

In both cases, new and more popular forms of Kurdish and Amazighen activism emerged in later periods. In Turkey, state oppression and Kurdish intransigence have interacted to generate a protracted violent conflict between the Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan [PKK]) and the state. This conflict makes it unlikely that recent improvements in the cultural realm can suffice to bring peace without a political settlement. In Morocco, the monarchy continued with its long-term strategy of cooptation and accommodation, which included most notably the recent institutional recognition of Tamazight as an official language alongside Arabic. Though remaining intolerant of Amazigh political dissent and not having resolved the Berber question, Morocco avoided major radicalization and violent conflict.

Aslan notes the tradeoffs between the relative peace that the Moroccan path enabled and state capacity in other areas. Morocco ranks quite low in human development indicators compared to Turkey and the king's alliance with rural notables contributed to "socio-economic stasis in the countryside" and curtailed the incentives for a state-led development agenda (p. 100). One might add that until recently Turkey had been much more "democratic" compared to Morocco, at least based on conventional, procedural definitions.

A major, unexplored difference between the two cases is that Berbers form a much larger share of Morocco's population (40%–45%) than Kurds do in Turkey (8%–10% in 1927 but currently 17%–20%). Hence, Turkey's intrusive policies would have been less possible in Morocco. The book also downplays the causal roles played by critical junctures, such as the division of former "Ottoman" Kurds—who had been part of the nationalist struggle—between the Republic of Turkey and the present states of Iraq and Syria in 1925–26. Had all former Ottoman Kurdish territories remained within Turkey, Kurds would have made up a much greater portion of Turkey's population. Hence, as I argued in *Milada Dönüş* (Return to Point Zero) (Istanbul: Koç University Press, 2016), Turkey's subsequent policies of suppressing Kurdish notables and of limiting public as well as private expressions of Kurdishness would have become less feasible and less likely. A related factor is that the real possibility of pan-Kurdish nationalism and secessionism significantly influenced state policies. This effect seems to have been much more subdued in the Moroccan case.

Aslan's book presents an even-handed and elegant analysis, and a much-needed, comparative and theory-informed contribution. It is highly recommended for anyone interested in Turkey and Morocco or in state-making, nation-making, and state-ethnic relations in general.

MISAGH PARSA, *Democracy in Iran: Why It Failed and How It Might Succeed* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016). Pp. 406. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780674545045

REVIEWED BY ALI M. ANSARI, School of History, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, UK;  
e-mail: [aa51@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:aa51@st-andrews.ac.uk)  
doi: [10.1017/S0020743817000800](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743817000800)

One of the more curious developments of the 2009 uprising popularly known as the Green Movement was the government show trial in which, among many others, Max Weber was indicted for sedition against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Other than showcasing the totalitarian paranoia of the regime, the purpose of this exercise was not immediately clear, nor was it immediately apparent that the prosecutors had a good handle on the clear and present danger of Weber's ideas. Regime anxiety extended to any thinker cited by the opposition, and the Islamic Republic was not alone in seeking to deconstruct the intellectual foundations of their rivals. The precise method was nonetheless somewhat clumsy and undoubtedly counterproductive.

Weber's crime was to have been co-opted and written into the constitution of the leading reformist organization, the Islamic Iran Participation Front (Jebhe-ye Mosharekat-e Iran-e Islami).

Saeed Hajarian, the leading strategist of the reform movement, who had been rendered paraplegic in a botched assassination attempt in 2000, was a strong advocate of Weber's ideas, even if some of these had been lost in translation. For Hajarian, Weber's concept of authority, and the means by which a state might transition from traditional to modern/legal forms of it, provided an essential framework not only to understand Iran's problems, but also to suggest a political solution. Weber provided the intellectual template for reform and a means by which the Islamic Revolution, and the Islamic Republic, could fulfill its promise and deliver on the idea of "Islamic" democracy, with minimum—and this was the crucial factor—economic, and political, social upheaval. One revolution per lifetime, it was argued, was quite enough for any country.

This problem, how to achieve peaceful change toward a stable and durable democratic settlement for the welfare of the people of Iran, has been at the heart of political discussion in Iran for the better part of a century and is the central question of this comprehensive study by Misagh Parsa. Parsa, who has written widely on contemporary Iranian political development, brings a useful comparative approach to his analysis and argument. For Parsa, there are two possible routes to a democratic settlement: reform or revolution. He delivers a comprehensive deconstruction of the reform route arguing that the hardline political establishment has effectively used the various powers at its disposal (including tools of coercion) both to entrench its position and, crucially, to create a dangerous distance between itself and society at large. This polarization, which effectively reached its apogee with the crisis over the 2009 presidential election, leaves very little room for political compromise. Indeed, his conclusion, reached, one suspects, with some frustration and reluctance, is uncompromising: the only route left is that of revolutionary change. And in case the reader be left in any doubt, this conclusion is repeated at the end of almost every section of the final chapter.

Parsa ends his study by discussing the brutal suppression of the Green Movement, and one senses that the frustration that permeates the text reflects a wider lamentation at the failure of this particularly prolonged uprising to achieve any of its aims. It is a frustration with which many students of Iran, including this reviewer, have sympathy, even if we may dispute the somewhat stark options available to us. It is true, as Parsa points out, that the political elite of the Islamic Republic have shown singular ruthlessness in the defense of their interests (which they naturally consider synonymous with the wider interests of the country). By way of example, Parsa draws a very unfavorable contrast between Iranian and South Korean security forces in their handling of student protests, showing how connected Korean police and security remained with student protestors who they clearly felt were part of the broader society to which they all belonged.

No such fraternity appears to exist in Iran, where the security establishment has an obvious tendency to view its opponents as heretics who are literally beyond the pale. Parsa reminds us that no less than one Hasan Rouhani warned protesting students in 1999 that they would be punished as *mohareb* (fighters against God) and *mofsed* (corrupt on Earth), religious terms that imply the most severe retribution. Repentance might yield forgiveness but this was not some negotiation. The relationship was and is absolute, and society must yield to the power of the state and provide unconditional loyalty. These are not promising grounds for democratic development and one must wonder how the Obama administration convinced itself that a more liberal—and, by extension, democratic—Iran was around the corner.

Many Iranians, themselves traumatized by the events of 2009, will have reached similar conclusions about the ability of the regime to reform. But having experienced repression first hand, and believing that one revolution per lifetime is enough, they have concluded that "evolution" is the best option. Given the establishment's expanded notion of what constitutes "regime change" (even modest changes in behavior, attitude, and practice find themselves falling into this category), the acceptable pace of evolutionary change appears to some to approximate a geological timeline. Patience, always a virtue when dealing with Iran, has now achieved a scale few would have previously imagined as commentators have argued that only the slowest possible change

(the more imperceptible the better) would be both manageable and sustainable given the regime's propensity to severe reaction.

What is perhaps most ironic about the polarization of recent years is that reformism as originally envisaged was regarded as a means by which the state could manage change in a manner that would avoid the upheaval of revolution and the deleterious cycle conceptualized by Weber of further autocracy followed by more revolution, a cycle which Weber posited might be exceptionally broken by charismatic leadership of progressive qualities. Leading Reformists such as Hajarian, consciously or unconsciously seeking to avoid such risks, seemed to draw on a Burkean philosophy to argue that the state must adapt in order to preserve itself. Recognizing that the hardline elite would always be reluctant to change, Hajarian argued for a dual strategy in which pressure from below would induce legislative change from above. But there was never any doubt that the change had to be legal and institutional in order for it to be durable. This was after all reform not revolution. In resisting and suppressing that platform, hardliners had paradoxically made the possibility of revolutionary change more likely: even tectonic shifts will occasionally yield earthquakes.

BLAKE ATWOOD, *Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). Pp. 255. \$30.00 paper. ISBN: 9780231178174

REVIEWED BY PEDRAM PARTOVI, Department of History, American University, Washington, D.C.; e-mail: [partovi@american.edu](mailto:partovi@american.edu)  
doi:[10.1017/S0020743817000812](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743817000812)

In *Reform Cinema in Iran*, Blake Atwood seeks to complicate the seemingly monolithic category of "postrevolutionary Iranian cinema" in the existing scholarship. He does not reject the general consensus that the Islamic Revolution of 1978–79 and the subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic effected a sea change in the domestic film industry, bringing it under unprecedented state control and scrutiny in order to promote (successfully) a film aesthetic that served the revolutionary leadership's ideological project. However, Atwood argues that as revolutionary fervor waned after the Iran–Iraq War and Ayatollah Khomeini's death, a reform cinema emerged in concert with a political movement that sought to emphasize stylistically, thematically, and technologically the pluralist, democratic, and republican aspects of the Islamic Republic.

In the introduction, the author searches for historical parallels to bolster his theory of reform cinema in Iran as a response to the instability of the revolutionary moment. He gives special attention to Soviet cinema in the decade following the Bolshevik Revolution. He claims that a postrevolutionary radical film aesthetic gave way in the 1920s to features addressing the more practical concerns of everyday life in a Soviet Union devastated by war and revolution. Atwood also connects the postwar, post-Khomeini cinema to the anti-imperialist Third Cinema movement and its subsequent theoretical reconceptualizations. He argues that reform cinema in Iran has similarly critiqued unequal class and power relations even if these critiques have taken place decades and miles apart from their origins in Latin America. However, the group of films that he designates as reformist was not necessarily a dissident cinema but very much a part of a mainstream political movement to remake the Islamic Republic.

Subsequent chapters are given over to case studies of films and their convergences with reformist politics, moving chronologically from the early 1990s to 2011. The first chapter examines the controversial infusions of mysticism in the postwar cinema. Atwood forcefully claims that directors such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf and Daryush Mehrjui, with the support of Mohammad Khatami as then minister of culture and Islamic guidance, turned to the "moral relativism" of the "mystic tradition" of Islam in their films to introduce previously taboo subject matters to the screen (e.g., male–female intimate relations) and invited a similar liberalization of the political sphere. Their cinematic appropriations of mysticism supposedly challenged then close-minded interpretations