

between religion and the state during the ancient regimes in France and Turkey left a strong legacy of a hostile separation between religion and politics, he carefully avoids historical determinism. Although Kuru rightly views state building as a critical juncture in state–religion interaction, his analysis leaves enough space for the possibility of change if social actors put sufficient effort into political transformation.

Kuru’s recognition of the possibility of change is most evident in the way he links structural analysis and human agency, particularly the will to mobilize in order to change the nature of secularism. Various forms of cross-ideological alliances in each country provide a wonderful laboratory for comparative thinking. In the American context, for example, Kuru elaborates the alliances between evangelicals, conservative Catholics, and Jews, which shaped the nature of passive secularism in the United States. In France, he notes that the headscarf debate created “an unprecedented coalition between the Right and Left,” which was facilitated by their shared anti-immigrationism and Islamophobia (p. 128). Finally, in the Turkish context, he mentions the alliance between religious conservatives and “liberals” in opposing assertive secularism and defending passive secularism (p. 171). Here, Kuru understandably emphasizes the politics of conservative pious Muslims, who played a leading role in the defense of passive secularism. However, one cannot help noticing the minimal presence of nonreligious democrats in his analysis, who unlike many conservative Muslims in Turkey, defend religious freedom as one among many other freedoms, including for example gay and transsexual rights and liberal choices of lifestyle for single women. It must be noted that while Muslim conservatives defend passive secularism mainly *for their own good* (and not others), nonreligious democrats promote passive secularism for the sake of individual liberties and liberal democracy *for all*.

Kuru concludes by arguing that “state policies toward religion in France are less restrictive than those in Turkey, despite the fact that assertive secularism is dominant in both countries” (p. 134). He rightly attributes this to the difference between the consolidated democracy in France and the “semiauthoritarian” regime in Turkey. Notwithstanding the difference between these two countries in terms of stability and strength of democratic political institutions, the ways in which France and Turkey currently tackle the challenge of public religion, specifically public Islam, could be interpreted slightly differently. In the consolidated democracy of France, as Kuru confirms, the question of religion overlaps with anti-immigrationist Islamophobia and converges antidemocratic left and right. In contrast, in Turkey, a rapidly democratizing country, the debate on the question of religion seems to link pro-democratic forces of conservative right and liberal left. In this sense, contested religion–state relations in Turkey are indicative of a Muslim country’s struggle for democratization, whereas they seem to attest to one of the main failures of European democracies—the inability to accommodate ordinary Muslim immigrants.

Although the book is a must read for students of comparative politics, political sociology, and international relations, it is of particular value to those of us who appreciate the affinities between political theory and area/international studies.

ERVAND ABRAHAMIAN, *A History of Modern Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Pp. 264. \$72.00 cloth, \$24.99 paper.

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Despite the immense coverage of Iranian politics and culture in the American mass media, Iran remains a mystery not only in the public imagination but also more importantly in academic

and policy circles. Along with two other important books, Hamid Dabashi's *Iran: A People Interrupted* and Fakhreddin Azimi's *The Quest for Democracy in Iran: A Century of Struggle against Authoritarian Rule*, Ervand Abrahamian's rather short monograph is among the latest attempts to offer a concise but rich history of the Iranian long 20th century. Whereas Dabashi and Azimi try to recover and highlight the voices of a nation in an enduring struggle for independence, liberty, and democracy, Abrahamian tells a story of arduous nation building at the center of which he finds an unremitting expansion of state authority. Although the publisher's description calls the book a history at the heart of which is "the people of Iran, who have endured and survived a century of war and revolution," the reader finds very quickly that the thread that weaves the book together is the narrative of state building. I do not make this assertion as a pejorative historiographical critique. On the contrary, I believe Abrahamian's approach might offer a better appreciation of the internal logic of the transformation of state power first from the Qajars to the Pahlavis and then from the latter to the Islamic republic.

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1, "Royal Despots," offers an edifying glimpse of "state and society under the Qajars." Despite the chapter title, Abrahamian argues that to use "state" and "society" to identify political order and social life under the Qajars is a misnomer. Far from an imperious oriental despotism, whether of Marxian or Weberian variety, Abrahamian observes that the Qajars of the late 19th century ruled over a divided territory with paltry influence in local decision making. They governed Iran "less through bureaucratic institutions, coercion, or grand appeals to divinity and history," the chapter argues, than through "the systematic manipulation of social divisions, especially clan, tribal, ethnic, regional, and sectarian differences" (p. 33). This chapter introduces persuasive counterevidence to the classical Orientalist claim that a despotic state caused the stagnation of civil society in the Orient.

In Chapter 2, "Reform, Revolution, and the Great War," we witness a disintegrating Qajar dynasty. The more the royal family failed to generate real and political capital domestically, the more they inclined to sell the resources of the country to foreigners, most notably, the British and the Russians. From tobacco rights and customs revenues to military contracts and the newly discovered oil fields, not only did the Qajars' concessions drive the country further toward bankruptcy but they also further alienated the court from local commercial, political, and religious elites. Although these colonial encounters also introduced European ideas of democracy and rights to an emerging class of intellectuals, the chapter situates the force behind the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 to 1907 in the moral and political bankruptcy of the Qajars and the economic hardship they inflicted on the populace.

Chapter 3 discusses how Reza Shah realized one of the main mandates of the Constitutional Revolution in the foundation of an Iranian nation-state, albeit by trampling the very constitution that made his reign possible. He terminated other sources of authority, pacified the "unruly tribes," and created a centralized political apparatus with a strong standing army and an incessantly growing state bureaucracy. He also created a national economy while making sure that the royal family would remain its main beneficiary.

Reza Shah's militaristic state building gave rise to a fervent ideology of nationalism, the topic of the fourth chapter. In 1941, the Allied command forced Reza Shah to abdicate his office but decided to save the monarchy by installing his son Muhammad Reza on the throne. In this period, which ended in 1953, Iran came closest to "letting a thousand flowers bloom" in its state politics. A divergent surge in political consciousness, from socialists to ultranationalists, shaped the scene for Prime Minister Mossadeq's project of nationalizing the oil industry. Here Abrahamian takes a revisionist position and dampens the significance of Cold War politics as *the* impetus behind the CIA-MI6 coup against Mossadeq's government.

He asserts that the main reason for the coup was the economic significance of regaining control of the oil fields. “Although the word ‘control’ was scrupulously avoided in public pronouncements, it was very much the operative term in confidential reports issued in both London and Washington” (p. 118). Abrahamian ends the chapter with a cautious dose of presentism by saying that the 1953 coup “helped replace nationalism, socialism, and liberalism with Islamic ‘fundamentalism’” (p. 122).

From 1953 to 1975, Muhammad Reza Shah reinstated measures his father had initiated but left unfinished in 1941, “to expand the three pillars that held up his state: the military, the bureaucracy, and the court patronage system” (p. 123). Iran soon developed the fifth-largest military in the world thanks to rapidly increasing oil revenues. However, the trickle-down economic philosophy of oil riches failed to materialize. By the 1970s, Iran ranked “the very worst in the whole world” on the income-distribution chart (p. 141). Despite the shah’s ambitious White Revolution, on the eve of the Islamic Revolution Iran had the worst infant-mortality rate and doctor–patient ratio in the Middle East and one of the lowest literacy rates in the region. In addition, political freedom and social justice had gradually disappeared even from the imperial court’s lexicon. The shah instituted a one-party system and charted a path to a “Great Civilization” through the gates of the ancient Persian Empire. The last chapter rightly points to the fallacies of analyses that regard the revolution as a consequence of “last-minute political mistake[s]” (p. 155).

Abrahamian follows the classical line of Crane Brinton’s *Anatomy of Revolution* in describing the revolutionary movement and postrevolutionary state building. He shows how the militants rallied against the liberal propensities of the moderate provisional government and instituted a reign of terror in the early 1980s. However, Khomeini’s death brought about a Thermidorian reaction, first with the Rafsanjani administration and later, and more comprehensively, with the election of Khatami to the presidency in 1997. Since 1979, Iran has emerged as a regional power, and the postrevolutionary state has made significant strides particularly in the areas of health, literacy, and other infrastructural social projects. Although the book was published in 2008, there is no reference to how Ahmadinejad’s election to presidency in 2005 has disrupted the Thermidor and laid the foundation of the militarization of the state.

A Modern History of Iran is clearly written for undergraduate courses on the contemporary Middle East or Iran. However, there are a number of moments, particularly in the first two chapters, in which the sophisticated and detail-oriented historian in Abrahamian steals the narrative and makes it harder for the nonspecialist to remain engaged in this otherwise vivacious history. Also, for those who know Persian, the transliterations and the spelling of names look idiosyncratic and at times simply wrong in many places. Just to note a few examples: *beshar* for *bashar*, *Akhavat* for *Okhovat*, Dar al-Fanon for Dar al-Fonun, *faqeh* for *faqih*, and Khatemi for Khatami.

In the introduction, Abrahamian oddly defines his book as a narrative that reflects every possible theoretical frame one can imagine: in the Weberian sense, “how patrimonial rule has been replaced by a bureaucratic state”; as Tönnies writes, “the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*”; in the language of Marx, “the transition from feudalism to capitalism”; in the Braudelian sense, “the deep-seated and slow-moving shifts that have occurred in popular *mentalités*”; and a Foucauldian “introduction of novel ‘discourses’ [that has] created tensions between old and new” (pp. 6–7). This rather peculiar framing omits the book’s most likely theoretical inspiration. It is difficult not to see in this text the spirit of Tocqueville and the theory he advanced in *L’Ancien Régime et la Révolution*. In the same Tocquevillian vein, Abrahamian sees continuities and ever-expanding authority of a centralized state where others see ruptures and discontinuities in modern Iranian history.