

contexts, could have led to a more nuanced discussion of such experiences, as opposed to leaving them as awe-inspiring individual stories. In other cases, it is not clear how Iranian women acted differently from men, from women in other contexts, and from what the government and the patriarchal society expected from them (even if we accept the controversial assumption that these imposed a clear and uniform set of expectations on women). Contrasts in the analysis also appear when in a great many of the narrated stories, women participate in the war in their traditional roles as suffering or supportive mothers and wives. Such stories—and the author’s interpretation thereof (see p. 6, for an example)—do not represent any challenges to cliché female roles and women’s victimization narrative; rather, they reinforce them.

The caveats that come with the abundant and colorful narratives, as discussed above, can be seen not as shortcomings, but as potentials for exploration. They leave the reader with the possibility to decide what to take away from the narratives, empirically and theoretically. Significantly, for the first time, non-Persian speakers can dive deeply into the rich world of Persian-language memoirs written by women. Farzaneh’s *Iranian Women* is the first book-length source in English that engages readers with these women’s stories as deeply as the memoirs would. Articles published on this topic have not had the space to serve this purpose, and the very few translated memoirs constitute too small of a sample to do so. Although the book does not contain many direct quotes from the texts, it can be used as a great initiation to the world of memoirs and autobiographies published in Iran. In addition, the book stands out in other seemingly marginal but very important ways. First, Farzaneh decentralizes the war narrative by covering stories from across the country, as opposed to focusing on either Tehran or the major war-torn cities on the western border. That allows us to get a snapshot of how women in different locations and from various social backgrounds experienced the war in different ways. Second, the book comes with useful appendices such as a list of articles about women’s participation in the war in Persian, published during the war itself, as well as a name index of female war participants. These additions will be useful for other researchers trying to tackle this important subject. Last, but not least, Farzaneh’s citation of junior scholars, female scholars, and scholars residing in Iran is a much needed celebration of their work. I hope that we see more of this thoughtful manner of citations in future studies of Iran and the Middle East.

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## **Women in Place: The Politics of Gender Segregation in Iran. Nazanin Shahrokni (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020). Pp. 176. \$85.00 cloth, \$34.95 paper. ISBN: 9780520304284**

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In *Women in Place*, Nazanin Shahrokni advances an innovative reading of gender politics in Iran that examines gender segregation as a policy pursued by both reformist and conservative factions within the state. While a great deal of academic and media interest have focused on the Islamic Republic’s regulation of women’s appearance and dress, little attention has been paid to how the state governs through the gendering of city spaces, and how women negotiate or contest these forms of regulation. What grounds Shahrokni’s account, on the other hand, is its close empirical focus on the ways in which urban space is allocated and divided. Through this lens, we gain a vivid sense of the ways in which state power impacts upon, and is shaped by, experiences of daily life, and how gendering takes place as (and through) everyday spatial practice.

Shahrokni argues that gender segregation has been pursued as state policy under both reformist (“liberal”) and conservative administrations, in spite of perceptions of the former as more inclusive and the latter as more exclusionary in their attitudes toward women. Under the presidency of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989–97), Iran collaborated with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to

expand the economy along neo-liberal lines, bringing much greater numbers of women into the waged workforce. As Shahrokni's study shows, while women's expectations of greater access to spaces of work, travel, and recreation certainly increased prior to and during the reformist presidency of Mohammed Khatami (1997–2005), it was often the conservatives who developed sophisticated ways of accommodating and redirecting these expectations, both at the municipal level and, under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005–13), at the state level. The author's analysis thus carefully navigates the role of the state, ever-mindful of "the romance of resistance," in Lila Abu-Lughod's terms (2), that is, the Western-centric lens that sees women as a perpetual internal danger to the Islamic Republic, and the Republic itself as a homogeneous monolith, always ready to repress dissent. In seeking to avoid this binarism of repression versus resistance, the book's argument presents the post-1979 state as continually generating new forms of regulation from the 1990s into the late 2000s, always in its capacity as "protector" of women. The book proposes that this discourse of protection, as it evolved, entailed a shift from gender segregation as a prohibitive and disabling mode, which denied certain spaces and practices to women, such as open-air exercise without the hijab, to a productive mode that enabled and encouraged such practices within specific spaces, such as women-only parks. One might argue that the contrast between prohibitory and enabling modes still entails some kind of binarism, but the book's more profound point is that the state itself plays a part in constituting the gendered category of woman as subject, one that, in turn, makes claims upon the state.

Shahrokni draws on her fieldwork in the late 2000s to present an in-depth ethnography that sets spatial micropractices of users as she observes them against the changing policies and objectives of the state and the Tehran municipality, as revealed through interviews, media coverage, and official archives. While the book's Foucauldian approach to governmentality at times blurs distinctions between power and resistance, it nonetheless frames women as agentively negotiating and contesting the forms of state regulation they encounter. Shahrokni introduces the notion of "gender boundary crisis" to conceptualize the conflicts between prevailing ideas about gender boundaries and women's daily spatial practices, such as the widespread "improper" wearing of the hijab, or "bad hijab," as well as their politically articulated demands, for example, against the banning of women from sports stadia.

In attempting to resolve these boundary conflicts, Shahrokni argues, the state adopts three strategies: outsourcing, scaling down, and scaling up. For example, the state has outsourced gender-regulatory practices to private bus companies and thereby scaled down these practices from national to local level. Yet these companies' designation of separate spaces for men and women on the buses in turn create a "desire to overcome that distance" (31). Women commuters, especially, have continually demanded more space on public transport and, as the author wryly observes, have often greatly valued the freedom from male harassment that becomes possible in segregated spaces. Such strategies of spatial negotiation leave unaddressed the wider social problem of sexist harassment, which has become particularly acute as women enter urban spaces in increasing numbers. To that extent, women who at first asserted their rights as revolutionary "sisters" and latterly as neo-liberal "customers" are made complicit in the management of gender-segregated space, seeking to extend spatial boundaries rather than to abolish them. Hence, as the author argues, while it might seem that women are "in place" when they are in officially designated spaces, and "out of place" when they dissent from such framings, passages from one status to the other are continually negotiated. Shahrokni's study also insightfully engages with Foucault's concept of pastoral power to show how the state shepherds women into segregated spaces, such as women-only parks, supposedly for their mental and physical well-being. As Shahrokni explains, the Ahmadinejad administration directed health experts to "win the hearts, minds and trust of the citizens"—as one of them puts it (79–80). These pastors drew on the authority of modern medical discourse to promote women's exercise in public spaces, winning awards from international bodies as a result. Through scaling down, the state once again expanded its role.

During the 2005 elections, the White Scarf Girls' campaign to access sports stadia, which drew its support from both the reformists within the state and the wider public, exploited political differences between reformists and conservatives. The Girls' protest outside Tehran's Azadi stadium successfully won them entry to the stands to watch Iran's football match with Bahrain. While these women invoked the liberal discourse of rights to appeal both to national government and to international bodies such as FIFA, the new conservative president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad also, surprisingly, called for women to be

allowed access to matches. In doing so, however, he drew on the discourse of national security, declaring that the West was seeking to exploit these issues for its own advantage. This is an example of the state's third strategy for resolving boundary conflicts: that of scaling up, or lending local conflicts a national dimension. Although the clergy refused to concede the point, Shahrokni argues that this episode shows the flexibility and versatility of state discourses, which at different moments can encompass liberal, neo-liberal, and religious discourses that produce women as, respectively, equal citizens, customers, and revolutionary sisters. At the same time, these discourses and the desires they generate continually come into conflict with the masculinist character of the state.

Shahrokni's book is an impressive response to Asef Bayat's call for "an analysis of the state as a system of power" in the Middle East that attends to the places in which power is "more concentrated."<sup>1</sup> The book shows what happens when the state's intimate regulation of bodies targets precisely those everyday spatial micropractices, such as "bad hijab," which Bayat has termed "non-movements," that is, ordinary people's daily encroachments on officially demarcated spaces. My joy at reading a book that tackles the everyday (im)possibilities of gendered spaces in Iran has, however, mingled with ambivalence, as I reflect on my experience of life there from the 1980s to the late 2000s. Out of the many occasions on which I was arrested for "improper hijab," I recall two incidents, one in Tehran and another in a small town in the north. Ironically, it was much easier for me to negotiate with the police in the small town, who might be required to implement much more gender-restrictive rules, than to negotiate with the Tehran police. Although the small-town police let me go without taking my documents, in Tehran, a well-established bureaucracy places greater limits on women's navigation of gendered urban space. While Shahrokni's work is an illuminating account of how an embodied politics of gender has situated women "in place" in the capital, I wonder what else might be revealed through a lens that focuses on areas beyond the central seat of power.

Nonetheless, I can only agree with Shahrokni's observation that "ultimately" women's "engagement and activism have been circumscribed by the gendered character of the political universe they have to operate in" (108). While women have been able to "reterritorialize" urban spaces such as parks, libraries, and lecture halls, reclaiming them symbolically and practically through different forms of use, the state frustrates any desires to overcome these boundaries entirely. These limitations, I would note, were increasingly evident in 2009, during and after the Green Movement protests against the allegedly fraudulent presidential elections. In this period, the One Million Signatures campaign against legal discrimination, which gathered signatures in women-only parks, was increasingly subject to restriction, as were the Mothers of Laleh Park, whose demonstrations in a Tehran park against state repression were eventually dispersed. Indeed, since 2009 the Islamic Republic has increasingly resorted to what Shahrokni terms "scaling up" in dealing with human rights activism, sometimes citing Western-led sanctions and the threat of external military intervention as justification for the harsh prison sentences it metes out, sometimes drawing on a patriotic discourse around its own intervention in Iraq and Syria.

While *Women in Place* convincingly presents the state as a "disaggregated" collection of actors up to the late 2000s, it appears that, since then, the state has "reaggregated" in the face of internal and external pressures. Shahrokni herself observes that Iran's failing economy, which has already provoked "waves of protests" (121), will increasingly limit the material resources available to the state for securing consent, and may lead to a return to prohibition rather than provision in the area of gender policy. Pursuing this line of thought, it may be argued that in analyzing recent protests that increasingly call the state's legitimacy into question, a different spatial paradigm, that of Henri Lefebvre, might be of use in rethinking the relation between these moments of upheaval and everyday forms of regulated existence. While the book examines the intimate connections between people's mundane spatial practices and how these are shaped by planners and officials—relations that concern two elements of Lefebvre's famous spatial triad—his third concept, space as it is lived and felt but also valued or visualized differently, contains a critical utopian potential for imagining life otherwise, for overcoming, rather than only negotiating boundaries, however vital those practices are to daily existence. What is distinctive about this book, these points notwithstanding, is its detailed examination and theorization of cases where some sort of boundary negotiation between

<sup>1</sup>Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (2nd ed.; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 44.

citizens and state was possible, showing how macropolitical agendas are played out and adapted at the level of the everyday. Attractively written in an accessible style throughout, this study represents a substantial contribution to the political sociology of gender and urban space, and deserves a wide readership.

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## **Oilcraft: The Myths of Scarcity and Security That Haunt U.S. Energy Policy. Robert Vitalis (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020). Pp. 240. \$24.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781503600904**

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*Oilcraft*, the brief but dense and compelling new book from Robert Vitalis, is an exercise in myth-busting. In five short chapters, Vitalis attacks the assumptions informing views of oil and U.S. foreign policy. The biggest myth of all is the notion that the U.S. military presence in the Middle East has improved American energy security. The reasons undergirding the U.S. commitment to the Persian Gulf, set down by the Carter Doctrine in 1980 and supposedly illustrated by the special relationship with Saudi Arabia and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, range “from the crude to the complex and at times arcane,” reflecting a misunderstanding of resource markets and abundance stretching back to the nineteenth century (3).

*Oilcraft* is polemical, passionate, and pithy. It is written in an engaged and off-the-cuff style—a conversational read that you could imagine Vitalis delivering as a lecture. The “oilcraft” in the title equates to witchcraft, “a modern-day form of magical realism” regarding a commodity “the same as copper, coal, rubber, palm oil, [and] tin” (6). Policymakers and think-tank specialists form discreet vocabularies around oil, disguising a relatively simple global market in a complex mélange of geopolitical vernacular. “A veneer of references, footnotes, and quotations mask what is in essence an ideological construction,” one that Vitalis believes has taken over discussion of oil’s place in international relations, particularly among intellectuals on the Left who have internalized oilcraft—arguing that the U.S. military controls oil prices, that its presence in the Middle East is meant to secure the region’s natural resources, or that the invasion of Iraq was somehow meant to expand or consolidate hegemonic control over oil—to an extent that defies reason (5–6).

Examining the work of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century intellectuals, Vitalis unearths the original consensus used to justify imperial expansion predicated on the idea that overseas resources had to be “secured” for future use. A group of scholars that Vitalis dubs the “Columbia School” worked to discredit this idea by arguing that resources were both abundant and readily available through a global market. Skeptics echoed these critiques during the 1970s, when the concept of resource scarcity was reduced to “energy insecurity.” Vitalis regards the “Arab oil embargo” as a piece of “political theater” that did little to imperil oil consumption in the United States (61–63). The American people blamed major oil companies and the Arab leaders for long gas lines—disruptions that vanished, Vitalis notes, by the end of 1974 when oil was once again plentiful. Subsequent years have left us “more, not less, confused...because the highly contested and suspect beliefs of a half-century ago are now seemingly unshakeable truths” (61) passed down both in popular discourse and within scholarship.

Fears of scarcity are closely tied to racialized views of the developing world. A belief that native peoples of the resource-rich Global South were incapable of managing their wealth appropriately—what historian Megan Black has termed “resource primitivism”—compelled leaders in the industrialized West to support imperial ventures “to control the tropics and their resources” (124)<sup>1</sup>. A similar pathology emerged in the

<sup>1</sup>Megan Black, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).