


convincingly enough the need for queering gender and related fields to acknowledge more faithfully the *shabāb*'s coming-of-age experiences and sex roles in general. Yet hegemony (mostly for worse) still comes across as a residual haunting, even in the troubled sentiments of the *shabāb* we come to care for and admire in this book.

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Iran's Experiment with Parliamentary Governance: The Second Majles, 1909–1911

**Mangol Bayat (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2020).
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Iran's Experiment with Parliamentary Governance provides a significant study of the second Majlis (1909–1911) which, until now, has been mentioned in the scholarly literature largely as a postscript to the first or as a mere stage in the ongoing struggles over religion and secularism; foreign power rivalry; encroachment, the policy of extending central control over the provinces; and the failure to implement the Constitution of 1906. The parliamentary period constituted an attempt to impose new political structures, drawn from Europe and based on popular representation, upon an ancient political edifice based on absolute power, which had no means of accommodating them other than by its replacement. Compromise was attempted, but in reality there was little room for it. Provincial, personal, and political divisions hampered reform. The role of foreign interference in this period has been much discussed by scholars, but Bayat places a new emphasis on the role of France, in particular the establishment of the Alliance Française, which contrived to exert influence on the contemporary Iranian political situation through its connection with the Iranian elite, using its links with Freemasonry. The Alliance Française sought to unite its members from different milieus in pursuit of the implementation of reform. Bayat also draws attention to reformist connections with Istanbul before the revolution. There, the Anjuman-i Sa'adat had support from the emerging Young Turk movement, which liaised with Najaf and Baghdad. The revolution, accordingly, emerged from a wider area in the Middle East that embraced similar ideas. The example of the Young Turks encouraged the Iranian reformists to organize, adopt a more moderate program, and so gain wider support.

Established in 1909, a newly elected assembly announced itself as seeking reform and organization, following the example of politically advanced countries while respecting the principles of Islam. However, it immediately began to produce divisions. Taqizadeh, the ardent and eloquent representative from Tabriz, antagonized the more conservative deputies and the clergy and generated opposition from Armenians and Georgians. He also contrived to aggravate the Russians and irritate the French, whose essential interests required order, on the grounds of his radicalism. Eventually, when in 1910 the growing antagonism to different views led to the assassination of a senior cleric, Sayyid Abdollah Behbehani, Taqizadeh was obliged to flee the country. In Bayat's view, there is no evidence that Taqizadeh condoned violence; likewise, she believes that his position was not particularly strengthened by his connection with the British.

Two parties appeared. The first, the Democrats, advanced a program that was based largely on European social democracy. Ardently secular, they sought to curtail the influence



of the clergy. The second, the Social Moderate Party, encompassed a range of views and classes, particularly from the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia, and was led by the aristocrat Nasser al-Mulk. According to Bayat, the latter party was seemingly moderate, but in reality quite radical. Its members argued for compulsory education and an expanded military, while still supporting Islamic culture. They emphasized democracy, and were to some extent revolutionary in seeking to destroy the feudal system and marginalize the clergy, thereby extending the power of the state. Bayat's view, notably, contrasts with that of Ervand Abrahamian, who considered that the moderate party represented the cause of the landed aristocracy and the traditional middle class.

A struggle also emerged over the judiciary and the sensitive issue of reform and Islamic law. This was addressed with the compromise of appointing five senior clerics to ensure that legislation was in accordance with the shari'a. However, there were differences about who should appoint the mujtahids, with secularists arguing that they should keep to religious affairs. The battle between the religious and secular views became intense and divisive, and led to the assassination in 1910 of the leading mujtahid Ayatollah Behbehani, which polarized opinion and obliged Taqizadeh to flee the country.

With the growing tension between the different groups in the Majlis, it became increasingly ineffective. At the same time, with the polarization of the situation in Iran, Britain and Russia sought to secure their own interests. Russia's insecurity over its position led to its occupation of the north-west of Iran in 1907, and in 1910 the British issued an ultimatum threatening to send troops to the south if order was not restored. Meanwhile, factional divisions along with financial insolvency stymied any measure of substance in the Majlis. However, some progress was made in the establishment of a national system of education under government control, despite ulama opposition. One subject of contention was the granting of concessions, particularly those linked to foreign regimes. Some favored free trade and capitalist development, whereas others, including the nationalists, saw them as facilitating foreign influence and even control. Loan negotiations also were a source of controversy, given the escalating financial crisis. Various proposals were put forward, including an Anglo-Russian plan, but Iranian reactions to the proposals were inevitably influenced by concern that the proposals, as the author remarks, were consistently disadvantageous to Iran and advanced foreign control.

By 1911, with no means to fund effective government and growing foreign pressure, Iran descended into chaos, and the government was powerless in the face of mob violence and the lack of an army. According to Bayat, Britain wanted Iran weak so as to control the south, but this was highly unlikely as the British needed order. Eventually, the British took over the south to protect their interests there, as the government was too feeble to offer protection. The Russians, meanwhile, advanced on the north.

Ultimately, Bayat contends that the revolution was thwarted by the religious and political elite, who undoubtedly played a role in undermining it; nevertheless, without an efficient tax system there could be no strong centralized government to build and sustain effective institutions. The one issue that is not given sufficient emphasis at the start is the basic question of finance, but it is addressed later on. Although trade was bringing Western modernity to Iran in the 19th century, the concomitant emergence of a larger state administration and other features of modernity meant a greater cost of government, which existing revenues could not cover. Iran was simply going bankrupt in the years before the revolution, a factor which, more than any other, undermined the experiment with parliamentary rule. Reforms were introduced but could not be implemented. There were no funds to create a much-needed modernized army that could effectively provide the order in which change could be properly implemented. Nevertheless, lucidly written, with an elegant style, *Iran's Experiment with Parliamentary Governance* results from wide and diligent research into a range of sources and emerges as a major contribution to the secondary literature on the subject of the second Majlis.