of equality or rights of ethnic minorities for propaganda without pursuing any concrete policy to address substantive issues.

Following his three forenamed main categories of the actors, Elling studies a variety of theories on Iranian national identity. On one side of the spectrum stand nationalists who emphasize the Persian language and consider all other non-Persian speaking communities in Iran as guests whom Iranians are kindly hosting. They ridicule non-Persian languages and view them as inferior and subordinate to Persian, and they deem these languages to be foreign imports that are alien to authentic Iranian culture. On the other hand, there are ethnicists who consider the Persian-centrism a recent anomaly rather than a long-term historical development. These groups emphasize the role of ethnic minorities in defense of their homeland and argue that the majority should respect Iranian minorities' cultures and languages. Both parties use Aryanism as a myth to prove their superiority. But they have different takes on the centralization of state power. Whereas the nationalists prefer a highly centralized governance, the ethnicists favor a decentralized administration. Regardless of these differences, Elling shows that neither one of them is necessarily against the Islamic Republic.

Throughout much of the book, Elling highlights the recent local unrest in the areas where the Kurds, the Azeris, the Baluch, and the Arabs live. He focuses on well-known cases that have appeared in the Iranian media, and draws on his extensive research to contextualize and analyze these events and their significance. Cases that are extensively discussed include football matches, journal caricatures, environmental movements, TV programs, university protests, as well as arrests, imprisonments, and executions.

Elling's work is impressive and raises questions that future research should consider addressing. For example, we do not yet know how the theories put forward by scholars and political activists are implemented or experienced in the daily life of the communities in question or how they influence the participation of minorities in national elections. Future research can also address the ongoing discourse of public meetings inside these communities. We now know much about the material from the virtual world of the Internet and media. But questions remain as to the characteristics of the quotidian discourse of people in their lives and meetings—in places such as mosques, buses, shops. How does the issue of ethnic background come up in the conversations of "ordinary people" in such public places? The case of "minorities of minorities" has also yet to be addressed. For example, women—which this book discusses only briefly—and non-Muslims provide another area of research that can be dealt with in the future.

This said, Elling's work is extremely valuable for theorizing and giving an analytical framework to the ways in which average Iranians perceive their national identity. It is an important contribution to modern Iranian studies and to scholarship on postrevolutionary politics, history, and ethnic minorities.

MAJID SHARIFI, *Imagining Iran: The Tragedy of Subaltern Nationalism* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013). Pp. 374. $110.00 cloth, $44.99 paper. ISBNs: 9780739179444, 9780739186398.

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Critical studies of nationalism and identity by scholars such as Rasmus Christian Elling, Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, Kamran Scot Aghaie and Afshin Marashi, Farzin Vejdani, and Abbas Amanat have proliferated the recent scholarship of modern Iran. These works critique the usage of categorical

binaries, such as modernity versus tradition, that characterize much of the intellectual production and political discourse in Iranian studies, both inside and outside of the country. They also collectively challenge what Fereydun Adamiyat and later Mehrzad Boroujerdi termed "heritageism," the predilection of contemporary Iranian scholars to fetishize the past and neglect historical transmutations and ruptures.

Majid Sharifi's *Imagining Iran: The Tragedy of Subaltern Nationalism*—based on the author's 2008 doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Florida—contributes to this body of scholarship. Sharifi aims to explore the relationship between the "formation and transformation of the Iranian state's official identity" and "the changing meaning of Iranianness" through an examination of "the political dynamics of regime change" (pp. x–xi). Simply put, Sharifi assesses how prominent elites and public intellectuals imagined the Iranian nationstate and then depicts how the resulting political discourses interacted, competed, and ultimately coalesced, particularly during periods of regime transition. He frames his work as a Foucauldian discourse analysis that draws on the theoretical insights of subaltern studies. The methodology of subaltern studies as espoused by Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee, who Sharifi frequently cites, would suggest that one would next retrieve the autonomous subaltern subject independent of elite discourse or examine subalternity as a result of discursive systems. However, Sharifi does not perform this type of discursive analysis; instead, he provides a history of the competing discourses of Iran's ruling elite from the late 19th century until the presidential election of 2009 in an attempt to expound "the political development in modern Iran" and "the ever present disconnect between the current regime and a great majority of its people" (p. x).

To present his understanding of Iranian political development, Sharifi organizes the work into nine chapters, each of which follow a parallel narrative structure. Sharifi first details the regime's official ideology as championed by the ruling elite, the "monarchic absolutism" of the Qajars; the centralization, nationstate building, and "modernization" policies of the Pahlavi state; and the Islamic nationalism of the Islamic Republic based on Khomeini's political theory of *vilāyat-i faqīh*. Next, he describes the rise of counterhegemonic, nationalist discursive fields, which were a direct response to the repressive tactics of the state and were promulgated by its political opponents, the constitutionalism of the early 20th century; the multiple challenges to the Pahlavi state, including the democratic nationalism of Mosaddeq; the Islamism of the clerical opposition; the secular rhetoric of leftist movements; and finally the reformist opposition to the Islamic Republic. Sharifi then situates these discursive fields within the broader context of the political history of the period in order to demonstrate how official state discourses based upon notions of constitutionalism, law, and democracy coincided and interacted with incommensurable relations and mechanisms of state domination and suppression. As a result, "the people resisted the state in what James Scott refers to as everyday forms of resistance" (p. 11).

Deeply contested from within, each regime ruled by "domination and securitization" of the political and social spaces (p. 19). Relying on Foucauldian terminology, Sharifi argues that no state created a "regime of truth," a discourse that was accepted and functioned as true. Elites failed to localize "imperially-produced truth-claims," such as national sovereignty, developmentalist economic policies, democratization based on Western models, and liberal conceptions of civil society. Therefore, Sharifi concludes that every Iranian regime since the constitutional period failed because it lacked the representational power to nationalize its official state narrative, unify a political community, and establish a "national language with which it speaks to its population" (p. 19). The current regime, Sharifi argues, is no exception: "the ongoing failure is a history in the making" (p. 315).

Sharifi's methodology is problematic because he does not show how historically specific social and political apparatuses failed to produce such a discourse. Nor does he make any attempt

to demonstrate how nonelites or even state institutions utilized, repudiated, or refashioned elite narratives. For Sharifi, an analysis of elite discourse coupled with a descriptive account of popular protest and regime change provides sufficient evidence to conclude that the Iranian people failed to internalize the official state narrative.

The majority of the source material that the author utilizes is based upon other works concerning Iranian elites, nationalist discourse, and intellectual production. The author himself states, "certainly, the purpose of this book is not to discover or reveal anything that has not been said about facts and events about which hundreds of detailed works exist . . . nor is it an attempt to make causal claims" (p. xi). Instead, he seeks to make a theoretical contribution to the field of Iranian studies by positing an analytical distinction between "imperial" and "subaltern" states within the "imperial ordering of the world system" (p. 28).

Sharifi articulates the differentiation between imperial and subaltern states by explicitly utilizing Foucault's conception of governmentality and implicitly invoking the notion of dominance without hegemony prevalent in subaltern studies. He argues that the distinction hinges upon the degree to which a state can "hegemonize its national identity" (p. 28). An imperial state establishes official narratives that are "read and understood as intended" and represents its coercive powers as "legal, rational, and normal" (p. 19). A subaltern state, on the other hand, is perpetually contested from within; it cannot "hear the fragmented voices of the masses" and its regulatory powers are perceived as "illegitimate, repressive, and immoral" by its citizens. Sharifi deems all "Third World countries" subaltern states, including Iran. These states "lack the capacity to reproduce themselves, so they fail" and are defined by the use of "epistemic violence." According to Sharifi, "misguided leadership" or "strategic choices" do not impact the development of subaltern states—all are destined for failure (p. 317). The author makes no attempts to explain why Iran should be considered "a case study of subaltern nationalism" (p. x).

By espousing such a confounding distinction between imperial and subaltern states, Sharifi reifies the teleological and essentialist claims of modernization theory and neoliberal ideals of economic and political development, which he forcefully argues against throughout the work. This problem stems from his misguided, top-down reliance upon the theoretical contributions of Foucault and subaltern studies. The book's theoretical framework fundamentally neglects the central contribution of subaltern studies as postcolonial critique: the challenge of the universalization of European history, specifically the formation of the modern nation-state.

This critique, along with Foucault's conceptualization of power, also shattered the stark divide between state and society that permeated the political and social history of an earlier generation. Sharifi's work, however, is representative of such previous scholarship, which implies a distinction between state, ideology, politics, and elite discourse on one hand, and society on the other. It may be the case that a majority of 19th- and 20th-century Iranian regimes failed to legitimize their official state ideologies, an argument supported by many other scholars of Iran, but this does not correspond to a lack of territorial or political nationalism amongst the Iranian people, as Sharifi suggests. In fact, most scholars consider the Iranian nationalist movement one of the most successful cases of nationalism in the Middle East.

Sharifi should be praised for his attempts to de-exceptionalize the Iranian experience of nationalism and for highlighting the coercive, violent practices that were an integral part of the creation of the nationalist narrative, a historical process that is often glossed over by secular nationalists and proponents of a primordialist conception of Iranian identity. The turn in Iranian history towards the deconstruction of the dominant narrative has produced fruitful scholarship. This turn, however, requires scholars to utilize critical theory with great care, grounding theoretical concepts in historical research. Otherwise, scholarship may fall victim to ideological inclinations. Sharifi's interpretation of Iranian nationalism is not as polemical as Mostafa Vaziri's assertion in *Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity* (New York: Paragon House, 1993), which draws upon Benedict Anderson's work, that Iran as a name and entity was "forged" by Orientalists.

Yet, *Imagining Iran: The Tragedy of Subaltern Nationalism* also fails to view the formation of Iranian nationalism as constituted by the extended interactions between Iran and the West, as a historical process of cultural hybridity. For Sharifi, the history of the Iranian nation-state is defined by its relation to imperial, Western power—an understanding that strips it of any semblance of autonomous agency.

In the conclusion, Sharifi argues that Iranians can "liberate the self from the state of subalternity. . .if imperial war or intervention does not dislocate this identity" and that "there is a glimmer of hope in the darkest hours of Iranian nationalism" (p. 330). Despite defining nationalism as inherently exclusionary, based upon the work of Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner, Sharifi seems to adhere to a positive, romanticized notion of nonterritorial Iranian nationalism, an understanding that contradicts the transmutations and ruptures that *Imagining Iran: The Case of Subaltern Nationalism* aims to reveal.

JOEL S. MIGDAL, *Shifting Sands: The United States in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). Pp. 424. $40.00 cloth, $39.99 e-book. ISBNs: 9780231166720, 9780231536349.

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Joel Migdal has made extremely important contributions to the study of Middle East politics, particularly in the Israeli–Palestinian area, and to comparative politics more generally. Here he takes on the daunting task of not only critiquing seventy years of American policy in the region but also suggesting a new grand strategy to better accomplish American goals. He tells a story of waves of regional change and American policy makers too caught up in Cold War dynamics or too ignorant of regional realities to deal intelligently with those changes. Those with some background on the region will be familiar with this narrative. Students and general readers can benefit from reading so learned a scholar and so skillful a writer's version of this oft-told tale. However, they are likely to be left with a few important questions that Migdal does not answer. It is a brave author who offers policy prescriptions in book form for a region changing as rapidly as is the Middle East. Migdal's recommendations are very sensible, but one wonders if the assumptions upon which he bases them have already been overtaken by events.

Migdal presents the story of the post–World War II Middle East without many curve balls or change-ups. Arab nationalism dominates the regional agenda until 1967, and declines thereafter. Political Islam enters the scene in 1979 and sets the regional agenda thereafter. Popular revolts against authoritarian governments—2009 in Iran, the Arab uprisings since late 2010, even Gezi Park 2013 against an increasingly authoritarian Erdogan—have set the stage for a new phase in regional history. American policy has followed these events more than led them, during the Cold War winning some tactical victories but never being able to organize the region to its liking. Realizing its limitations and fearing a confrontation with the Soviets, Washington largely acted through local allies during this period. The combination of the end of the Cold War and the traumatic attacks of 11 September 2001 led the George W. Bush administration to take a more directly imperial tack, using American military might to try to restructure not only the regional balance of power but also state–society relations within regional states, with the disastrous results all but the most blinkered now acknowledge. He portrays the Obama administration as coming into office knowing that the imperial turn had failed, seeking a new tactical approach but still wedded