived as comprising determinate entities, thus assuming well-defined forms and relationships. This realm of realities was believed to be universally consistent, stable, and uniform across all contexts, with knowledge of their universal laws representing the quintessential characteristic of scientific knowledge [23]. These ontological and epistemological perspectives were deeply rooted in the modern episteme and, consequently, in imperial and national epistemes, which facilitated the emergence of modern social and human sciences [24]. Within this epistemic ground, a foundation, inclusive of both

essence and genesis, was formulated to account for fragmented and segregated social phenomena. Understanding the regulated and standardized phenomena, which could be historically analyzed, necessitated the identification of this foundation [25]. It was within these cognitive coordinates that notions and categories like nation, society, religion, state, government, class, freedom, and citizenship were either constructed or endowed with novel connotations. By presupposing these categories, early mainstream social sciences sought to encompass various, indeterminate concrete phenomena and applied formal rationality to render them coherent, comprehensible, and rational. This endeavor not only elucidated facets of reality but also actively participated in their construction. All of these developments occurred in a context where modern immanent reason aspired to grasp and establish a new rational order.

This is while the cosmopolitanization of the world implies another realm of realities, a social world that fundamentally relies on a completely distinct ontology and epistemology [1,16,17,26–30]. Traditional social categories, such as race, order, progress, class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and globality, alongside analytical units like individuals, families, nations, and structures, now grapple with the understanding and making sense of the intricate complexities of contemporary phenomena. The new phenomena and entities we encounter are multifaceted, eluding straightforward classification and frequently transcending established boundaries and demarcations. These phenomena can simultaneously have local, national, regional, and global implications, and over time, they can shift between cultural, political, and economic dimensions. For instance, political systems exhibit a complex blend of characteristics, oscillating between authoritarian and democratic attributes [25]. Similarly, phenomena framed within economic paradigms exhibit diverse and fluid manifestations, carrying a range of implications. Consequently, elucidating these phenomena within well-established economic research frameworks poses a complex task.

Within the domain of contemporary social theory, two predominant paradigms have come to the forefront. Foundationalist social theory, which has historically prevailed, relies on universal, predetermined, and standardized categories and solid foundations to interpret a wide spectrum of phenomena. In contrast, emerging anti/non-foundationalist social theories advocate for the diversification of these categories or even reject the very notion of universal social categories, embracing a more flexible and groundless approach to engaging with the complexities of the real world. This demarcation results in two contrasting approaches: one adhering to theoretical, fixed, and universal categories with solid foundations, and the other adopting a radical empirical, groundless, and non-foundationalist perspective devoid of such fixed anchors and presupposing a world consisting of singular realities [25,31]. The widening chasm between these paradigms, influenced by the evolving cosmopolitanization of our world, raises questions about the adequacy of traditional sociological approaches in the context of our ever-changing and interconnected global reality [32–35].

But what implications and functions does social science hold in the contemporary uncertain and interwoven world? In a landscape where established boundaries and entities have been deconstructed and cosmopolitanization has left them fragile and indeterminate, how do we comprehend the ever-changing social trends and phenomena that transcend traditional and dominant epistemic grounds? As we grapple with global indeterminacy and disparities and the conventional concepts of self-contained and self-balanced societies lose their relevance, what epistemological and methodological challenges arise from this shifting ontological landscape, and how can they be effectively addressed in empirical research?

In response to the mentioned questions, many solutions have been presented, both in social theory and outside of it. The current paper aims to provide a solution to overcome this gap between the ontology and epistemology of sociology. To this end, the cosmopolitanization of reality [1,16,17,26–30] as the process of intensifying transnational hybridity is considered an ontological state in which the contingent or the indeterminate has the highest determinative significance [36]. It is argued that the precedence of this ontology requires a kind of epistemological turn in social theory. This article, while reviewing some recent

efforts in social theory to confront this dilemma, introduces the concept of social configurations as the best tool for understanding the indeterminate and transnational phenomena: heterogeneous and contingent units that have been determined under certain conditions of possibility and should be considered as the main objects of social inquiries instead of fixed, given, and standardized categories and entities. Finally, by investigating the case of Iranian everyday life as an empirical instance, it is indicated that these shifts in the ontology and epistemology of social theory give rise to a kind of politics of transnationalism and hybridity in the social and political sciences. In the empirical section of this study, an attempt is made to utilize the cosmopolitanization of the world and the idea of social configuration to understand the formation of the identities of Iranian youth in everyday life in Tehran. This process serves as an excellent example of cosmopolitized spaces of action. On one hand, the dominance of the Islamist regime in Iran, the seizure of the totality of social, political, economic, and cultural spaces, and the insistence on a rigid politics of Islamic identity have marginalized a significant portion of Iranian society. On the other hand, especially in the context of the cosmopolitanization of social realities, this process has given rise to new social segments and strata with novel identity patterns in contemporary Iran. This situation has led to serious challenges in the everyday life of Iran in urban spaces. This paper extensively aims to demonstrate that the accurate understanding of this deeply heterogeneous, fluid, and uncertain process requires suspending many established concepts and categories in social analyses and understanding it based on a type of politics of indeterminacy. In this section, by reviewing several empirical studies conducted in recent years on the identity construction of Tehran's youth in everyday life, an effort will be made to highlight the unique formation of this politics of hybridity and indeterminacy among these young people within the framework of the cosmopolitanization of social realities.

2. Reimagining Social Science: Post-Foundationalist Perspectives and Alternative Units of Analysis

In the modern understanding of science, which also penetrated into classical sociology, as noted, social entities were envisaged as linear and homogeneous, equilibrium-based compositions, which represented self-closed and bounded totalities, and were predictable, consistent, and ahistorical in their principles. These features aim to suspend the indeterminacy, incompleteness, complexity, historicity, and relationality of social phenomena in different ways and display them in the form of coherent, homogeneous, regulated, and given units [25]. These concepts and categories have been regarded as prior categories for understanding global realities, independent of temporal and spatial characteristics. The most important task in quantitative research, for instance, was measuring the proximity or distance of concrete social realities from these categories. Here, an attempt was made to identify the various variations or types of these categories in the external world, through different so-called abstract, logical, and given models. However, can we consider these categories as contingent and historical, defined under specific conditions, by suspending the determination of these categories? What will be the consequences of this suspension for socio-cultural inquiries? Can we easily employ categories such as class, sub-culture, or lifestyle, for example, to understand the distinctions in all societies? Do class and lifestyle have universal meanings? How about their empirical connotations? How can we be cautious of relativistic and anti/non-foundationalist approaches, which have taken shape in opposition to foundationalist and essentialist approaches and lead to a kind of epistemic nihilism, and consider everything singular? Based on this, how can the degree of determination, as well as the universality or singularity of social phenomena, be evaluated?

The social sciences, within the context of the cosmopolitanization of the world and the suspension of its perceived determinations, primarily require methods that, while suspending established categories and given foundations, make sense of and analyze phenomena posteriority within historical constellations and at the moments of their actualization. In the post-foundationalist approach, more than anything, the main effort is to suspend the conception of established and complete foundations for the phenomena and categories

under study, considering them in terms of incomplete foundations and in a constant process of (un)grounding [24,25,31]. This happens entirely in relation to various possible contingencies in a historical and empirical manner. Instead of fixed, pure, standardized, and given categories or units such as people, society, gender, race, nationalism, migration, authority, legitimation, development, secularism, modernization, culture, religion, etc., from a post-foundationalist approach, the conditions of the possibility of formation, consolidation, transformation, and collapse of various social configurations can be considered the most proper objects of social science. In this approach, social configurations are considered heterogeneous and indeterminate entities as the main object of social inquiries [37]. The predominance of social configurations and the identification of historical constellations and the moments of their formation, their relationality, and their indeterminacy should lead social research towards the posterior nature of the objective and empirical features of these configurations [25]. Instead of considering a category such as migration a priori in a social inquiry, for instance, we should refer to the condition of categorizing migration and its consequences in a particular configuration a posteriori.

Many solutions and alternatives have been proposed for dealing with the mentioned predicaments and dilemmas in the epistemology of the social sciences. Precisely by formulating alternative units of analysis and using a post-foundationalist approach, some of these solutions have endeavored to criticize the dominant categories and category constructions in the social sciences. In many respects, the idea introduced in this paper, namely social configuration, has been formulated in relation to these alternative units. These notions include Norbert Elias's figuration; Theodor Adorno's constellation; Michel Foucault's dispositif; James Mohany's set; Bruno Latour's association; Pierre Bourdieu's field; and Boike Rehbein's configuration.

2.1. Norbert Elias's Figuration

In overcoming essentialism in the modern social sciences, especially the antinomy of the individual/society, by introducing the notion of figuration, Norbert Elias strives to make sense of the relationality, agency, and fluidity in the construction of social phenomena. According to him, rather than the established, regulated, and given categories of social science, the construction of figurations should be the main object of social inquiry [38,39]. The coexistence of people in societies always, as he emphasizes, even in chaos, in decay, in the very greatest social disorder, has a very specific figuration [40]. For Elias, figuration signifies the "network of interdependences formed among human beings and binds them together, . . . [that is to say], a structure of mutually oriented and dependent people" [41] (p. 213–214). People always group themselves in the form of specific figurations due to their fundamental interdependence with one another [42]. Figurations can have relative autonomy in relation to particular individuals who constitute them here and now, but never in relation to individuals at all [40]. For Elias, society is nothing but a set of figurations. Elias employs the metaphor of games to illustrate the construction of figuration [39]. Actors interact with each other in order to satisfy a need or function. These interactions become the basis for the construction of various types of figurations, which themselves go beyond individuals on another level. Some of these figurations endure, and some are demolished immediately. As he puts it, the case in any figuration is the distribution or balance of power [39,40,43]. Therefore, power and its relations are the prominent elements of figurations. However, this prioritization laid the groundwork for determining specific types of figurations, as well as their related relations and categories. On the other hand, the game metaphor causes a kind of universalization in the concept of figurations and limits their understanding. Entering any game requires learning and reproducing its rules while playing. But by taking into account the indeterminacy, it should be kept in mind that although every game has rules and their knowledge is an essential factor in entering them, in the process of playing, we do not necessarily witness the reproduction of the rules and relations of the game, and the creativity and agency of the actors or the intervention of external elements may set the stage for the transformation of the game.

Therefore, configurations are open, highly fluid, and heterogeneous units. Moreover, a kind of materialistic conception of power can be found in Elias's figuration theory, a perception that assigns a secondary role to symbolic power [44].

2.2. Pierre Bourdieu's Field

The idea of configurations in prioritizing a relational, empirical, positional, and action-oriented perspective, in highlighting the negotiation process of constructing social realities over the assumption of the existence of given social realities, and in emphasizing an anti-essentialist and posterior approach is similar to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of fields. In a comprehensive and precise definition, "fields are realms of struggle in which actors compete for a variety of [considered] valued resources, that is, different types of "capital" that are potentially convertible to each other" [45] (p. 97), [46] (p. 206). Two related but analytically distinct dimensions make up fields: "(1) the objective configuration of actor-positions and (2) the subjective meanings guiding actors in the struggle, that is, the "rules of the game" and particular types of cultural or symbolic capital" [45], [46] (p. 206). The actors can be individuals, nation-states, corporate actors, or transnational actors; "the "capitals" pursued by any particular actor in the field might be multiple (e.g., economic capital, political capital, or symbolic capital); and the "rules of the game" can vary across fields or across time" [46] (p. 206–207). Instead of the universal and metaphysical context in sociology, namely society and the social, here fields, in a relational conception, are the real scales and context of the social world. But the above-mentioned critiques can be raised on the idea of Bourdieu's field. By prioritizing a certain type of relation, i.e., relations based on difference, over other types, and by highlighting power, its relations, and rules, the analysis of fields dominates certain types of configurations over others [47]. Besides that, fields are also vulnerable to the criticism of reproductionism and structuralism and are not properly able to incorporate and provide an explanation for social changes [1]. But the logic of action formulated by Bourdieu [48] can well overcome the problems related to the advent and evolution of configurations in the theory of fields. On the other hand, in the theory of fields, we are faced with inviolable and prior demarcations. But in the idea of configurations, the quantity and quality of boundaries are posterior and relational.

2.3. Bruno Latour's Association

Attention to the plurality and diversity of relations as the central feature of configuration is precisely reflected in the ideas of Theodor Adorno's constellation, Bruno Latour's associations, and Mohany's sets. Basically, by criticizing the objectification and reification of the social and presupposing a universal dimension for them, Latour [49] considers the task of sociology to be tracing and reassembling relations and their types. For him, there are two types of sociology: sociology of the social, in which the social refers to an external, given, objective, and distinct thing or being; and sociology of associations (associology), which implies a special kind of tracing and reassembling of relations between actors and other beings as well [49] (p. 9). He maintains that social beings can form collective phenomena through some kind of connection, coexistence, and relationships, phenomena that are not given and prior but are completely relational and posterior. In favor of the second type of sociology, he claims that,

there is nothing specific to social order; that there is no social dimension of any sort, no 'social context', no distinct domain of reality to which the label 'social' or 'society' could be attributed; that no 'social force' is available to 'explain' the residual features other domains cannot account for; that members know very well what they are doing even if they don't articulate it to the satisfaction of the observers; that actors are never embedded in a social context and so are always much more than 'mere informants'; that there is thus no meaning in adding some 'social factors' to other scientific specialties; that political relevance obtained through a 'science of society' is not necessarily desirable; and that 'society', far from being the context 'in which' everything is framed, should rather be

construed as one of the many connecting elements circulating inside tiny conduits. With some provocation, . . . ‘There is no such a thing as a society’. [49] (pp. 4–5)

But Latour’s radical effort in deconstructing various social entities and categories (as a kind of groundlessness) prevents considering different levels of consistency, regularity, universality, collectivity, and coherency among social phenomena.

2.4. James Mohany’s Set

To some extent, James Mohany’s set-theoretical theory [21] has been able to consider the very issue of coherence among social categories and make them meaningful. He names his idea, “scientific constructivism” [21] (p. 3), something between essentialism and extreme constructivism, and believes that instead of objective, given, and external categories, social categories should be considered sets that are rooted to some extent in the cognitive structure of the mind. In set-theoretic analysis, a set is considered “a group of entities that all share one or more essential properties” [21] (p. 13). Sets, in this conception, are “mental phenomena that are ontologically prior to the entities they categorize.” (ibid) For Mohany, “social categories refer to particular entanglements of human understandings and aspects of objective reality. They are interactions between conceptual spaces in human minds and entities from the natural world” [21] (p. 14). Although the various and indeterminate relations between social categories and their relative correlations are appropriately meaningful in the idea of sets, this understanding of social categories ultimately takes a step into a kind of essentialism.

2.5. Theodor Adorno’s Constellation

Theodor Adorno’s constellation [50] offers perhaps the best solution to deal with the problem of the plurality of relations as well as the relative cohesion of social configurations, transcending the essentialist feature of existing social categories. According to Adorno [50], social relations in a specific time and place manifest themselves as a distinct unit for an analyst, an incomplete unit that he refers to as a constellation. Understanding a constellation requires identifying its internal relations, the history of these relations, and finally suspending the independence of these objects, i.e., constellations. However, in Adorno’s negative dialectics, he prioritizes negative relations and differentiation in the construction of a constellation. Another problem is the place of a theory of action as well as the construction of social phenomena in the practical field, which is largely absent in the idea of the constellation because it is more of an epistemological idea.

2.6. Michel Foucault’s Dispositif

A much more comprehensive and complete theory in this field, which embraces many elements and relations from a relational and historical approach to social categories, is Foucault’s dispositif theory [51–53]. Dispositif is precisely a relational conceptualization of the order of things or states of affairs beyond the presupposition of regulated and given categories with a solid foundation. As maintained by Foucault, a dispositif is a historically structured collectivity under which we can track the emergence of discourses and power/knowledge relations that lead to distinct social practices. For Foucault, a dispositif (apparatus) is:

“a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble, consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural planning, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic proportions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus [or dispositif]. The apparatus [or dispositif] itself is the network that can be established between these elements”. [51] (p. 2194)

A dispositif is a set of relations that exist between its constituent elements. This means that these elements are put together based on a certain form of dispersion and figuration. Therefore, identifying the relations between a dispositif’s elements, which are incongruous and heterogeneous, is the first step in analyzing a dispositif. This heterogeneity and unevenness can be traced both temporally and functionally. This implies that a dispositif

is formed in a certain period of history and based on a specific function in a specific configuration consisting of distinct and heterogeneous elements and relations. Since *dispositif* is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between heterogeneous elements, as Foucault puts it, a particular [*dispositif* or] discourse can figure at one time as the program of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice that itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality" [51] (pp. 194–195). Then, these historical configurations may continue to exist after fulfilling their constitutive function and represent themselves as trans-temporal and trans-spatial constructions. In this way, *dispositifs* appear in historical ruptures and in response to specific functions, but they aim to demonstrate themselves as continuous and permanent [51,53]. Foucault's *dispositif*, on the other hand, corresponds to the configuration of knowledge and power, whereby knowledge is linked to the visible and the expressible, speakable on the basis of power [54]. In this reading, the function that is the basis of *dispositif* formation is rendered to the requirements of power. Therefore, identifying different strategies through which power supports a certain knowledge and, at the same time, exercising that knowledge to strengthen the existing power relations are the most important steps in the path of understanding a *dispositif* [51,53,54]. *Dispositifs* provide the best explanation for the conditions of possibility for different configurations by considering their contingency. Eventually, Foucault reduces the *dispositif* to a certain moment of power/knowledge configuration and the requirements of power. On this basis, on the other hand, the agency of the actors is resolved at a high level, and the ground is provided for a kind of structuralism.

2.7. Boike Rehbein's Configuration

By suspending the centrality of power in Foucault's *dispositif* and by employing the idea of Adorno's constellation, Boike Rehbein [47,55] strives to provide a trans-historical understanding of the idea of configurations. By putting heterogeneous configurations as the main object of social inquiry, he considers the recognition of various types of relations between the elements of social configurations to be the main goal of social analysis. He ponders [47,55] the kaleidoscopic dialectic as the best method of understanding configurations, which takes the configurations into account at the level of the particular between the universal and the singular. For him, the particular means that after identifying the unlimited relations of a configuration and also searching for their history, one should look for their similarities among other configurations, drawing on Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblance. Some relationships are more universal, and some are more particular. Therefore, everything in a configuration depends on its types of relations; even the means of knowing a configuration is reliant on the coordinates of that configuration. What Rehbein proposes is a general idea with many disadvantages. His idea in the empirical investigations has no practical tools to grasp the social and hybrid configurations. It is more a hermeneutical, cognitive theory than a social theory. The beginning and end of configurations, their regimes of boundary, as well as the position of the knowing subject, are absent in his theory. The structural context and conditions for their construction are largely disregarded, and a specific idea about space and time, as well as a theory of action, is absent in his conception of configurations. But the openness and changing nature of configuration, considering wide types of relations, their historicity, their heterogeneity, a relative understanding of rationality, and most importantly, the formulation of configurations at a particular level, are the most important features of Rehbein's configurations.

Therefore, we need far more flexible and complex conceptual tools and methods that can, in the first place, prioritize indeterminacy and fluidity to make sense of concrete social phenomena based on their actualized yet incomplete foundations. By suspending established categorizations in the social sciences, these methods should allow their conceptualization based on the conditions of their determinability within historical constellations and their moment of actualization. Considering these social configurations in a continuous process of grounding across various historical layers and their contingency will be the

most critical analytical concern when examining these configurations, and this can be best achieved within the post-foundationalist approach.

3. Social Configurations

Social configurations, in their broadest sense, can be considered a set of relations that have been formed at a certain time and place by a set of actors around specific categories. These configurations are considered contingent, which means they are determined under certain possible conditions. Unlike regulated social units, interconnectivity, incompleteness, fluidity, and indeterminacy are the key features of configurations. Therefore, since relations and categories are the key constituent elements of any configuration, with the change of relations or their type, the configurations also change. Thus, social configurations are incomplete units with partial and temporary foundations that are examined by sociologists over a period of time. Heterogeneity and indeterminacy are the main features of these configurations, traits that lie both in the conditions of their determination as well as in the lack of clear boundaries and the indeterminate nature of the relations and categories of these configurations [24,25,31,36].

Numerous categories, elements, relationships, variables, and other aspects that were traditionally subjects of examination in social theory and were positioned within the framework of society now take on significance within the context of social configurations and the intricate processes of their construction, consolidation, reconstruction, and deconstruction. This transition is not merely a straightforward substitution of one analytical unit for another; it involves a shift from well-defined units to the endeavor of comprehending inherently uncertain phenomena. Attributes such as the degree of determinism, universality, stability, continuity, generalizability, historicity, agency's essence, the determination of agency versus structure, normative versus descriptive elements, power dynamics, colonial legacies, local versus global considerations, and nationality or transnationality are defined within a configuration at a specific temporal and spatial juncture. Consequently, the seemingly abstract concept of "society" is no more than a set of configurations within a particular time, space, and locale. By recognizing the contingency of these configurations, sociologists initially scrutinize the conditions underpinning their existence and subsequently examine their principal characteristics and coordinates. To gain profound insight into configurations, it is imperative to both deconstruct a priori categories and establish universal theories while avoiding extreme singularism, empiricism, or presentism ingrained in numerous social approaches. Given that all categories and relationships are determined a posteriori in relation to configurations, bridging the gap between theory and methodology, which is prominent in sociology, is of primary importance. Hence, from an epistemological standpoint, configurations serve as instruments for understanding themselves or provide fitting tools for their own comprehension [24,25].

In the examination of social configurations, in the first place, the homogeneity, ahistoricity, universality, stability, and abstraction of social units must be deferred. On the other hand, the internal relations and then the external relations of the object of inquiry (here, social configurations) should be traced and analyzed. Then, the relations between these configurations should be revisited in their historical horizon, and finally, the integrity, independence, and inviolable demarcation of these configurations should be resolved. According to Rehbein [47,55], the autonomy of these configurations, rather than their relationships with totality, comes from the multiplicity of their relations. A configuration according to the type of relations and central categories and their orders may seem economic, but this configuration at another time and facing another problem is considered cultural. A configuration may be formed on a regional scale but has broad local and national implications. These configurations can be the place of encounter, accumulation, or intersection of various social categories, including gender, nationality, class, etc., an encounter that has now found a distinct meaning in a possible specific configuration. All social variables and laws are extracted from these configurations in a posteriori form and become meaningful

in relation to them [24,25]. In examining each configuration, following Boike Rehbein and Theodor Adorno [50], three basic features should always be considered:

First, the object of inquiry must be construed as a configuration at the level of the particular, something between the universal and the singular. Second, configurations must be attributed to a clearly defined empirical realm. Third, the configurations must be constructed historically, but without any teleology or mention of an origin or destination [55] (pp. 90–100), [47] (p. 58). So particularity, empirically and historically, is one of the prominent features that every researcher should take into account when examining configurations.

Abstract interpretations of history and social objects make them seem universally applicable. But in reality, a law will be applicable only within a particular realm of phenomena from which it has emerged at a historical moment. This is the very meaning of ‘particular’. “Some laws and rules apply to many phenomena, some too few—however, none to all and none to just one” [55] (p. 60). Thus, each configuration implicitly refers to universal propositions and laws, but they apply and are true only to the relevant configuration [56]. Each configuration remains open and endless as new relations emerge and new relations are uncovered. Drawing on Wittgenstein’s idea of family resemblance [57], it can be revealed that configurations cannot be reduced to universal similarities and general concepts because these similarities and general concepts do not suffice to fully grasp them [24,25,47,55]. It means that they have similarities in some relationships and aspects but, at the same time, many differences in others. Identifying central relations and categories, as well as the conditions of possibility of these configurations, provides a ground for recognizing family resemblances between them. The most important point of these explorations and understanding the relations and categories within each configuration is, in addition to advancing the empirical inquiry, situating them within a historical framework and constellation of relations and categories. Therefore, considering a historical approach to comprehending configurations is highly significant.

In this regard, Reinhart Koselleck’s theory of sediments of time [58] can provide an appropriate historical theory for configurations. His theory, in other words, provides an account for the historical condition of the possibility of social configurations. This theory attempts to portray a new approach to examining the history of social phenomena while overcoming the linear-cyclical dichotomy by drawing on the metaphor of geological formation and layers of sediments. “By transposing this metaphor back into human, political, or social history as well as into structural history, we can analytically separate different temporal levels upon which people move and events unfold, and thus ask about the longer-term preconditions for such events” [58] (p. 3).

Social configurations are built into and on different layers of time. Historical dimensions of configurations are composed of numerous layers that mutually reference one another but are not completely reliant on one another. Based on the etymology of history, Koselleck [58] conceived of history as the science of human experience. According to him, this experience can be evaluated in three interrelated (analytical) layers:

1. The first layer of experience is singularity. In this layer, events, configurations, or their elements, such as a revolution, a change of leader, or an economic recession, are experienced primarily as surprising and irreversible. This experience can be experienced in the biography of a person or in communities of action, which experience their own evolution as a succession of singular constellations. At this level, this succession of singular events is reflected as linear, and future developments will also be placed on this timeline [58] (pp. 4–5).

2. This singularity is made possible by a structure of repetitions. According to Koselleck, “in all realms of life, we can identify phenomena of recurrence that secure the condition of a possible singularity” [58] (p. 6). An important question that is always raised here is the mode, quality, and quantity of the change in this structure of repetition. For Koselleck [58] (p. 6), “not only does the singularity of sudden events seem to bring historical changes with them, but longer-lasting structures that enable changes but initially appear to be more

static, are themselves also subject to change.” The benefit of Koselleck’s theory of sedimentations of time is its capacity to quantify various intensities and velocities—accelerations or decelerations—and, in doing so, to show various historical change mechanisms that suggest vast temporal complexity. Another important issue is the relationship between the layer of singular events and structures of repetition, without which such singular events would not be possible. The manner in which people or generations living together as a collective amass experience has been linked to these different layers of time. This connection, as well as the quiddity singularity, can be understood above all in the notion of rupture in the layer of structures of repetition. This rupture, which occurs as a result of a surprise in a chain of events, means that something has happened differently than had been thought. First, it appears different and new, and second, it is not as one anticipates. All of a sudden, “one encounters a novelty, that is, a temporal minimum generated in the space between before and after” [58] (p. 7), between previous experience and the expectation of coming events, and it is precisely in this gap that a new construction becomes necessary, a necessity that is the basis for the formation of many social configurations. In particular, historians ponder how something may have happened the way it did rather than merely asking what has been the case. This is precisely asking about the conditions of the possibility of a configuration as a cotangential phenomenon in terms of structures of repetition. Only if these causes repeatedly occur can singularity be justified by them.

3. There are certain historical periods that go beyond the experience of specific people or generations. This relates to preconditions of experience that existed prior to their respective generational cohorts and will probably persist after these cohorts pass away. However, there are several patterns of repetition that go well beyond a single generation and any sort of generational succession that can be directly experienced, i.e., where generations may meet each other. Koselleck referred to such recurring events that transcend everyday experience, go beyond and undergird several generations, and change very slowly as “transcendental”. As he puts it, “all groups with shared experiences possess a certain minimum need for transcendence: without it, there is no final explanation, and it would be impossible to translate experience into knowledge” [58] (p. 9).

In this way, the history of configurations and their relations and components can be analyzed in three layers. Some configurations’ relations and categories are singular and occur singularly, while others are promoted with higher continuity and durability and are more structured. Some aspects of configuration are also raised by or represent deep social and cultural structures that continue for several generations. On another level, based on the logic of sediments of time, some configurations can be considered singular and short-term events that deconstruct immediately after their construction. Some configurations have higher continuity and strength and can become the basis of different forms of social institutions, organizations, or macro-groups. Sometimes deep historical layers provide the condition of possibility for configurations, and sometimes, conversely, the most external and visibly apparent historical layers and transformations become the basis for constructing social configurations. Some configurations, such as religion or the idea of the nation-state, also become trans-temporal and trans-spatial structures after being constructed and last for several generations, with changes.

The construction of these configurations can be analyzed across three distinct levels, encapsulating cognitive compromise, category construction, and social division. Crafting these configurations at a higher echelon parallels the intricacies of game construction. Just as players must first acquaint themselves with and internalize the rules, positions, roles, and symbolic relationships of a game before participating, a similar process unfolds. This process culminates in the establishment of a collective repertoire of action strategies and cognitive patterns. Actors entering a new field engage with others who introduce their pre-existing categories, initiating a dynamic negotiation process that may lead to the formation, accumulation, or deconstruction of new categories, relationships, and initial configurations [25]. At this level, the perception and evaluation of one’s interests based on the initial rules governing social and cultural backgrounds, as well as one’s social position

within a social field, become pivotal factors influencing the crystallization of various forms of “cognitive compromise”. In the realm of negotiation and consent, cognitive compromise can be understood as a consensus on the enduring validity of collective norms, values, categorizations, and patterns of interpretation, transcending the open-ended process of their construction [45,48,59].

Hence, a social configuration materializes as a consequence of a few select social actors whose interests within a commutative field converge, leading them to mutually agree upon social categories and classifications, subsequently endeavoring to evaluate, legitimize, and imbue them with significance [60]. This process engenders a spectrum of diverse social categories, encompassing national, ethnic, racial, and other such categorical distinctions [45,48,59]. This juncture represents a transient phase in the actualization of social foundations, a phase intricately interwoven with specific historical constellations. These categories materialize temporarily, their formation and completeness remaining contingent on their interaction with other extant elements. Their import becomes discernible within the context of the novel configuration from which they spring. Consequently, a multitude of pre-existing categories and relationships acquire fresh connotations and significance in this new arrangement. The coordinates and essence of these configurations are shaped by the order of these categories, their structure, the nature of their syntagmatic and paradigmatic associations, discursive expressions, and, more broadly, the grammar governing them at a higher level [61]. The grammatical constructs of these categorical arrangements, in tandem with the governing regime of boundaries, unveil the typologies of national, transnational, religious, cultural, and political categories within a specific configuration. For instance, the precedence and determinism of culture within a particular configuration can be demonstrated through the implementation of a specific categorical order at a given moment. In essence, nothing is intrinsically national, ethnical, religious, racial, cultural, global, or secular; instead, these distinctions arise from the order and dominance of certain categories within a particular configuration.

The formation of numerous categories, orders of categories, relationships, and elements serves as the groundwork for the emergence of diverse forms of social boundaries, which manifest through various mechanisms of boundary delineation, group dynamics, and distinctions that, in turn, define the scale and operational scope of a configuration [60–63]. Through the process of social division, a demarcation is drawn between the familiar and the unfamiliar, insiders and outsiders. This delineation results in the exclusion of those who do not align with the shared sense of belonging, categories, identity, cognition of the categories, and similar attributes. Depending on the arrangement of categories, the transparency and permeability of boundaries, and the degree of structurality within configurations, social boundary-making can give rise to various forms of social differentiation, group formation, and entities such as social classes, gender-based collectives, subcultures, ethnic groups, nations, transnational diasporas, fields, and domains, among others. Social boundaries may entail the suspension of pre-existing boundaries and groupings or the establishment of new ones [60]. Consequently, the three stages involved in shaping social configurations can enter into diverse relationships with existing configurations, relationships that themselves may be uncertain and asymmetrical [25].

Henceforth, the examination of social configurations encompasses three distinct levels. Initially, the first level delves into an exploration of the conditions fostering their emergence. This entails a comprehensive consideration of their contingency, historicity, and the explicit delineation of the particular and partial foundations upon which their existence is firmly grounded. Moving to the second level, scrutiny is directed towards the construction of these configurations. This involves a meticulous analysis encompassing the identification of cognitive compromises, the delineation of category constructions, the establishment of orders within categories, and an investigation into the discursive expressions that underpin them. The third and final level involves a comprehensive assessment of the concrete determinations and discernible outcomes linked to the construction of these configurations. This manifests in the generation of diverse collective identities, the formation of social

groupings, the initiation of collective actions, and the emergence of social, political, cultural, and economic realities and forces across varying scales.

4. An Empirical Case: The Politics of Hybridity and Indeterminacy in the Iranian Everyday Life

The metamorphosis of the world is the outcome of the unwanted consequences and side effects of modernization and industrialization on a global scale, which are now sweeping the world at an unprecedented speed. This global trend is a kind of globalization of risk, indeterminacy, and deep and successive transformation; a situation that is in direct conflict with structured power on a global scale; a power that strives to determine the social world in the form of organized and regulated entities under the regime of nation-states [37] by suspending indeterminacy and uncertainty. Therefore, the cosmopolitanization of the world, as one of the main pillars of the world's metamorphosis, poses the most serious challenge to this historical regime that once arose from Western Europe and then conquered the world in various forms [1,15–17]. Crises, risks, and new global forces are neutral to the existing categories and foundations of different societies and affect different groups regardless of their local or national conditions. Here, only the reactions and the degree of impact can be distinct and national or local in appearance, reactions that have mainly arisen in a global and relational context [64]. As mentioned earlier, in the light of this process, various societies and nation-states confront the side effects of their modernization processes, and after a period of time, they face the challenge of uncertainty and indeterminacy, a situation that they desperately attempt to overcome.

The cosmopolitanization of the world, in other words, is the arena of conflict between the politics of determinacy and indeterminacy in the cosmopolitanized spaces of action. Dominant regimes of power with different strategies try to exclude, regulate, discipline, and eliminate accidental, indeterminate, and uncertain elements because the requirements of power will be strictly applicable in a determined situation. Therefore, the cosmopolitanization of the world in the era of nation-states is the process of intensifying transnational hybridity and emerging various politics of transnationalism [25,30,36,64]. This means that the configurations constructed as a result of this process are transnational in essence because they comprise relations, boundaries, and categories that go beyond the national fixed, solid, and determined boundaries and entities. This situation in the current world can be found in many slums, ghettos, immigration camps, diasporas, transnational configurations, cosmopolitan metropolises, cartels, religious networks, etc., and can be considered a threat to many regimes of powers and nation-states.

The politics of everyday life in Iran in the last two decades can be well scrutinized under the process of the cosmopolitanization of the world as well as the logic of social configurations and the politics of transnational hybridity in a conflict between the politics of determinacy of the regime in power and the politics of indeterminacy and hybridity of the actors in everyday life. A brief review of contemporary Iranian history, especially the developments in the regime of power over the past two decades, vividly illustrates the historical layers that have provided the conditions for the emergence of new social strata and the politics of indeterminacy, along with various related social configurations. After a short respite, the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) resumed the same modernization policy as the Pahlavi regime, with a few modifications, and was able to inject the totalitarian state inherited from that regime into society, along with a kind of political Islam, a state that remained above society and was resisted by society [65]. Although the Islamist regime of Iran, due to its novelty [66], had a kind of indeterminacy since its emergence, the internal developments in the dominant regime of power, especially in the last two decades, have made it more and more determined.

In line with the modernization of the Pahlavi regime, which sought to construct a new Iran based on a form of enlightened and modern monarchy, the revolutionary Islamist regime of Iran also endeavored to incorporate its Islamist ideology into this modernization program and impose it on Iranian society [67]. Due to the dominance of a

form of Islamic totalitarianism, the official politics of culture and identity played a central role in the Islamicization policies after the 1979 revolution. The regime, similar to the Pahlavi regime but with distinct content, aimed to create *Homo Islamicus*, which should serve as the foundation for the Islamic society envisioned by the ruling Islamic jurists (authorities) in Iran. The totalitarian Islamicization programs of this regime, like many Islamist ideologies [31], sought to provide an inclusive and imposing plan for all aspects and layers of society, from the most private realms of Iranians to the macro financial system and foreign relations, based on their specific interpretation of Islamic tradition and, most importantly, to serve the interests of the ruling Islamist regime.

Over the course of nearly half a century of the regime's rule in Iran, various cultural and social policies and institutions have emerged to implement the regime's politics of identity and culture. In different periods, attempts have been made to create a disciplined population based on the necessities of this regime by constructing a somewhat Islamist image of humans, time, space, society, lifestyle, religiosity, body, subjectivity, femininity, masculinity, citizenship, and more. Politically and economically, the most significant legacy of Ayatollah Khomeini was also establishing a form of hierarchical Islamist regime of power with the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader (*velayat-e faqih*) and the centrality of the aristocratic clergy and their affiliated elites, who are integrated into this hierarchical system through a tough ideological as well as clientelist system [68,69]. Consequently, access to the upper echelons of wealth and power became impossible for various segments of the Iranian population, leading to widespread political, economic, and ultimately cultural exclusion and marginalization in contemporary Iran. Furthermore, it can be seen that the dominant Islamist politics of culture and identity were constructed based on the power structure of this regime and aimed to justify it while creating disciplined subjects.

However, the indeterminacy that dominated the regime during its first two decades of appearance, along with the practical necessities and unintended consequences of its modernization policies, paved the way for the emergence of new social strata and groups in the political, economic, and cultural domains, posing a significant challenge to the ruling regime in different periods. Widespread resistance also took place across various social layers against the authoritarian policies of this regime, becoming another source of extensive conflicts in contemporary Iran. Power dynamics within the dominant aristocratic clerical regime and their affiliated Islamist forces were also a source of transformation in Iran. For instance, the post-Islamist reformist movement in Iran emerged precisely within these contradictions and contests within the Islamist ruling power and managed to instigate fundamental changes in Iran for about a decade in the early 2000s. In the economic sector, a form of neoliberal economic system gained dominance in the economic reconstruction following the Iran–Iraq war in the 1990s, giving rise to the emergence of technocrats and capitalists associated with the rentier economic system of the Islamic Republic [70]. In the cultural and identity politics sphere, the Islamist regime of Iran prioritized its *Homo Islamicus*, focusing predominantly on the body, social relationships, and the overall lifeworld of youth and women, even in the private sphere. Consequently, these domains became some of the most significant battlegrounds against the dominant politics of identity throughout the last half century in Iran, witnessing the emergence of subcultures, new lifestyles, modern body management, and various forms of resistance strategies.

The dominance of the post-Islamist reformist regime in 1997 was accompanied by the modification of some of the Islamist policies of the ruling power, allowing relative freedom in the public sphere and, to some extent, in the economic and political domains. This led to the strengthening of civil society forces, social freedoms, and the emergence of new social domains by marginalized forces opposed to the Islamist regime, especially women, youth, minorities, pluralistic and modernist thinkers, and political and religious reformists. In general, it resulted in a reconfiguration of a somewhat pro-progressive middle class. New reference groups, people-centric urban spaces, new freedoms for attire and public consumption, extensive social and political participation, cultural freedoms in various forms, economic growth, and fair wealth distribution create a new space in contemporary

Iran. At a higher level, this clashed with the material and non-material imperatives of the entrenched conservative clerical dominance, especially the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader (Ali Khamenei), and the forces associated with it, particularly the military and security apparatus.

The widespread demand for structural changes in the dominant regime of power and the reduction in the power of religious authoritarian forces led to intense conflicts in various political, economic, and cultural layers in Iran in the middle of the 2000s. This conflict emerged between the reformist faction of the ruling power and the emerging forces in the public sphere and civil society on one side, and the conservative clergy-dominated establishment and military and security forces, centered around the Supreme Leader, on the other side. The culmination of these conflicts was the emergence of the Green Movement in 2009 [71], followed by severe political, social, and cultural suppression at the public level, as well as some internal purges within the ruling power structure. The ultimate outcome was the continued absolute dominance of the institution of the Supreme Leader in Iran, along with a group of affiliated clerics, particularly the rise of a military bourgeoisie centered around the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

The reconfiguration of the regime of power in Iran was comprehensive, encompassing all political, cultural, and economic domains. Extensive purges took place in political and economic arenas, leading to the removal of many influential forces within the reformist government and civil society, while numerous social and cultural spheres came under the strict control of the regime's policies. Currently, significant capital, economic privileges, and crucial political and governmental positions are solely distributed among forces affiliated with the Supreme Leader institution and the military bourgeoisie, composed of the IRGC, and other military, security, and intelligence personnel. Once again, a form of strict politics of identity and culture was imposed on society. However, this transformation in the regime of power, coupled with the transfer of wealth and power to non-democratic and military authoritarian forces, reinforced rentier and clientelist economic practices in contemporary Iran. This strengthened a form of predatory economy where power affiliates accumulated substantial capital through informal channels and clientelist relationships with the core of the power structure, leading to a reduction in the formal and productive economy of the country [72]. The abnormal growth of the non-productive and informal sectors of Iran's economy, such as the expansion of the financial sector through the emergence of various private banks linked to different blocs within the dominant regime of power, or the excessive growth of the consumption sector and the deepening of corruption across various economic layers, represented an economic facet of these changes in power in the early 2010s in Iran. This provided a unique opportunity for extensive money laundering and the nourishment of the regime's affiliated forces, alongside the expulsion and weakening of influential and longstanding opposition forces during this period.

In this period, Iran's consumer sector manifested itself through the expansion of urban consumption spaces, entertaining services, the construction of extensive mega-malls and shopping centers, the growth of entertainment and tourist facilities, etc. These centers, whose construction was feasible due to the accumulation of substantial capital, mainly traced their ownership back to the ruling military bourgeoisie and entities and individuals affiliated with the governmental (non-elective ruling section) sector. This path, both lucrative and secure, served as a means for extensive money laundering and the accumulation of scattered capital, benefiting this military bourgeoisie. However, this immense consumer sector also required a substantial number of consumers.

Therefore, in the 2010s, with the expansion of the consumer sector, a new consumer culture gradually emerged, leading to the unintentional outcome of a change in the regime of power in contemporary Iran. Despite the regime's strict cultural policies pursued in official and unofficial social domains, consumers in these consumption spheres enjoyed relative freedom in purchasing and consumption. It was precisely in these consumer centers that many goods, commodities, and symbols of global and transnational culture (deemed by the ruling regime as a Western cultural invasion, fiercely combated in its cultural policies)

entered Iran and were freely consumed by these actors of everyday life. However, after some time, within these consumer realms, both in urban areas and their related virtual domains, younger generations, women, and certain marginalized groups managed to create new social and cultural spaces beyond the Islamist regime's official politics of identity. They forged new identities and consumption patterns with greater freedom. Initially, the regime viewed the emergence of these spaces and strata on the fringes of consumer and leisure centers, along with the expansion of consumer culture on a national scale, not as a threat but as an opportunity to secure the economic and political interests of the ruling regime. Additionally, it served to expel and weaken active civil society forces and groups associated with the public sphere, creating a mass society and culture. The regime, in its cultural and economic policies, attempted to promote and strengthen these developments. During this period, contrary to the dominance of the public sphere mainly relying on civil society forces in the 2000s, a kind of public sphere reliant on the consumer society and mass forces arising from this sphere came to the forefront.

The 2010s in Iran can be considered the decade of consolidating the new regime of power in Iran, centered around the institution of the Supreme Leader (Velayat-e Faqih) and the military bourgeoisie. This regime gradually took control of all layers of power in various political, economic, and cultural dimensions. However, this decade also witnessed the erosion of civil society, the public sphere, and public freedoms that emerged prior to or during the era of the Reformist state. In addition, the establishment and subsequent dominance of a certain mass culture and society in Iran created a new realm that gradually gained prominence in economic and, ultimately, political spheres. In these new spaces, predominantly led by the youth, beyond the official politics of identity, various and creative social configurations emerged. These heterogeneous, hybrid, and indeterminate configurations encompassed diverse and innovative aspects as well as categories and elements in various consumer layers, such as clothing, food, cultural practices, social relationships, and body management. They even manifested in the form of collective actions resembling carnivals in both official and religious spaces. The hybrid and heterogeneous nature of these youth configurations in everyday life and urban consumer areas, where global symbols and values coexisted with local, religious, and national elements, constituted a kind of subversive strategy against the Islamic regime's official, purist, determinate, and religious politics of identity. These youths in various social configurations adopted and adapted official symbols and categories, attempting to deconstruct and reconstruct them and locate them along other categories. Their choice of clothing, dietary preferences, cultural practices, and recreational activities placed them in opposition to the all-encompassing and determinate cultural and identity policies of the Islamist regime, and subsequently, many elements, values, and categories of this regime were suspended. Essentially, these actors challenged the Islamic Republic's determinate, homogenous politics of culture and identity by postponing and deferring their identity and consumption patterns, creating various forms of politics of indeterminacy.

The dominance of this mass culture in the official politics of culture was well evident in the reinforcement of different representations of mass culture, prominently showcased in official cinema, television, political economy, and other formal ceremonies of the Islamic Republic. The expansion of urban nightlife, food and entertainment venues in major cities, the emergence of new mass movements in everyday life such as the Megamall takeover movements planned by teenagers in virtual spaces, new virtual economy, widespread hangouts along formal spaces, numerous parties, abundant concerts, and city tours, as well as the emergence of several collective actions like extensive youth participation in public ceremonies such as the funeral of a pop singer or attendance in public gatherings with celebrity presence—all, while apparently conflicting with the official politics identity and culture, were somewhat tolerated by the regime for the mentioned reasons for a short period of time [73].

Gradually, the consolidation of this consumer realm, various subcultures associated with it, and the emerging social strata, which were the main carriers of both global and

many local symbols and categories, created a kind of cosmopolitized space of action on the fringes of the Islamic Republic's official politics and in consumer realms. As mentioned, the construction of these configurations was essentially a deconstructive strategy against official policies. These configurations, on the one hand, incorporate many official symbols and categories present in Iranian society, and then, after reinterpretation and reconstruction, coexist alongside different global and transnational symbols, taking on new meanings. The indeterminacy and heterogeneity of configurations were central, delaying any final stabilization within designated categories such as national, ethical, religious, anti-religious, gendered, etc. As mentioned earlier, this postponement and indeterminacy represented a novel form of politics in Iranian everyday life. Above all, this politics, more than anything else, led to the suspension of many elements of the official politics of identity [73–76]. This dynamic space gradually evolved into a form of political activism in the late 2010s, considering the political changes during that period. This transformation also led to a certain politicization of this realm and the emerging of a new politicized collective identity, provoking a severe reaction from the Islamist regime. The regime attempted to control and suppress these spaces and strata through a renewed and intensified enforcement of identity and cultural policies. Consequently, the consumer realm and cosmopolitized spaces of action became the stage for one of the most intense conflicts and struggles in contemporary Iran. The “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the years 2021–2022 was a significant manifestation of this trend in contemporary Iran, where women and young individuals in everyday life played a crucial role in leading this movement.

The point here is that the determination of the field of everyday life in Iran itself is a contingent and historical transformation, and it occurred under certain conditions of possibility. The field of everyday life and also consumer society in contemporary Iran have set the stage for the construction of various social configurations, a field that has been the intersection of the national/local and the global. With an essentialist approach and drawing on given and closed categories, such as resistance [77], dignity [78], subculture [79], secularization [80], revolutionary life [81], modernization [82], etc., the layers, appearances, and coordinates of this realm can be investigated, but what distinguishes contemporary Iranian everyday life from other social fields is precisely the dominance of indeterminacy, a feature that has arisen due to the process of the cosmopolitanization of social realities and the unintended consequences of modernization in contemporary Iran. Therefore, the priority of this contingent field, on another level, has provided the conditions for the construction of various social configurations in a certain period.

By addressing the configurations at the intersection of consumption and identification by the actors of everyday life in the fields of consumption, it is possible to find a kind of politics of transnationalism in contemporary Iran. By combining and consuming different types of local and global sources and signs (resources that are defined by the actors as the local, the national, or the global), and through a politics of hybridity, while suspending the determination of the dominant politics of culture and identity, these actors, especially the younger generations, are striving to construct heterogeneous and fluid configurations, configurations that are not only new and distinct realities but also characterized by the dominance of a kind of indeterminacy against the determination of official politics. Therefore, these configurations are uncompleted, fluid, relational, and hybrid, with destructible boundaries, and they crystallize in different formats in the fields of everyday life. In the first place, by consuming global cultural symbols alongside the local ones, hybridity becomes a strategy for these actors to challenge the ideologically dominant politics of culture and identity as well as to localize the global based on Iranian social specialties. Through hybridity, the actors could suspend the articulations of the symbols' meaning and, therefore, in contrast to the Iranian official culture, postpone the construction of their own identity in different configurations. Based on the type and amount of referenced (consumed) sources and signs, the way they are juxtaposed, and their consumption, and especially the type of justification of these patterns of consumption and signs and their types of relationships, some of the dominant configurations in this field can be distinguished from each other, and

various types of indeterminacy, fluidity, hybridity, antagonism, and, in general, a kind of politics of transnationalism can be found in them [73–76,79].

Based on the research that the author of this paper has conducted in the field of constructing identity and consumption patterns in everyday life among the youth of Tehran in different periods in the last ten years (three times since 2014) [73–75], it is possible to point out some of the most important configurations constructed in this field. The data for these studies were gathered through interviews, participatory observations, and ethnographic methods in Tehran's consumption fields as well as the city's nightlife, and were then thematically analyzed and categorized. As mentioned earlier, these configurations are constructed at the intersection between consumption patterns and resources, identification patterns, and strategies. Basically, the construction of these configurations can be comprehended through a relational analysis based on the social position of the actors. These relations can be between the actor and the official culture, the actor and the local and global consumption resources (resources that he/she calls local, national, or global), the actor and other group members, or other social members, activists and social, cultural, economic capitals, and so on. The construction of these configurations, which can be investigated in the form of Tehran's everyday life actors' exposure to globalization, has been addressed in five consumption sectors in everyday life, namely food; clothing and body management; entertainment; cultural consumption; and communicative (virtual) consumption. Six general configurations can be identified in this field:

1. (Extreme)Pure configurations

- 1.1. Localist: rejecting the global in favor of the local based on local resources;
- 1.2. Globalism: rejecting the local in favor of the global based on global resources;

2. Hybrid Configurations

- 2.1. Passive encounter with the global;
- 2.2. Eclectic encounter with the global;
- 2.3. Active and creative encounter with the global;
- 2.4. Multiple and uneven encounters with the global;

If we base the politics of culture and identity on the Islamic Republic, then two extreme configurations on both sides of the spectrum can be realized. Pure localism configurations generally and consciously reject and set aside the global in favor of the local, and radical opposing configurations that the local and the national are suspended with the intention of a kind of resistance and opposition against official culture and in favor of the global and the transnational. At both ends of this spectrum, the foundations are well defined and solid. In general, in configurations in which the global is rejected in favor of the local/national (here the local is more pointed out than the official politics' definition of culture that is inspired by the Islamic Republic's conception of Islam), three types of configurations were identified: passive and isolationist localism; radical and aggressive localism; and creative traditionalist localism. Between these two radical configurations, which can be found among a few actors, a number of hybrid and transnational configurations can be seen. According to the type and logic of juxtaposition and consumption of local and global resources and the type of orientation and justification of the investigated actors, four configurations were recognized. In the first type, actors consume local and global resources together with the least self-consciousness and based solely on practical reason, situational logic, and momentary pleasures or economic limitations, without being aware of the logic, essence, and outcomes of this kind of consumption. But in terms of the official politics of culture, this type of combined, hedonistic, and momentary consumption is considered to be the suspension of the semiotic and symbolistic system imposed by the official culture, which means that the actors, regardless of the official and totalitarian politics of identity, are trying to construct distinct configurations based on the distinct logic of construction, a construction that implicitly or explicitly includes a kind of deconstruction or reconstruction of official culture and identity. Here we can find a kind of indirect struggle and resistance in the construction of this type of configuration in different forms of consumption/identification. This configuration itself has provided the ground for constructing categories such as enjoyment, emancipation, etc., and

it has become the basis for some collective actions in the form of night gatherings, collective circles in social networks, or virtual or real-life friendly groups. These configurations are very fluid and do not have solid and clear boundaries or foundations [73–75].

In the configurations of the second type, that is, the eclectic encounter with the global, the actor's self-conscience is a bit higher when faced with consumption resources and identity signs. The individual, group, and even collective consequences of these constructed configurations and categories, as well as the subsequent groupings, were well known to the actors who made this configuration. Due to the higher level of determination, these configurations include more challenges for the official culture. The global was sometimes used to justify local gender or ethnic categories, a usage that is completely opposite to the official ideology. The local versus the global is sometimes dismissed as a fundamental and irresolvable conflict. In this type of configuration, the logic of the situation and a kind of spontaneous individualism play an active role in the construction of the configuration. Actors in this configuration, based on their situational strategy, may be consistent with the dominant ideology or even indifferent to it in their consumption combinations, but they may adopt an aggressive tendency in different aspects of their consumption [74,75].

In the third configuration, i.e., the active and creative encounter with the global, a kind of politics of indeterminacy was well perceived because many of the actors of these configurations, with the goals of confronting or resisting the official culture, based on their consumption patterns, aimed to suspend and challenge the determined signs and policies of official culture and deliberately display an area of indeterminacy. They attempted to postpone the semiotic determination of official culture, for instance, by creatively combining the religious with the transnational, such as in the art of resistance or participating in official religious ceremonies and consuming religious goods in the form of clothing or cultural uses in opposing contexts. The actors in these configurations considered the global and its consumption alongside the local as an effective strategy in their struggle to challenge the official politics of identity and create cosmopolitanized spaces of action. Various types of groupness, the construction of urban spaces, the creation of youth subcultures, and creative political and collective movements can be identified among the actors in these configurations. The fourth type refers to a group of configurations that are very uneven and indeterminate. In terms of food and clothing consumption, some groups of young people prefer the local to the global, and their encounters were also very passive in their consumption pattern, but in this configuration, the same actors had adopted an eclectic approach and adopted a resistant and controversial attitude in their cultural or communicative consumption. The element of time also played a central role in this type because this configuration displayed different levels of hybridity and indeterminacy at different moments [73–75].

These were an example of the hybrid configurations that are constructed, reconstructed, and deconstructed in an Islamic country in the global south in the context of everyday life based on a kind of politics of indeterminacy, and in a process of grounding, mainly in front of the official culture, configurations that can be understood based on the social, economic, and political structure of contemporary Iran and in the process of its cosmopolitanization, its successive ruptures, the significance of indeterminacy, and the identification of complex networks of relations and categories. Neither a universal and given category, nor a determined order, nor a theory of social movements formulated in the global north, nor a teleological theory that emphasizes the process of modernization or democratization, nor mere theories of mass and consumer society, none of them can accurately make sense of the coordinates of this field and its configurations.

5. Conclusions

The metamorphosis of the world and its leading trend, i.e., cosmopolitanization, has set the stage for the contemporary world to be exposed to the most profound global transformation, but dominant social science continues to understand the world and make it meaningful by discarding uncertainty and indeterminacy and by relying on the axioms of

modern episteme. The social analyst is either afraid of or unable to incorporate indeterminacy into her/his analytical categories because this inclusion would collapse the research field that constitutes her/his profession. Following the analogy of Sigmund Bauman [83], the sociologist must convert from a pilgrim of the holy place of the modern world, the world of certainties and determinations, to a tourist and a homeless person to be a part of the metamorphosized world; that is, as a homeless person in the uncertain, unexpected, and fluid waves of cosmopolitanization, she/he can precisely carry out her/his task, which is to know and make sense of new social phenomena. But the dominance of modern metaphysics and modern episteme and their others that have come out of or against these axioms has prevented this fundamental transformation in sociology and modern social theory and therefore made this discipline more and more alien from the objective world. Therefore, the gap between the cosmopolitanized world and modern sociology, or, in other words, between the ontology and epistemology of sociology, is getting deeper and deeper. A few modifications and alternatives have been expressed to overcome this gap, but in none of them, the most basic assumptions of modern, national, and imperial epistemes as providers of conditions for the construction of sociology and social theory have been transcended. Any critique of existing sociology must inevitably begin with the critique and suspension of these epistemes.

By postulating the cosmopolitanization of the world as the ontology of social theory in which indeterminacy is the central feature in the construction of socially changing phenomena, in this article, an attempt has been made to address the epistemological implications and requirements of this ontological transformation. While addressing some of the epistemological premises dominated in the social sciences, and also reviewing some alternatives proposed in this regard, the post-foundationalist approach is introduced as the best epistemological approach in this field, and the idea of social configurations is also suggested as the only proper objects that can be taken into account in the conditions of uncertainty and indeterminacy arising from the process of cosmopolitanization. In this way, by suspending the given, regulated, standardized categories and universal, trans-historical, and essentialist theories, as well as abandoning different kinds of anti/non-foundationalist approaches, in the first place, any social analysis should consider configurations as incomplete and contingent units in the process of grounding that are realized in a certain historical constellation and specific moments. A sociologist only has access to the moments of determination of configurations, and therefore, she/he must primarily deal with the conditions of their possibility and then recognize the characteristics of these temporary and heterogeneous configurations by identifying their relations, categories, and the order of their categories. Fluidity, relationality, and indeterminacy are the main pillars of configurations, which are mainly realized at a level between the universal and the singular, that is, the particular, with different degrees of determination. However, these heterogeneous configurations are constructed based on existing foundations, categories, boundaries, and entities; at another level, they extend from them—but this transcendent does not mean the construction of a new, solid, and distinct reality because the very existence of the reality is relationally dependent on the existing units. Thus, in this regard, a kind of politics of indeterminacy and hybridity is embedded in constructed configurations and their analysis. This means that in the cosmopolitanization of the world of nation-states and in the conditions of the metamorphosis of the social, every configuration basically includes a kind of politics of transnationalism, in emancipating as well as making sense of relations, categories, actors, and new spaces, the critical principle that should be incorporated into the agenda of social analysis.

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