

# IRAN'S CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION

Popular Politics, Cultural Transformations  
and Transnational Connections

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## CHAPTER 16

# *Mashrutiyyat, Meşrutiyet, and Beyond: Intellectuals and the Constitutional Revolutions of 1905–12*

Charles Kurzman

Every country's history is unique. However, not every aspect of every country's history is unique. Only a comparative perspective allows one to distinguish which features of an event such as the Iranian *mashrutiyyat* are specific to the country's history and culture, and which are manifestations of broader transnational phenomena. As it happens, a comparative perspective for the *mashrutiyyat* was provided by a series of similar events that occurred in a variety of countries during the same time period, beginning with the Russian Revolution of 1905 and continuing with the Second Ottoman Constitutional Revolution of 1908 (known in Turkish as the İkinci Meşrutiyet), the Portuguese Revolution of 1910, the Mexican Revolution of 1910–11, and the Chinese Revolution of 1911–12.<sup>1</sup>

These constitutionalist revolutions underwent parallel trajectories and faced parallel influences from the great powers of the day. In addition, they were organized and led by an emerging class of modern-educated intellectuals that defined itself as distinct from traditional religious scholars. Only in Iran, however, were the intellectuals careful to draw the boundaries of their class broadly enough to include seminarians, identifying themselves as *daneshmandan* rather than using more exclusively Enlightenment-tinged terms such as *'oqala* or *monavvaran al-fekr*. This attempted alliance ultimately fell apart, and by the end of the *mashrutiyyat* period intellectuals came to refer to themselves as *monavvaran* and to shut religious scholars out of power.

### Parallels

Transnational influences on the Iranian *mashrutiyyat* are no secret. Edward G. Browne's classic account, for example, quotes a British diplomat in Tehran as writing that 'the Russian Revolution [of 1905] has had a most astounding

effect here. Events in Russia have been watched with great attention, and a new spirit would seem to have come over the people. They are tired of their rulers, and, taking example of Russia, have come to think that it is possible to have another and better form of government.'<sup>2</sup> Mehdi Malekzadeh's account similarly comments, 'The founding of the Duma [parliamentary] assembly in Russia ... was exhilarating good news for Iranians, and the participation of the Russian nation in making its own destiny announced happy news to intellectual Iran.'<sup>3</sup> Iranian constitutionalists themselves spoke openly at the time about the parallels with Russia. To pick just one example, *Habl al-Matin*, the prominent Iranian newspaper, urged Muslims in 1906 to 'adopt the peoples of Russia as a model'.<sup>4</sup>

It is not so widely known that the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the Iranian *mashrutiyat* of 1906 were part of a broader wave of revolutions. Ali Gheissari has translated a highly amusing article which appeared on this subject in 1907 in the satirical Iranian newspaper *Majalleh-ye estebdad* and took the form of a letter from the baby parliament in Iran to his older brother, the Russian Duma, expecting further siblings in other countries. 'I've heard our father ['Edalat al-Dowleh, or State Justice] has recently taken a wife in India as well, and the wife is pregnant. ... Another thing that I've heard is that from India 'Edalat al-Dowleh intends to go to China, [and] I don't know where he will go first, the Ottoman country or China [?], undoubtedly he will not stay [put] in India; I know my father, wherever he goes he takes a wife and as soon as his wife becomes pregnant he leaves that country. [So] if you [happen to] know where he is going after India [please] write to me.'<sup>5</sup> As it turned out, India's *swadeshi* movement of 1905 did not result in major democratic reforms, but the article was accurate in anticipating revolutions in the Ottoman Empire and China. These and similar events encompassed more than a quarter of the world's population by the First World War. International observers at the time noted the flurry of uprisings. V. I. Lenin, the Russian Social Democrat, lumped several of these events together as 'bourgeois-democratic revolutions'; James Bryce, the British liberal, called them misguided attempts to 'set a child to drive a motor car'; British positivists noted that positivism played 'so great a part' in them.<sup>6</sup> In the decades since, however, knowledge of these democratizing experiments has receded and become the province of area specialists. Plenty has been written about the individual cases, but a comparative perspective is rare. Exceptions include works by John Foran, John Mason Hart, Don C. Price, Ivan Spector, and especially Nader Sohrabi – plus Farzin Vejdani's chapter in this volume – which deal with subsets of the constitutional revolutions considered here.<sup>7</sup>

I propose that a comparative perspective is particularly useful for these constitutional revolutions because they constitute a single international event,

an interlinked 'wave' of democratization.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the individual revolutions featured events that were eerily parallel to one another. These parallels set the events apart from other movements of the same period and from later movements of the same type. The specificities of the Iranian *mashrutiyat* stand out against the backdrop of these parallels.

Each of these revolutions of 1905–12 emerged unexpectedly in the context of a long-standing autocracy, though state capacity varied greatly. There were hazy precedents for constitutional governance in all of these countries but Iran: the gentry's provincial parliaments in Russia and China, the Ottoman constitutional interlude of 1876–77, and the corrupt electoral systems of Mexico and Portugal. Still, just a few years prior to the revolution, movements for democratizing reforms could rightly be considered fringe movements – a handful of idealistic activists operating largely underground or in exile, whose dreams of power struck many observers as futile.

The revolutions were triggered by relatively minor events: the shooting of pro-tsar labour demonstrators on Bloody Sunday in early 1905, the bastinado of merchants in Iran, a military investigation into secret societies in Ottoman Rumelia, the theft of a presidential election in Mexico, the assassination of a leading republican in Portugal, a mutiny in Wuchang, China. Yet within a year – within a week in Portugal, within a month in the Ottoman Empire – the autocracy had given way, allowing free elections, free speech, free assembly, and other liberties. Monarchs retained their thrones, at least initially, in Russia, Iran, and the Ottoman Empire; dynasties were ended in Portugal and China; and the Mexican president was chased into exile.

The new regimes all held elections, though with limited suffrage. Women were not permitted to vote in any of these new regimes – just as women were not permitted to vote in countries that were considered democracies at the time, including France, Great Britain, and the United States. These elections were unprecedentedly competitive, if not perfectly free and fair by today's standards, and the parliaments that resulted were unusually diverse and outspoken. At the same time, popular mobilizations surged under the new constitutional order. Strikes broke out in many places, especially in the more industrialized sectors of each country's economy. Agrarian rebels claimed land rights in each country. Popular associations mushroomed, claiming to represent the interests of the masses, by force if necessary: *anjomans* in Iran, *soviets* in Russia, multiple local Committees of Union and Progress in the Ottoman Empire, the *Carbonária* in Portugal, the *Porra* in Mexico, secret societies in China. The new regimes all struggled with disorder, and the states failed in numerous instances to uphold the rights and freedoms that they proclaimed. Nevertheless, these interludes represented a distinct break from the practices of the previous regimes, and from the autocratic regimes that would follow them.

The constitutional period did not last long. In Russia, the tsar dismissed the first two parliaments after only a few months each, and then changed the electoral law to ensure a more compliant legislature. In Iran, the first two parliaments were dismissed within two years each. The Ottoman parliament was subdued in less than a year, after the military and the Committee of Union and Progress used the excuse of the '31 Mart' mutiny to march on the capital and declare martial law. Mexico's democratically elected president was ousted in a coup after a year and a half, and the president of China purged the opposition after two years. By the end of 1913, democratic institutions persisted, if feebly, only in Portugal, where they survived several attempted coups before succumbing to fascists in 1926.

In several cases, constitutionalism got a second chance. In Iran, the pro-democracy forces survived the coup of 1908 and managed to retake Tehran in 1909 before parliament was dismissed a second time in 1911. The Mexican pro-democracy movement defeated General Victoriano Huerta in 1914 and held a constitutional convention in 1916–17, but elections were generally manipulated by the ruling party until the late twentieth century. Portuguese democrats withstood an attempted coup in 1915, staging a second revolutionary uprising in May of that year. In Russia, intellectuals led the brief transitional government in 1917 that abolished the monarchy, but this second democratic interlude lasted only a few months before the Bolshevik revolution. The Ottoman Empire witnessed only an isolated instance of democratic competition during a by-election in 1911, which was won by an opposition candidate, and the authoritarian Committee of Union and Progress was temporarily ousted from the cabinet in 1912–13, but this and other changes in government continued to be determined by force rather than democratic procedures. China still has not recovered competitive elections, except on the island of Taiwan.

A second parallel among these revolutions, in addition to their shared trajectories, is the role of the great powers. These constitutional interludes occurred in countries that had not won a war in many years, and during the period of imperial expansion their politics was haunted by the possibility that they might be colonized by European powers, as many of their neighbours had been. This was no idle threat. Months after parliament began to meet in Iran, for example, Britain and Russia agreed to recognize zones of special influence in southern and northern Iran, notifying the Iranian government several weeks later with an understated cover letter: 'I have the honour of sending you the enclosed text of the Agreement of August 18/31, 1907, entered into by Great Britain and Russia, inasmuch as this agreement treats matters that might interest the Persian Government.'<sup>9</sup> Both countries soon sent troops into Iran to protect their special rights.

The great powers were internally conflicted about the new regimes. On

the one hand, all of them were flattered by the imitation of their own political systems – except for Russia, a regional power whose monarchy played a consistently reactionary role in neighbouring countries. 'I can't tell you how refreshing it is to hear the Persians [Iranians] talking about their new liberties and the things they are ready to do for their country,' a British diplomat confided to a colleague around the time that the British chargé d'affaires allowed protesters to take sanctuary on legation grounds.<sup>10</sup> In addition, some great-power officials saw economic or geopolitical advantages in supporting democratic reforms. It is worth noting that most of these revolutions relied at least in part on well-timed assistance from one or more great powers: the sit-in at the British legation in Iran, the postponement of loans to the Russian and Chinese governments, the US government's willingness to look the other way while Francisco Madero organized his pro-democracy rebellion from Texas. In Portugal, the British helped the revolution simply by doing nothing, refusing to summon British warships to protect the king of Portugal despite the 'fixed idea at the [Portuguese] Court that if a revolutionary movement were attempted we [British] should intervene.'<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, government officials in the great powers frequently shared the racist belief that non-Europeans were unsuited for constitutional forms of government. A US official in Iran suggested that 'As a matter of fact, the [Iranian] people are not in a condition to appreciate the benefits of a constitutional form of government, and are much less fit to govern themselves than are the Filipinos.'<sup>12</sup> A US diplomat held that the Chinese 'are not endowed with the intellect to enjoy the blessings of a free government, the principles of which are wholly unknown to the great majority of the people.'<sup>13</sup> The German ambassador in Mexico wrote, 'The cardinal error lies in his [President Madero's] ... belief that he can rule the Mexican people as one would rule one of the more advanced Germanic nations. This raw people of half-savages without religion, with its small ruling stratum of superficially civilized mestizos can live with no regime other than enlightened despotism.' Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany noted in the margin of this last report: 'Right!'<sup>14</sup> British ambassador Arthur Hardinge, who had served in Iran and the Ottoman Empire before coming to Lisbon, described the Portuguese as midway between Iranians and Europeans on the scale of intellectual development: unlike more civilized people, he wrote, the Portuguese tend to be 'inaccurate persons – I have erased a harsher word' (the word 'liars' is crossed out). At the same time, when compared with Iranians, the Portuguese have 'developed a greater appreciation of the merits of strict accuracy', and their behaviour is therefore more culpable than that of 'my Persian friends, whose mendacities were more naive and childlike'. Hardinge characterized the Portuguese as 'not everyday Europeans': 'I believe that if you found yourself face to face with this inert and corrupt mass you would be the

first, now and then, to use the goad.'<sup>15</sup> In addition, some great-power officials were hostile to the economic nationalism promised by some constitutionalist leaders.

Great-power policy could go either way, for or against constitutionalism. As a result, politicians on all sides paid almost obsessive attention to slight cues of support from the great powers. For example, British journalists reported snidely that in Iran, 'The educated Nationalists seemed to feel – mistakenly, as time showed – that the issue of the struggle depended neither upon the efforts of the Shah nor upon those of his enemies, but upon the actions of the British and the Russian governments. Wherever one went brilliant talk reigned upon the subtler points of British and Russian diplomacy.'<sup>16</sup> The Russian democracy movement plastered Paris with handbills protesting against a proposed French loan to the tsar; the monarchy had the French government plaster posters over them.<sup>17</sup> In Mexico, the US ambassador got rival military leaders – each in control of hundreds, if not thousands, of troops – to coordinate their coup plans by threatening to bring in a small number of US Marines.<sup>18</sup> In China, constitutionalist forces offered to cede the province of Manchuria to Japan; to adopt Japanese currency for use in China; even, the next year, when their internal support had been destroyed, to be 'Japan's India'.<sup>19</sup> Japan, with the encouragement of Britain, refused to assist them. Instead, Japan participated in the decisive multilateral loan to the new military ruler. The evening that the loan was concluded, opposition leaders searched Beijing for the location of the signing ceremony. They found it, managed to gain entrance, and made a small speech on the unconstitutionality of the loan – all in vain.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, the anti-constitutionalist forces checked with the representatives of the great powers before they carried out their coups. In Iran, for example, as he undertook his coup in 1908, Mohammad Ali Shah asked the tsar of Russia 'to accept Persia under [his] patronage' and said he considered Iran to be in 'the same relations to Russia as the emir of Bukhara' – that is to say, a semi-colonial relationship.<sup>21</sup> The tsar wrote back noncommittally, but the Russian-controlled Persian Cossacks helped to carry out the coup. In 1911, the Iranian prime minister visited the Russian and British ambassadors to seek their opinion of his planned coup d'état.<sup>22</sup> Both foreign ministries telegraphed their implied assent: 'we certainly cannot encourage [a] coup d'état,' wrote the British foreign minister, 'but [we] have no more intention of interfering with a Bakhtiari coup d'état than with previous coups d'état in Persia.'<sup>23</sup> (The usual nod towards non-interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state was particularly insincere in this case, since the British government was at the same time actively engaged in preventing a coup d'état by Mohammad Ali, the former Shah.) The Russian foreign ministry was more honest, hewing to the British line of non-encouragement but instructing the ambassador 'not

to repulse the Bakhtiyaris and not to impel them to give up energetic actions against ... the parliament desirable from our point of view.'<sup>24</sup> The coup took place the following month.

A third parallel, in addition to trajectory and the role of the great powers, involved the social basis of the constitutional revolutions of this period: the emerging class of modern intellectuals. The term 'intellectuals', as a collective self-identification, was popularized in 1898 during the Dreyfus Affair in France, in which a Jewish military officer was wrongly convicted of treason. News of the Dreyfus Affair was followed intently by educated people around the world. Thousands wrote letters of support to Dreyfus and his family.<sup>25</sup> A decade later, an Iranian newspaper would comment, 'Of course, the Dreyfus Affair is implanted in [our] memories.'<sup>26</sup> In the Ottoman Empire, the sultan was reportedly concerned that the scandal might encourage the opposition.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, many educated people, drawing inspiration from the mobilization of their French comrades, adopted the activist identity of 'intellectuals'. In Spain, where virtually 'all the literate men' of Barcelona signed a manifesto in support of Dreyfus, the term *intelectuales* gained currency almost immediately.<sup>28</sup> In Egypt, a prominent Islamic modernist reported on the difficulties of the French *'uqala*, an Arabic term for rational intellectuals, as contrasted with religious scholars.<sup>29</sup> In Iran, the terms *daneshmandan* (knowledgeable ones) and later *monavvaran al-fekr* (people of enlightened thought), borrowed from Ottoman Turkish, became popular terms of self-identification among those with modern education (see below), as did the term *ziyalilar* (enlightened ones) in Central Asia.<sup>30</sup> In Russia, the older term *intelligentsia*, previously used to refer to alienated, radical youths, changed in meaning to encompass the broader meaning of 'intellectuals'.<sup>31</sup> China, by contrast, lacked a specific term for intellectuals at this time, as evidenced by the use of the descriptive phrase 'people of education and knowledge' to translate the Russian word *intelligentsia* in 1906.<sup>32</sup> Only in the late 1910s was the term *zhishi jieji* (knowledge class) adapted from Japanese.<sup>33</sup>

This emerging class of modern intellectuals identified itself with a democratic variant of Comtean positivism. This ideology held that modern-educated individuals were the appropriate heirs of pre-modern aristocracies, both because of their scientific expertise and because of their purported lack of self-interest: unlike other classes, they argued, intellectuals acted only on the interests of society as a whole. Several prominent revolutionary leaders were outright followers of Auguste Comte, including Pavel Miliukov in Russia, Ahmet Rıza in the Ottoman Empire, and Teófilo Braga in Portugal. Others picked up the ideology indirectly, tapping into currents of positivist liberalism that were in the air at the time, sometimes through Masonic connections.<sup>34</sup> Comte himself had been no fan of popular sovereignty, but the elitism of early twentieth-

century intellectuals was combined with a belief that ordinary people, once permitted to choose their leaders freely, would recognize the value of the intellectuals and elect them to office. As it turned out, this belief was not mistaken. Other social groups acceded to the leadership of the intellectuals during the constitutionalist movement: in Iran, for example, merchants and artisans at the sit-in at the British legation invited intellectuals from modern schools to lecture them on good governance and to negotiate a parliamentary system with the Shah (discussed further below). When the revolutions brought elections, intellectuals came to be hugely overrepresented in parliament. In Russia, a hostile Tsarist official characterized the first parliament as 'the dregs of the Russian "intelligentsia"'.<sup>35</sup> In Portugal, less-educated republicans complained that all the best government jobs were going to youths whose sole qualification was 'having spent years of their youth eating sardines and strumming guitars alongside the learned teat of the University'.<sup>36</sup> In Mexico, young intellectuals 'picked up the plums of office, while the real captains of the revolution' – the non-intellectuals who had actually fought against the dictator's army – 'were fobbed off with, at best, lowly commissions in the *rurales* [gendarmes]'.<sup>37</sup> In the Guangdong province of China, where the constitutionalist movement was most entrenched, foreign-educated men occupied 'practically all the important government posts for the province'.<sup>38</sup>

In all these countries, the intellectuals used power not just for the public interest, but also for their particular class interests: reducing censorship, which may have been good for the country but was especially good for writers and publishers; raising taxes for positivist social programmes such as educational expansion and public-health projects, which particularly benefited teachers and doctors; attempting to reform the legal system and public budgeting processes to give a greater role to modern-educated lawyers and accountants. These moves cost the intellectuals the support of the groups that had helped them come to power, and intellectuals found themselves isolated when authoritarian movements threatened the new regime.

After the coups, intellectuals despaired. In Russia, a famous poet worried: 'Already, as in a nightmare or a frightening dream, we can imagine that the darkness overhanging us is the shaggy chest of the shaft-horse, and that in another moment the heavy hoofs will descend.'<sup>39</sup> A poet in Iran brought his audience to tears with the lament, 'These ruins of a cemetery are not our Iran. These ruins are not Iran, where is Iran?'<sup>40</sup> An Ottoman author opined: 'My friend, sometimes the environment is like a bad omen, like a graveyard. What intelligence, what wisdom, what talent can survive there?'<sup>41</sup> A well-known Mexican novelist came to the 'basic conviction that the fight is a hopeless one and a thorough waste.'<sup>42</sup> In Portugal, after the coup of 1926, the journal *School Federation* warned, 'Black days await us. Days of hunger threaten us. Days of

slavery await us.'<sup>43</sup> A Chinese writer offered this extreme metaphor: 'Imagine an iron house having not a single window, and virtually indestructible, with all its inmates sound asleep and about to die of suffocation. Dying in their sleep, they won't feel the pain of death. Now if you raise a shout to awake a few of the light sleepers, making these unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you really think you are doing them a good turn?'<sup>44</sup>

The class project of the intellectuals shattered along with hopes for constitutionalism. Some turned to religious identities, such as anti-democratic versions of Russian Orthodox Christianity or Shiite Islam, exemplified by Ayatollah Mohammad Hoseyn Na'ini's attempt to have copies of his treatise, the era's most extensive Islamic defence of democracy, destroyed in 1914.<sup>45</sup> Others turned to various secular authoritarian trends of the left and the right. Instead of ruling in their own name, intellectuals served other masters.

### Iranian Distinctiveness

Against the backdrop of these parallels, numerous features of the Iranian *mashrutiyyat* stand out. The use of the extended sit-in as a method of pressure, for example, appears to be unique to Iran during this period, applied not only at the British legation but also in telegraph offices and other settings throughout the constitutional era. The interlude known as the Lesser Despotism, following the coup of 1908, has no direct parallels in the trajectory of the other revolutions of the period. The remainder of this chapter, however, will focus on one distinction in particular: the definition of the intellectuals. Ali Gheissari has noted that Iranians borrowed the term for intellectuals – *monavvaran al-fekr*, or people of enlightened thought – from Ottoman usage.<sup>46</sup> He cites a source from 1911, and some authors have applied the term *monavvaran al-fekr* to the entire period of the *mashrutiyyat*, including the events of 1906.<sup>47</sup> However, Gheissari's 1911 source may well be the first published use of the term in Iran, though a Persian-language book published in Istanbul used the term in 1910.<sup>48</sup> The phrase seems to have been strongly identified with modern education and Dreyfusard-type intellectuals. For example, activist Yayha Dowlatabadi later recalled that religious scholars objected in 1906 to constitutional plans coming from people who 'were clearly nineteenth-century Babis, that is, the *monavvar al-afkaran* of the nation, that is, renovators, atheists, and superstitious people, since true Muslims would not enter parliament, because they would consider doing so to be harmful to the [religious scholars'] leadership [of the community]'.<sup>49</sup>

In 1906, however, activist intellectuals seem to have been careful not to identify themselves as *monavvaran*, or for that matter as *'oqala* – another, older term constructed from the root for 'rationality', which was used in the nine-



teenth century as a contrast with religious scholars (*'olama/ulema*).<sup>50</sup> Indeed, they explicitly attempted to ally themselves with, not distinguish themselves from, seminary-educated religious scholars. One of the organizers of a secret constitutionalist meeting explained that 'Power in this country is in the hands of two classes, the state officials and the religious scholars, and up to now they have colluded with one another to rule the country.' In order to change the regime, the movement would have to win over Islamic scholars 'without letting them know of our real goals', according to Article 7 of the by-laws ratified at the meeting. Article 10 urged activists not to publish material 'related to the laws of Islam, or anything that would hand the weapon of excommunication to ill-wishers'.<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps in an effort to play down their distinctiveness, modern intellectuals most often described themselves at this time instead as *daneshmandan*, or knowledgeable ones. The term was distinct from 'religious scholars' – in 1898, for example, the educator Zoka' al-Molk listed 'our *daneshmandan*, our *'olama*' as separate groups,<sup>52</sup> and in 1902 the traveller Mo'in al-Saltaneh referred to Christopher Columbus – after viewing his statue in a Philadelphia park – as 'that intellectual sage' (*an hakim-e daneshmand*).<sup>53</sup> However, this older term had no particularly Western connotations and could subsume people with either modern or traditional educations, both of which categories were active in underground constitutionalist organizations. The first meeting of one such group opened with this term in 1905: 'O gentlemen, O *daneshmandan*, O patriots, O supporters and reformers of Islam, O zealous ones, are you sleeping or are you awake?'<sup>54</sup> An open letter later in the year used the term as well:

A hundred to 150 thousand tumans of Iranian money go into the pockets of French and German teachers annually, and the *daneshmandan* of Iran are forced to go hungry. ... It should also be mentioned that Belgians were hired in the customs service and the post office and given 800 thousand tumans while educated, experienced Iranian youths were left unemployed. In any case, although the existence of these students was of no use to the state, it was of great use to the nation. Among other things, they who had seen the condition of the French and English state [in their studies abroad] gradually became offended by the deplorable conditions of oppression and dictatorship in Iran, and laid the foundation for complaints about this and stories about that, and awakened the people.<sup>55</sup>

It was modern-educated intellectuals who turned a reform movement begun by merchants, tradespeople, and religious leaders into an overtly constitutionalist movement in the summer of 1906. The famous sit-in at the British legation, which forced the Shah to declare a constitution and an elected parliament, began as a protest against recent arbitrary oppressive actions of the monarchy. Within days, a delegation of teachers, graduates, and students

from modern schools joined the sit-in and set up their own tent alongside those of the various guilds of the city, popularizing European customs such as clapping after speeches.<sup>56</sup> ('We're not Europeans. We don't clap,' Seyyed Mohammad Tabataba'i reprimanded members of parliament the following year. 'Say, "Bravo to you" [*ahsant*]' instead.)<sup>57</sup> 'Since those who took refuge in the [legation] had absolutely no concept as to what a constitution was or what it required, a special group kept them informed and instilled in them its own ideas', according to a socialist pro-democracy activist who identified himself in his memoirs with modern-educated intellectuals (using the terms *'aleman* and *ashkhas-e 'alem*, or knowledgeable people).<sup>58</sup> 'One could say that the legation had turned into a school, what with people sitting around under every tent and in every corner while a politically knowledgeable student [*yek nafar 'alem-e siyasi az shagerdan-e madares*] or someone else gave lessons. That is, the people heard contemporary things that up to now nobody had the courage to say.'<sup>59</sup> A contemporary described the scene: 'Every night they study lessons in law. Everyone has become an expert on politics and law, and they say things which leave one astonished', including the idea that 'when the nation no longer wants a Shah he is not recognized'.<sup>60</sup> Intellectuals dominated the sit-in's negotiating committee and inserted a constitution and elected parliament among the protest's demands.<sup>61</sup> They convinced various groups not to leave the sit-in as negotiations continued over these demands.<sup>62</sup>

Religious scholars also participated in the constitutionalist movement – Jamal al-Din Va'ez was one of the movement's earliest and staunchest activists, for example, and Tabataba'i not only sympathized but encouraged its mobilization.<sup>63</sup> Some of the leading ulema of Najaf famously telegraphed their support.<sup>64</sup> However, the bulk of the ulema had different goals and saw themselves as distinct from the intellectuals. They did not use the term *daneshmandan* to bridge the identities of the two groups. During the parallel sit-ins in July to August 1906 – the ulema in Qom and the constitutionalists at the British legation in Tehran – the religious scholars described their goals as an unelected assembly composed of government officials, merchants, 'several representatives of the knowledgeable ulema of goodwill and intelligence, and certain of the intellectuals [*'oqala*], the learned [*fozala*], the nobles [*ashraf*], and people of intelligence and knowledge [*ahl-e basirat va ettela*]'.<sup>65</sup> An open letter attributed to Hojjat al-Eslam Mazandarani, one of the pro-constitutionalist scholars of Najaf, also used different terms for modern intellectuals and religious scholars and noted the leading role of the intellectuals in the *mashrutiyyat*: 'What has been communicated and written to me about the meaning of *mashruteh* is that intellectuals [*arbab-e 'oqli*, or possessors of reason] would be chosen to protect and secure the rights of the state and the subjects.'<sup>66</sup>

After the constitution was declared, modern intellectuals continued to use

the term *daneshmandan* in its dual sense of Western-oriented intellectuals, on the one hand, and also educated people in general, both modern and traditional, on the other. In an early session of parliament, one intellectual used the term *daneshmandan* to refer to ulema supporters of constitutionalism.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, a Tehran newspaper labelled a constitutionalist religious scholar as 'one of the *daneshmandan*'.<sup>68</sup> More commonly, however, the term referred to the modern-educated. A constitutionalist newspaper insisted that 'Today the greatest *daneshmandan* of Iran must be present in the special royal cabinet.'<sup>69</sup> Another newspaper reported on efforts to form a government commission 'composed of *daneshmandan*',<sup>70</sup> by contrast with a more conservative member of parliament's suggestion that the commission be made up of 'knowledgeable persons and proofs of Islam' (*ahl-e 'elm va hojaj-e eslam*).<sup>71</sup>

The term *daneshmand* quickly became the stuff of satire. One newspaper started a Molla Nasruddin story on the subject:

I'm a *daneshmand* and wise (*kheradmand*) man. I'm aware of what's going on everywhere, and I keep current from Saturday to Friday. ... Wait, I wrote some notes on a piece of paper so I wouldn't forget to ask you. I've lived among the *daneshmandan* for 60 years and I never heard these words until this year. Now if I don't know them, the kids will laugh at me. I have to know them. So tell me what these are – I'll read them from the paper: first, *mashruteh* [constitutional or democratic]; second, *parlaman* [parliament]; third, *qanun* [law]; fourth, *azadi* [liberty]; fifth, *hoquq* [rights].<sup>72</sup>

The meaning of these terms was contested. While most intellectuals sought to derive these terms from Islamic sources and norms, Mohammad Ali Khan, a professor at the School of Political Science in Tehran, openly equated *mashrutiyyat* with European democracy: 'In any case, the state is either dictatorial, that is, *absolu* [transliterated from French], or *mashruteh*, that is, *représentatif*. ... Therefore the *mashrutiyyat* system is also called the representative system, or *régime représentatif*. In earlier eras, one person or one group ruled absolutely, in some countries claiming divine right to rule. 'But for more than a hundred years, *hokama* [sages] and *daneshmandan*, and perhaps also the majority of the people, have turned away from this position, believing that one person or one group never has the right to control a people or a nation. The nation must control itself and run its own affairs. In the recent expression, the nation is the only absolute monarch.' However, the professor was unwilling to grant this control to all members of the nation. 'Of course, universal suffrage is the fundamentally correct system, but this system is advisable only when a people has progressed in political affairs and has completed its training. In many countries of Europe, suffrage is still limited in elections.'<sup>73</sup>

Opponents of constitutionalism accepted this characterization of

*mashrutiyyat* as equivalent to European political systems, and objected strongly to the idea that such systems were applicable to Iran.<sup>74</sup> After the coup of 1908, the already uncertain alliance between the two types of intellectuals began to come apart. Some constitutionalist ulema were executed by the Shah's government, and others shifted towards more cautious political positions. Modern-oriented intellectuals, for their part, became more openly critical of religious scholars. In 1907, the masthead of the constitutionalist newspaper *Sur-e Esrafil* visualized the alliance between modern and traditional intellectuals with an engraving of a group of men with hats (the moderns) and a group of men with turbans (the seminary scholars) both greeting an angel's message of 'freedom', 'equality', and 'fraternity'. Between them lay an inert mass of people sleeping unaware.<sup>75</sup> By 1911, this optimistic alliance was no longer possible – and this appears to have been the moment when the intellectuals shifted from the more inclusive identity of *daneshmandan* to the more exclusively modern identity of *monavvaran al-fekr*.

Modern-educated intellectuals also shifted their political project during the same period. In 1907, they had valued the alliance with religious scholars enough to incorporate a panel of ulema into the Supplementary Fundamental Law, to ensure that the new man-made laws conformed to the religious scholars' understanding of divine law; this document also envisioned separate and equal secular and religious court systems (an original draft had abolished the religious courts entirely). In 1908, parliament created a new state court to adjudicate disputes between the two court systems; in 1910, an attorney general's office was founded; and in 1911, the entire legal system was reorganized, subordinating religious courts to state courts.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, in the field of education, the Supplementary Fundamental Law of 1907 envisioned a secular state school system alongside religious schools. In 1910, parliament reorganized the Ministry of Science and Arts, placing the school system more firmly under state control. In 1911, parliament required all school curricula to be planned by the ministry, and all teachers to pass state examinations. Islamic schools were granted a partial exemption from these rules, but traditional religious schools were subordinated to modern-educated government officials, even to the extent of selecting texts for study.<sup>77</sup>

This shift brought Iran into line with intellectuals in the other constitutional revolutions of the period, who had treated traditional religious scholars all along as a class of competitors who were outside of the category of 'intellectuals'. In Russia, despite a reform movement within the Orthodox Christian church,<sup>78</sup> it was widely recognized that 'church and intelligentsia are deeply divided'.<sup>79</sup> Among the first decrees of the revolutionary government in Portugal was the expulsion of the Jesuits and the substitution of civic education for Christian teaching in primary schools.<sup>80</sup> In Mexico, intellectuals were



suspicious of clergy-run schools, which struck them as 'making the cat the butler of the grease', a Spanish phrase roughly equivalent to the English phrase 'putting the fox in charge of the henhouse'.<sup>81</sup> Chinese intellectuals pushed to shut down traditional Confucian *shih* schools.<sup>82</sup>

Ottoman intellectuals were the closest parallel to Iran in the matter of religion. In both countries constitutionalist movements sought to project Islamic legitimacy onto their intellectual identity.<sup>83</sup> For example, a pro-democracy Ottoman newspaper, *Meşveret*, included a Qur'anic quotation on the masthead of its Turkish-language edition (along with the positivist calendar on the French-language edition): 'And consult them in the matter,' a constitutionalist interpretation introduced to modernist Islamic discourse by Namık Kemal a generation earlier.<sup>84</sup> The title of the newspaper, meaning 'Consultation', drew on this Qur'anic reference, and the editor stressed that 'Consultation is the most important aspect of Islamic law.'<sup>85</sup> Some argued later that the concern for Islam was the undoing of the movement: 'The mistaken starting point of the constitutional revolution, which bound its feet like fetters, was the concern that every movement and plan be consistent with the shari'a, the fear that they would be seen in the country as opposed to religion, and the politics of respecting and protecting public opinion, or more precisely, the guild of religious scholars.'<sup>86</sup> At the same time, some Ottoman intellectuals were bolder than their Iranian colleagues in asserting an identity distinct from seminary-trained religious scholars. A major constitutionalist newspaper, published in Paris, identified its supporters (in Turkish) as the 'Sorbonnes, Tolstoys, and Hugos' of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>87</sup> The newspaper later editorialized, 'Thus whether the people get upset about something – for example, whether or not they will oppose despotism – depends on the intellectuals of the nation. ... In sum, it may be said that if a small rudder can by itself steer a ship ten or twenty thousand times its size, the intellectual notables can similarly manage the ordinary masses, steering them forward or backward. ... The people of Istanbul endures its most sacred rights being trodden upon, and the shame that derives from this belongs not to the masses but to the intellectuals of Muslim society.'<sup>88</sup> Opponents of the constitutionalist movement echoed this theme, deriding its leaders as 'Turkish Dreyfuses'.<sup>89</sup>

These considerations are intended to offer a bit of the global context within which the Iranian *mashrutiyyat* emerged, in an effort to counteract the geographical blinders that country and area specialists tend to develop. Constitutionalist activists at the time did not wear these blinders. Their newspapers covered developments in other revolutions of the period, and they saw themselves as part of a global phenomenon, the 'caravan of civilization'.<sup>90</sup> To view the Iranian *mashrutiyyat* in comparative perspective is to recover something of the perspective of the *mashrutiyyat* itself.

## CHAPTER 17

# Erin and Iran Resurgent: Irish Nationalists and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution<sup>1</sup>

Mansour Bonakdarian

## Introduction

The Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906–11, directed against both the native autocracy and imperialist intervention in Iran's domestic affairs by Russia and Britain, occurred during a period of intensified anti-colonial nationalist and/or parliamentary-democratic struggles around the world. These ranged from the parliamentary revolution in Russia in 1905 to the dissolution of Norway's union with Sweden (1905), the Egyptian struggle for independence from Britain (particularly in the aftermath of the 1906 Dinshawai incident – see below), Finland's struggle for autonomy from Russia, varying Indian nationalist campaigns (both militant and petitional) either for self-government within the confines of the British Empire or for absolute independence – particularly after the 1905 partition of Bengal –, the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, the Mexican Revolution of 1910–11, and the Chinese Republican Revolution of 1911–12, among many other examples. During the Iranian revolution, Iranian constitutionalists/nationalists expressed support for, and solidarity with, some of these other struggles and received varying degrees of assistance from nationalist and reformist movements around the world.<sup>2</sup>

In Ireland, the years 1900 to 1914 happened to be a time of reinvigorated 'nationalist' politics with a countervailing 'unionist' commitment to the preservation of the union of Ireland and Great Britain under the rubric of the United Kingdom, with an assortment of nationalists and unionists simultaneously involved in Irish cultural and Gaelic 'Revival' movements.<sup>3</sup> Following the introduction of the Irish Home Rule Bill in the British parliament in 1912 (passed into law in May 1914, but postponed and never fully implemented), Ireland was beset by unionist versus nationalist disturbances and heightened sectarian communal tensions prior to the outbreak of the First World War, as the militant wings of the unionist opposition to Home Rule and various Irish nationalist organizations began arming themselves in preparation for an anticipated civil war.

53. We begin by faces lost in a crowd (set-ins). We then transition to a heightened sense of individuality in response to aggression after the coup. We finally regroup as civil servants and civic organizations. In between we witness the realignment of political figures facing the shifting circumstances.

**Chapter 16. *Mashrutiyyat, Meşrutiyyet, and Beyond: Intellectuals and the Constitutional Revolutions of 1905–12***

1. This paper draws on Charles Kurzman, *Democracy Denied, 1905–1915* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). That work describes the Iranian *mashrutiyyat* as a democratic revolution, with ideals and institutions comparable to countries that were considered leading 'democracies' at the time. For the purposes of the present volume, however, the more usual term 'Constitutional Revolution' is used instead.
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3. Mehdi Malekzadeh, *Tarikh-e enqelab-e mashrutiyyat-e Iran*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Elmi, 1984), p. 87.
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7. John Foran, 'Dependency and Resistance in the Middle East, 1800–1925', *Political Power and Social Theory* 8 (1993), pp. 107–40; John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Don C. Price, *Russia and the Roots of the Chinese Revolution, 1896–1911* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Nader Sohrabi, 'Historicizing Revolutions: Constitutional Revolutions in the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and Russia, 1905–1908', *American Journal of Sociology* 100/6 (1995), pp. 383–447; Nader Sohrabi, 'Constitutionalism, Revolution and State: The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906 with Comparisons to the Russian Revolution of 1905' (PhD dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1996); Nader Sohrabi, 'Global Waves, Local Actors: What the Young Turks Knew about Other Revolutions and Why It Mattered', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 44/1 (2002), pp. 45–79; Ivan Spector, *The First Russian Revolution: Its Impact on Asia* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962).
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14. Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 89.
15. Arthur Hardinge, British ambassador in Lisbon, to Eyre Crowe, British assistant under-secretary of state, April 4, 1912, Great Britain, Public Record Office, FO 371/1463; J. D. Vincent-Smith, 'Britain and Portugal, 1910–16' (PhD dissertation, Department of History, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London, 1971), p. 87.
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  27. Mustafa Refik, 'Abdülhamid ve Dreyfus Meselesi', *Osmanlı Mecmuası* 2/43 (1 September 1899), p. 2.
  28. Jesús Jareño López, *El Affaire Dreyfus en España, 1894–1906* (Murcia: Editorial Godoy, 1981), p. 154.
  29. Muhammad Rashid Rida, 'Al-Yahud fi Faransa wa fi Misr', *al-Manar* (Cairo) 1/2 (18 March 1898), p. 55.
  30. Mahmud Khoja Behbudiy, 'Padarkush' (1911), in Edward A. Allworth, 'Murder as Metaphor in the First Central Asian Drama', *Ural-Altaischer Jahrbücher/Ural-Altaic Yearbook* 68 (1986), pp. 74–76, 81; Abdulhamid Sulayman Cholpan, 'Dokhtur Muhammadyor' (1914), *Sharq Yulduzi* 1 (1992), p. 136, translated by Adeeb Khalid and Ken Petersen in Charles Kurzman (ed.), *Modernist Islam, 1840–1940: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 268.
  31. Michael Confino, 'On Intellectuals and Intellectual Traditions in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Russia', *Daedalus* 101/102 (1972), p. 138.
  32. *Min Bao* (Tokyo) 3 (3 April 1906), p. 1. I thank Mei Zhou for the translation.
  33. Wolfgang Lippert, *Entstehung und Funktion einiger chinesischer marxistischer Termini* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979), p. 316; Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 186.
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  38. Edward Friedman, 'The Center Cannot Hold: The Failure of Parliamentary Democracy in China From the Chinese Revolution of 1911 to the World War in 1914' (PhD dissertation, Department of Government, Harvard University), pp. 163–64; see also Edward J. M. Rhoads, *China's Republican Revolution: The Case of Kwangtung, 1895–1913* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 235–36.
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40. Quoted in H. E. Chehabi, 'From Revolutionary Tasnif to Patriotic Surūd: Music and Nation-Building in Pre-World War II Iran', *Iran* 37 (1999), p. 145.
  41. Tarik Z. Tunaya, *Hürriyet İlanı: İkinci Meşrutiyetin Siyasî Hayatına Bakışlar* (Istanbul: Baha Matbaası, 1959), p. 64.
  42. John Rutherford, *Mexican Society during the Revolution: A Literary Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 89.
  43. Maria Filomena Mónica, *Educação e Sociedade no Portugal de Salazar* (Lisbon: Editorial Presença, 1978), p. 179.
  44. Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment*, p. 13.
  45. Abdul-Hadi Hairi, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), pp. 124, 158–59.
  46. Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1998), pp. 15–16.
  47. For example, Rasul Ja'fariyan, *Bast-neshini: mashruteh-kh'ahan dar sefarat-e Engelis* (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye Motala'at-e Tarikh-e Mo'aser-e Iran, 1999), pp. 58–63.
  48. Asadollah Mamaqani, *Maslak al-imam fi salamat al-Islam* (Istanbul: Matba'eh-ye Shams, 1910), p. 60.
  49. Yahya Dowlatabadi, *Hayat-e Yahya*, 6th edition, vol. 2 (Tehran: 'Attar, Ferdowsi, 1992), p. 86.
  50. *Qanun* (London) 1/6 (19 July 1890), p. 1. The terms 'ogala and daneshmandan are treated as synonyms by Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1909* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 34. I will argue that there is a distinction between them, since *daneshmandan* also included seminary scholars.
  51. Mehdi Malekzadeh, *Tarikh-e enqelab-e mashrutiyat-e Iran*, 4th edition, vol. 2 (Tehran: 'Elmi, n.d.), pp. 241–43, translated in Charles Kurzman, 'Weaving Iran into the Tree of Nations', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37/2 (2005), p. 151.
  52. *Tarbiyat* (Tehran) 1/60 (3 February 1898), p. 237.
  53. Haj Mirza Mohammad Ali Mo'in al-Saltaneh, *Safarnamih-ye Shikago* (Paris: Georges Meunier et Cie., 1902), p. 102.
  54. Mohammad Nazem al-Eslam Kermani, *Tarikh-e bidari-ye Iraniyan*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Entesharat-e Bonyad-e Farhang-e Iran, 1968), p. 6. Another underground constitutionalist group opened with an appeal to intellectuals as 'men of goodwill and enlightened thought' (*mardan-e kheyrkh'ah va rowshanfekr*) (Malekzadeh, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, p. 241), though this usage of *rowshanfekr* – which came to be the main term for 'intellectual' during the Pahlavi era – appears to be anachronistic. I have found no other use of the term during the constitutional era.
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  56. Dowlatabadi, *Hayat-e Yahya*, vol. 2, p. 84.
  57. Ja'fariyan, *Bast-neshini*, p. 61.

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62. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 85; Ahmad Tafreshi Hoseyni, *Ruznameh-ye akhbar-e mashrutiyat va enqelab-e Iran* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1973), pp. 41–42.
63. Kurzman, 'Weaving Iran into the Tree of Nations', p. 151; Martin, *Islam and Modernism*, pp. 68–69.
64. Hairi, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran*, pp. 98–100.
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66. *Rahnema* (Tehran), 3 August 1907, p. 2. See also similar comments by Sheykh Esma'il Mahallati, discussed in Bayat's contribution to this volume.
67. *Mozakerat-e majles*, 8 January 1907 (Tehran: Chapkhaneh-ye Majles, 1946), vol. 1, p. 53.
68. *Majles* (Tehran) 1/27 (12 January 1907), p. 3.
69. *Habl al-Matin* (Tehran) 11/7 (4 September 1906), p. 12.
70. *Anjoman* (Tabriz) 1/99 (15 June 1907), p. 2.
71. *Mozakerat-e majles*, 11 July 1907, vol. 1, p. 209.
72. *Neda-ye vatan* (Tehran) 1/1 (27 December 1906), p. 7.
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74. Sa'id Amir Arjomand, 'The Ulama's Traditionalist Opposition to Parliamentarism, 1907–1909', *Middle Eastern Studies* 17/2 (1981), pp. 174–90.
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#### Chapter 17. Erin and Iran Resurgent: Irish Nationalists and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution

1. This essay incorporates material from two forthcoming monographs on *Confluences of Nationalisms, Internationalisms, & Transnationalisms: India, Iran, and Ireland, 1905–1921* and *Global Networks of Anti-Imperialist Nationalist Resistance, 1905–1914*. My thanks to Houchang Chehabi for his editorial comments on an earlier draft of this essay.
2. See also the contributions of Charles Kurzman, Farzin Vejdani, Touraj Atabaki, and Yidan Wang in this volume.
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