Introduction

The history and historiography of Iran, as of the countries of the wider Middle East, have been dominated by the twin narratives of top-down, elite-driven and state-centred modernization, and methodological nationalism, the assumption that the geographical territory defined by the state and the population within its borders is the primary, and sometimes only, organizing principle for research and analysis. This book seeks to problematize both these state-centred narratives. Its attention is firmly on subaltern social groups outside the dominant elites, whether these elites be old or new, traditional or modern. These subaltern groups include the 'dangerous classes', and their constructed contrast with the new and avowedly modern bourgeois elite created by the infant Pahlavi state; the hungry poor pitted against the deregulation and globalization of the late nineteenth-century Iranian economy; rural criminals of every variety, bandits, smugglers and pirates, and the profoundly ambiguous attitudes towards them of the communities from which they came; slaves and the puzzle of their agency. Although the focus is firmly fixed on these subaltern elements, their historical experience is deployed in a much larger attempt to understand the wider societies of which they were a part and the nature of the political, economic and cultural authority to which they were subject. In particular they are counterpointed to the praxis of modernism, hegemonic not only in Iran and the wider Middle East but across the world from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century and depicted here in all its astonishing ambition, reaching from the state itself into the deepest and most intimate layers of everyday life.

In addition, and complementary, to this spotlight on subaltern lives, this book seeks to move beyond a narrow national context, rejecting any singularity or uniqueness to the experience of individual countries

but seeing it as fundamentally shaped by inescapable transnational and global developments, and its character and significance illuminated by comparative perspectives.[1] Put simply, these narratives take as their starting point the notion that what happens in Iran, or in any other national environment, is always part of something much bigger and can be better understood as such.

The book seeks to demonstrate, through a series of case studies, the explanatory power of global, transnational and comparative approaches to the study of the social history of the Middle East. The first part of the book focuses on Iran in a comparative perspective, the second adopts a wider lens to consider the Middle East in general, including Iran but also incorporating discussions of the Ottoman Empire/Turkish republic, the Arab world and North Africa, and the former Ottoman territories in the Balkans. Each chapter consists of narrative elements, but pays equal or perhaps greater attention to issues of theoretical framing, of methodology and of historiography. The chapters in both parts of the book are linked by their concern with social and sociological history 'from below' but also and particularly by their approach. All are comparative, all trace the impact of specific transnational relationships and all integrate global historical processes into their analysis.

The first chapter of the book examines the revolutionary movements of the 1970s in Iran. An obvious example of a global historical event, the Iranian revolution is, in fact, a prime example of the profound fracture that routinely separates analysis of the national history of Iran from its global context. This generalized fracture, furthermore, has operated in both directions. Not only is the global context usually absent from analyses of the Iranian experience, but that experience has also itself been neglected by wider scholarship, thus aggravating a persistent Eurocentrism in global, transnational and comparative

[1] The *Journal of Global History* defines its mission as examining 'structures, processes and theories of global change, inequality and stability', www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-global-history. *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* states that 'modern world history must be understood, not simply as a sum of national histories or a chronicle of interstate affairs, but also as a story of connections and circulation, by people, goods, ideas and skills', Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier (eds.), *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Comparative history applies comparisons between different national societies. See Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) for a good introduction to methodological issues.

history. Iran is almost always omitted, or dealt with in a perfunctory way, in global and transnational histories in general, as well as in specific monographic studies, for example, of the 1960s and 1970s and its student movements or of histories of socialist and communist movements.[2]

Chapter 1 argues that although the multiple domestic crises besieging the Pahlavi monarchy in the late 1970s were real and serious enough, the emergence of the revolutionary movements and their character can be properly explained only by wider perspectives. These include global processes: the post-Second World War 'education revolution', the youth radicalization of the late 1960s, the ubiquity of the resort to urban guerrilla warfare by this young generation, increasing ease of movement, whether migration or simple travel, technological innovations in the dissemination of ideas, through the press, radio and cassette recordings, the creation of an activist and highly influential diaspora, political influences not only from traditional Western sources but from the wider world, especially Latin America. Transnational connections include particularly those with neighbouring revolutionary movements, especially in Dhofar and the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, and with new dissident movements in the United States and Europe. The chapter also argues that the profile of the opposition may be clarified particularly by a comparative approach illustrating the extraordinary similarities between the Iranian and other radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s across the world, in sociology, politics, ideology and objectives, and even tactics and strategies. Iran's history thus ceases to be either the crude product of foreign influence

[2] The prevailing methodological nationalism has been challenged recently. See, for example, the conference held to mark the 40th anniversary of the Iranian Revolution at the Amsterdam Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, 13–14 December 2018, 'The Iranian Revolution as a World Event'. See also H. E. Chehabi, Peyman Jafari and Maral Jefroudi (eds.), *Iran in the Middle East: Transnational Encounters and Social History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015); Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, 'The Origins of Communist Unity: Anti-Colonialism and Revolution in Iran's Tri-Continental Moment', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 45, no. 5, 2017, pp. 796–822; Manijeh Nasrabadi and Afshin Matin-asgari, 'The Iranian Student Movement and the Making of Global 1968', Chen Jian, Martin Klimke, Masha Kirasirova, Mary Nolan, Marilyn Young and Joanna Waley-Cohen, (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 443–56; Toby Matthiesen, 'Red Arabia: Anti-Colonialism. The Cold War, and the Long Sixties in the Gulf States', Chen Jian et al. (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties*, pp. 94–105.

or the result of local mimicking but one arising from indigenous socio-economic and political processes similar to, but not derived from or dependent upon, those operative across the world. Using notions of global contexts, historical periods and, especially important, paradigm shifts, the chapter also sheds light on an enduring paradox: how a revolutionary movement of the 1970s apparently steeped in the ideology of the Left actually produced in the 1980s an outcome so much at variance with the objectives of so many of its original advocates.

Revolutions in general are pre-eminently global events. This is illustrated comparatively by the two other examples of profound revolutionary change in the modern world, the French and Russian revolutions. The Iranian revolution of 1979 was certainly a result of a process of globalization but, as the French and Russian examples show, such globalization was by no means new and can be detected in the causes, long and short term, of an earlier episode, the Iranian constitutional revolution of 1905/6. Indeed, the constitutional revolution in Iran was as much a product of globalization as that of 1979 and offers an equally powerful example of the ways in which moments of radical change provide an opportunity for integrating Iran into broader waves of historical development. Such integration both deepens our understanding of global historical processes through the addition of a neglected concrete case study and also illuminates the Iranian experience. Thus, the Iranian constitutional revolution ceases to be a unique event, explicable only by Iranian history, and becomes instead one example of a much bigger story, the sudden and dramatic, and almost simultaneous outbreak of political and labour conflict across the world in the early 1900s, including across the Middle East.

The lower classes of the pre-modern Middle East are often seen as largely untouched by new ideas, passive recipients of change, the impact of modernity affecting first, and sometimes only, elites and intellectuals. Yet the nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the urban and rural poor of Iran experiencing massive transformations in their circumstances and the options available to them, as they were drawn into a rapidly globalizing world. Migration was one strategy, long-distance travel increasingly viable. The movement of people and ideas, both the labouring poor in search of work and a layer of subaltern political activists and organic intellectuals, between Iran and the Russian Empire, especially the oil fields of the Caucasus, in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century has long been recognized as instrumental in the

diffusion of early ideas and practices of constitutionalism inside Iran.[3] Yet a closer examination of this single transnational connection shows how deeply it was embedded in more general global change, Iran already integrated into and shaped by international economic, political and technological trends. For Baku to become a magnet for impoverished Iranians seeking work and a centre of dissident and oppositional politics a kaleidoscope of necessary change was required: the extension of Russian imperial rule to the southern Caucasus in the early nineteenth century; an oil boom made possible by the new technology of drilling, which replaced the old practice of collecting oil seepage from man-made pits, investment made secure and immensely profitable by the developing capitalism of imperial Russia, the tsarist government selling outright parcels of land to Russian and Armenian speculators and later the Nobel Company.[4]

At the same time, movement within Iran had been accelerating from the mid-nineteenth century, largely driven by the consequences of Iran's integration into the global economy. Migration from the rural areas to local towns and from there to the large cities had steadily increased, driven by the growing economic, financial and political crises, and their accompanying food shortages and famines. Although urbanization was increasing exponentially, no industrial development absorbed the pool of surplus labour resulting from migration from the countryside and the collapse of local handicraft production. The demands of Russian industrial capitalism, encouraged by the Russian

[3] The political and economic significance of Iranian migration in both the creation of an Iranian working class and in its acquisition of organizational and ideological tools was firmly established before 1917 in works by Mikhail Pavlovich and later became a central trope of Soviet academic writing on this period of Iranian history. It was transmitted to academic scholarship beyond the USSR principally by extracts from a work by Z. Z. Abdullaev translated and published in English in 1971 which then became the basis for several studies of the impact of this migration on the politics of Iran during the constitutional period. See Stephanie Cronin, 'Introduction: Edward Said, Russian Orientalism and Soviet Iranology', Stephanie Cronin and Edmund Herzig (eds.), *Russian Orientalism to Soviet Iranology: the Persian-Speaking World and its History through Russian Eyes*, Special Issue: *Iranian Studies*, vol. 48, no. 5, 2015, pp. 647–62; Charles Phillip Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran, 1800–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Hassan Hakimian, 'Wage Labor and Migration: Persian Workers in Southern Russia, 1880–1914', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1985, pp. 443–62.

[4] Audrey Altstadt-Mirhadi, 'Baku: Transformation of a Muslim Town',' Michael F. Hamm, *The City in Late Imperial Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 238–318, p. 286.

state, were, however, insatiable. Towards the end of the nineteenth century rapidly improving communications, especially steam shipping on the Caspian Sea, brought cheap and desperate Iranian labour to satisfy this demand. The development of new, quick and cheap forms of transport was crucial. Only thus was seasonal or semi-permanent migration possible and a viable strategy for the Iranian poor. The expansion of shipping on the Caspian Sea linked Enzeli directly with Baku, ships leaving twice weekly, and also with Central Asia.[5] The construction of railways was also vital in linking Baku to Tiflis, the capital of the Russian Caucasus, and to European Russia, eventually bringing the labouring Muslim poor of northern Iran and members of the constitutionalist intelligentsia face to face with Russian products of European social democracy.[6]

By the late nineteenth century, the scale and character of this migration was massive and unprecedented. Yet this Iranian movement, permanent, semi-permanent and seasonal, was far from a unique or even unusual case, indeed was part of a much wider phenomenon. It seemed the entire world was on the move. In these years migrating Iranians joined the waves of massive population movements that were taking place around the world between the 1870s and the First World War, prompted by the search for land and work and escape from political crisis and war.[7] This movement was instrumental in the diffusion of new ideas and practices in the political arena and the workplace. Not only Iran but the rest of the Middle East shared fully in this experience. As well as Iranians moving between Tabriz and Baku, the cities of Alexandria, Cairo and Beirut attracted both skilled workers with political and trade union traditions, and subaltern intellectuals, while Iran itself became a destination for migrant workers.[8] The countries of the Middle East became both recipients and providers of migrant labour. Projects such as the Suez Canal and the development of cotton cultivation in Egypt depended on large quantities of local migration, while Syria and Lebanon saw some

[5] Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran*.
[6] For a full discussion of the situation in Baku, see Altstadt-Mirhadi, 'Baku: Transformation of a Muslim Town'.
[7] See Donna R. Gabaccia, 'Worker Internationalism and Italian Labour Migration, 1870–1914',' *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 45, 1994, pp. 63–79.
[8] For a recent discussion, see Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010). See also Anthony Gorman, 'Foreign Workers in Egypt 1882–1914: Subaltern or Labour Elite?', Stephanie Cronin (ed.), *Subalterns and Social Protest: History from Below in the Middle East and North Africa* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), pp. 237–59; Touraj Atabaki, 'Far from Home, But at Home: Indian Migrant Workers in the Iranian Oil Industry',' *Studies in History*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2015, pp. 85–114.

of the highest overseas migration rates in the world.[9] The transmission of ideas and example through these routes was intense. Everywhere, the result was similar. Between 1900 and 1914, a wave of strikes broke out around the world, in the advanced industrial countries, across the Russian Empire, and in China, Africa, Latin America and across the Middle East, migrants or those with experience of movement among the most militant of the workforce and often providing the leadership. The introduction of constitutional rule in Iran, with the revolution of 1905/6, and in the Ottoman Empire with the revolution of 1908, unleashed a period of intense unionization and labour agitation while these few years of the early 1900s saw the extraordinary synchronicity of revolutions overthrowing autocratic rule and introducing representative government around the world, not only in Iran and the Ottoman Empire, but also in Russia in 1905, Portugal and Mexico in 1910 and China in 1911.[10]

Most Iranian migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was driven by economic hardship and especially difficulties in the supply of food. Chapter 2 discusses the deteriorating living conditions of the Iranian poor and their reaction in the form of the bread riot or protest. The chapter argues that one central, and so far overlooked factor contributing to the constitutional revolution was the refusal of the hungry poor to accept their worsening immiseration as the Iranian economy was drawn into international trade and financial networks, coupled with the increasing political unresponsiveness of a paternalistic Qajar order crumbling under the impact of imperial penetration. It places the Iranian case firmly in Mike Davis' famous template for understanding the global subsistence crises of the late nineteenth century.[11] Like similar episodes elsewhere, especially the better documented cases of China and India, food crises in Iran may be explained not by the ecological disaster of drought alone, but by the economic and political context, the deregulation of the older paternalistic Iranian economy concomitant on the arrival of a local variety of capitalism and exposure to global trade and financial systems.

Chapter 2 takes as its framework a foundational text in the field of social history, E. P. Thompson's 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd

[9] Adam McKeown, 'Global Migration, 1856–1940', *Journal of World History*, vol. 15, 2004, pp. 155–89, p. 162.
[10] See Charles Kurzman, *Democracy Denied, 1905–1915: Intellectuals and the Fate of Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Nader Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[11] Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001).

in the Eighteenth Century'.[12] Although E. P. Thompson was cautious about the extension of his paradigm to cover the wider, especially the non-European, world, its approach has been widely adopted, including for the Middle East. However, the subtleties of Thompson's text, and its location of the phenomena of protest within a specific and evolving ideological, cultural, political and economic universe, have sometimes been lost en route. The account here returns to Thompson's original text and uses a close reading of his narrative of eighteenth-century bread riots in England to shed light on key features of the Iranian case: the elite sources of legitimacy, secular and religious, on which the protesters drew and which they fashioned into a powerful weapon; the rational and even ritualized character of their protests, their target market manipulation rather than simple and absolute dearth; the proliferation of protests as an older paternalism, embodied in the figure of the *muhtasib* with his *hisba* manuals, disintegrated, to be replaced by the free market; and the contribution of their actions to the outbreak of the constitutional revolution.

Two important conclusions may be singled out. First, Iranian bread protesters were, like their confrères elsewhere, motivated by anger at hoarding and speculation, not a simple lack of food. Famine in fact produced very little protest. Second, urban crowds justified their action by specific and complex beliefs and older existing practices. They were not at all simply hungry mobs, but were engaging with the authorities in political and ideological contests that possessed a degree of legitimacy recognized by both sides.

Nonetheless, these protests took place against a menacing backdrop of hunger and famine, a sharp fear of both dominating the lives of most Iranians, as they dominated the lives of populations around the world, until at least the Second World War. Famine was episodic but urban populations in particular were perennially haunted by any signs of its impending arrival. This stark reality provides another illustration of the invisible quarantine separating Iranian history from that of the rest of the world. Iran is rarely, if ever, included in broader histories of famine, and comparative studies are rarely used to shed light on the Iranian experience.[13]

The absence of Iran from histories of famine partly flows from the example of Iranian historiography itself. The marginality of the

[12] E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1971, pp. 76–136.
[13] Mike Davis, for example, although he looks at other parts of the Middle East, does not touch on the Iranian experience.

historical experience of famine to Iranian scholarly and nationalist discourses is striking and in stark contrast to other countries. The failure of the potato crop and the 'great hunger' of the 1840s quickly came to possess an iconic status within Irish nationalism, an iconic status that persists until today. A similar role was played by the repeated famines in India, perhaps especially that of Bengal during the Second World War. Famine was also crucial in shaping indigenous narratives of reform in the nineteenth century. In Qing Dynasty China, for example, the famine of 1876–79 created both a sense of crisis and a corresponding opportunity for a critical discussion of Chinese state and society.[14] Yet in Iran the history and historiography of famine has been largely confined to footnotes and scholarly journals.[15] The suffering engendered in Iran by famine and dearth was shocking in itself but the long-term impact was also highly deleterious to the country's demographic, economic and social development. Yet these episodes are almost completely neglected in conventional narratives of Iranian history. The template of reform and state-building, which has dominated scholarship on Qajar and early Pahlavi Iran, has found literally no place for any discussion of their significance. It is striking, for example, that all the discussion of the notorious Reuter concession is silent regarding the fact that its granting, in 1872, coincided with Iran's emergence from perhaps the most devastating famine of the entire century, a demographic disaster with all its consequences for economic development. The literature on the causes of the constitutional revolution also omits any possible role for the localized famines, more generalized food shortages and bread riots that proliferated in the years before 1905, nor do analyses of the political crisis that eventually led to Reza Khan's coup in 1921 take any account of the apocalyptic losses to famine and Spanish flu between 1916 and 1919.

Nor, furthermore, have food shortages and famine been integrated into the discourses of Iranian nationalism. Both Irish and Indian nationalism located primary responsibility for the famines that struck their countries in British imperial control, this control underpinned by Malthusian notions of demography and laissez-faire economics and free trade. Yet, despite the overweening position of Britain in Iran during the formative decades of Iranian nationalism, British policies have been seen

[14] Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley, 'The "Feminization of Famine", the Feminization of Nationalism: Famine and Social Activism in Treaty-Port Shanghai, 1876–9', *Social History*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2005, pp. 421–43.

[15] The exception is of course the work of Mohammad Goli Majd, *The Great Famine and Genocide in Iran, 1917–1919* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2013); *Iran under Allied Occupation in World War II* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2016). For a discussion of the literature see below, Chapter 2 footnote 3.

as only secondary contributory factors to food insecurity and famine.[16] This is perhaps connected to a general disinclination to valorize, or even to acknowledge, the political role of the peasantry. In countries such as Ireland, India and China, peasants played, in both ideological and actual physical terms, a central role in the struggle for independence. Their sufferings, especially in terms of famine, consequently came to be acknowledged by the victorious new elites, both nationalist and communist, and venerated in newly constructed historical narratives. In Iran, by contrast, under both Qajars and Pahlavis, the politics of state-building has been an exclusively urban phenomenon, and an elite urban phenomenon at that, the peasantry often marginalized and sometimes stigmatized.[17] Indeed, nationalist discourses in the Middle East, with the partial exception of colonial North Africa and mandatory Palestine, have not in general embraced peasants as heroic figures, the efforts of nationalist states and modernist elites such as those of Pahlavi Iran or Kemalist Turkey to police rural populations often given greater political and ideological import than the struggles of the rural poor themselves.

Gradually, over the final decades of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth centuries, the urban poor of Iran and especially the 'lower depths' among them, ceased to be merely a permanent and occasionally troublesome presence in towns and cities, to be tolerated, managed or ignored. They became instead a collective menace, to be confronted by a new elite and, after 1921, a new state determined that they be reformed and moulded into obedient citizens and productive workers.

Chapter 3 moves on to examine marginality and the dialectical dynamic between the marginal and modernism, again locating its focus on Iran within wider comparative frameworks. Using especially the work of Michel Foucault, it takes as its key players, on the one hand the so-called 'dangerous classes' and, on the other, their eternal adversary, the modern state. The chapter has, at its centre, narratives of the lives of various representatives of the 'dangerous classes', prostitutes, the criminal in the form of the serial killer, prisoners, the undeserving poor, beggars and paupers and the quintessentially liminal *lutis*. But it also argues for the artificiality of this notion of the 'dangerous classes' and its deliberate construction by a modernizing elite for whom it functioned as a mirror image, the marginal, the immoral and the criminal a perfect foil for the emerging middle classes. The chapter also examines the

[16] Again, Majd's work is the exception to this general approach.
[17] See Stephanie Cronin, 'Resisting the New State: Peasants and Pastoralists in Iran, 1921–41', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2005, pp. 1–47.