

and Bazargan, about whom many secondary sources exist. Nonreligious intellectual figures or trends that have usually been overlooked in the literature on contemporary Iranian intellectual history have again received little attention in this work. This is despite the fact that the nonreligious liberal trend has enjoyed increasing significance in Iran's intellectual sphere in the last two decades. Examples include periodicals and magazines such as *Mehrnameh*, *Siasat Nameh*, *Agahi-e No*, *Tajrobeh*, *Golestaneh* and *Ham-Mihan*, and secular intellectuals like Morteza Mardiha and Mousa Ghaninejad, who have contributed extensively and directly to liberal thought in postrevolutionary Iran. This literature and these individuals have a more apparent direct impact on the public discourse and vitality of liberal thought in Iran than, for instance, Mirsepassi or Jahanbegloo, better-known nonreligious intellectuals who are mentioned briefly in chapter 2 but “do not outright identify their positions as liberal ones” (57).

In addition, Iranian antiliberal and secular leftist thought has had its representatives both inside and outside of Iran after the Islamic Revolution. Apart from exiled leftist political parties, there have been leftist intellectual institutions and individual scholars in the last two decades who have criticized liberal trends of intellectual thought; institutions such as *Porsesh* and individuals like Morad Farhadpour and Mohammad Maljou, among others. That is to say, as a reaction to the emergence of leftist thought in the 90s, hidden liberalism started to express itself more vividly in the following decade: a pattern of thought that does not define itself “strictly within the Islamic tradition” (140). Some of its examples have been mentioned. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the intellectual history of liberalism in Iran, it is imperative to address the latest developments in this field. Dedicating more space to the later developments of liberal thought would have completed the historical trajectory that the book provides. Nevertheless, Banai's argument on the hidden nature of liberalism lays the foundation for this additional work by shedding light on the historical period before these developments.

Hidden Liberalism is an intellectually rigorous work and one of the first intellectual histories of Iranian liberalism; it paves the way for further exploration of this underexplored territory. The author's intention “to expand the scope of comparative studies of liberalism beyond the modern West” (11) and to suggest a new model of inquiry inclusive of non-Western liberalism is a valuable contribution to the field. It invites further exploration of the development of liberal thought, particularly in contrast to Iran's religious context.

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**Women and the Islamic Republic: How Gendered
Citizenship Conditions the Iranian State. Shirin Saeidi
(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022). 220 pp.
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Women and the Islamic Republic: How Gendered Citizenship Conditions the Iranian State is a very welcome addition to recent publications in Iranian studies that contribute historically situated and deeply contextual, ethnographic research on postrevolutionary women in Iran (e.g.,

Siamdoust and Batmanghelichi).¹ A 2022 Cambridge University Press offering, this is the first monograph from Shirin Saeidi, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Arkansas. Saeidi investigates how women outside of Iran's organized women's rights movements act as postrevolutionary citizens in a historically authoritarian state, and in turn, how these acts of citizenship affect the state formation process (17, 191). Unlike previous, influential works that focus on state (female) political activists or secular activists linearly fighting against an illiberal, Islamist regime, *Women and the Islamic Republic* foregrounds case studies of interlocutors who are not typically underscored as dynamic, postrevolutionary Iranian women.² Readers are privy to the nuanced stories of wives and daughters of war martyrs; young female (Iranian) Hezbollah cultural activists; Islamist volunteers of war; and leftist political prisoners turned memoirists now residing in Europe. Notably, the monograph is the result of more than two years of fieldwork that the author conducted in Iran, Sweden, Germany, and the United Kingdom between 2007 and 2009 and between 2012 and 2014. Using extensive interviews, oral histories, and archival sources, the monograph delves into the multiple forms of citizenship from the 1979 revolution until 2009, from the perspectives of non-elite Iranian women.

Saeidi first looks at gendered legacies of the Iran–Iraq war and how they have informed the somewhat unpredictable and malleable state-building process of postrevolutionary Iran. The author is clearly drawn to the particularities of the national, international, and local contexts within which women perform acts of citizenship and are continually (re)imagining their rights. Gauging the competing visions of the Islamic Republic of Iran nation–state, she retheorizes Engin Isin's take on acts of citizenship in a context beyond the West, moving beyond the “right to demand rights framework” and exploring gendered acts of citizenship performed within irregular citizenry structures. For instance, Saeidi highlights women's pursuit of a revolutionary spirituality encapsulating desires for self-preservation, belonging, and care (19). Her first case study explores intergenerational exchanges these women have with political male elites (52–53), and later in the book she recounts the social militarization efforts of Hezbollah cultural institutes seeking to increase female participation by appealing to their “higher level of piety” and presumed ability to better police the nation and protect “Islamic Iran” (183).

In seven chapters that take on five unique case studies, the collection features everyday encounters in which “everyday” people learn to negotiate a “hybrid governance structure [that] produces citizens who cross, abide, and (at times) manipulate the state's formal boundaries.” Saeidi keenly observes, “This pushes the postrevolutionary state toward a balancing act to pacify its female population” (1). By the book's end, however, we learn about the innumerable ways in which women have taken matters into their own hands, reworking and rethinking alongside the state's nation–state agendas to improve their own family relations, reconstruct their war-torn cities, and find pleasure in new and different forms and scales of citizenship—attempting to balance for themselves expectations from state and societal forces with their own desires, thoughts, and lifestyles.

The hefty introduction—almost forty pages in length—sits as a twofold gateway into Saeidi's robust theoretical defense and mapping of her overall project on the art and procession of statecraft in postrevolutionary Iran. Parsing the introduction is like navigating a dizzying labyrinth of texts, inquiries, and theoretical inspirations that furnish her work, from

¹ Nahid Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution: The Politics of Music in Iran* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017); K. S. Batmanghelichi, *Revolutionary Bodies: Technologies for Gender, Sex, and Self in Contemporary Iran* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

² See Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl, eds. *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994); Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth Century Iran* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Shahrzad Mojab, “Years of Solitude, Years of Defiance: Women Political Prisoners in Iran,” in *We Lived to Tell: Political Prison Memoirs of Iranian Women*, edited by Azadeh Agah, Sousan Mehr and Shadi Parsi, 7–18 (Toronto: McGilligan Books, 2007).

political science, anthropology, and history to conflict, feminist and gender studies, and more. The myriad references merge to construct a theoretical prism through which she illustrates women's "unruly expressions of citizenship," manifesting at different "momentary bursts" in Iran's postrevolutionary history (18). For Saeidi, "acts of citizenship" are a working concept—at times inspired by spiritual growth, and at others centered on belonging and togetherness and expressed through poetry, volunteer work, and pursuing a more dignified life (69).

Notably, Saeidi does not characterize her interlocutors' subjectivities using stable identity markers or tropes based on their social class or Muslim identity and practice. The author gives space to tracing and illustrating their fluctuating negotiations, hesitations, and articulations over time, as they frame and reframe their roles, status, rights, and responsibilities in a similarly evolving Islamic Republic (23). Indeed, these women are presented as cautiously subverting and maneuvering around red lines, some emboldened enough to question state restrictions and patriarchal norms, using handwritten statements of approval from Ayatollah Khomeini himself.

Through this deeply contextual political ethnography, we gain insight into not just the triangulation of her findings on the ways in which acts of citizenship have emerged among different social groups, but also how Saeidi analytically engages with affective questions that the research process has engendered. She meticulously articulates her reactions and positionality in relation to her interviewees. She speculates on how she came to (mis) understand their perspectives vis-à-vis scholarly debates and popular historical renditions. There are many occasions throughout the work when she details the multiple complexities of intimacy, emotion, and methodology she and her interlocutors held at various stages of her research project. This commitment to capturing her interlocutors' varied meanings and personal convictions is discernible from the onset and heightened by the author's own brutally honest reflections about interview dynamics and the interviewees' perceptions of her. Readers are even privy to the pushback she encounters while presenting her findings at international conferences. An unforgettable example is an awkward encounter between her and former political prisoners whom she and Shadi Sadr, Iranian lawyer and activist, had previously interviewed. At an Oxford University conference in which all were in attendance, Saeidi challenged their and Sadr's claims on the ubiquity of rape in Iranian prisons given that prison rape was not mentioned during her own interviews with them (8).

Women and the Islamic Republic will likely be considered a detailed exposition of earlier historical works on postrevolutionary Iran. An example of such works is *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth Century Iran* by Parvin Paidar, which traces the development of women's position through the evolutionary and revolutionary transformation of political discourses of modernity, revolution, and Islamization that have dominated Iranian society (Paidar, 24).³ Whereas Paidar's discussion of the legacies of women during the Iran–Iraq war is broad, Saeidi's work delves deep into the narrations of Iranian women who have seen themselves fighting at the physical and spiritual frontlines of the Islamic Republic's conflicts against Westernization, feminism, spiritual and moral decay, and the like. As Saeidi captures, theirs was a revolutionary subjectivity forged through varying moments of triumph, despair, moral uncertainty, rapidly changing social context, and contradictory messaging from the postrevolutionary governments and its leaders.

Whatever misgivings or unexplored areas there might be in this work are found in the few words dedicated to unpacking the conceptualization of "non-elite women" that features prominently in this work. Were not many of these women idealized and highlighted as beacons by the IRI state? Were they not given promotions in the workforce and specifically championed by Iran's clerical authority? One should acknowledge that, first, many of these women were and are affiliated with groups who by sheer force have maintained a long-standing, hegemonic presence in state, economic, political, and cultural affairs for the past

³ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process*.

four decades. Moreover, patriarchal norms are deeply entrenched and extensive in society and thus affect *all* women. At what point does the non-elite label lose its resonance and distinction? Proverbially speaking, what does one make of the perks that these women were afforded in their “contextualized realities” (42)? Do these perks not, in some way, afford them a privileged status? Apropos, we do not learn from the book whether the women featured in this work refer to themselves using such terminology as “non-elite.” Did they themselves discuss shades of similarity and difference in class, ethnicity, and/or sexuality that they might have with their “elite” counterparts? This oversight might have been due to practical limitations. The volume of material Saeidi obtained and sifted through to arrive at this important work supersedes her publication’s actual pages, and as such *Women and the Islamic Republic* will continue to stimulate future discussion.

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