that Iran contains approximately seventy-thousand villages over a vast expanse of
more than 630,000 square miles (ranking eighth in the world), the reader is left
wondering the extent that peasants participated in the Iranian revolution on a
national level. Thirty-five years later, this question remains a lacuna in the literature
on revolutionary Iran and one with which scholars are still forced to grapple.

References
Kurzman, C. 2005. The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University
Press.
Lohmann, S. 1994. The dynamics of informational cascades: the Monday demonstrations in
McCarthy, J.D. and Zald, M.N. 1973. The Trend of Social Movements in America:
Press.
of Sociology 82(6):1212–41.
Movements. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Eric Lob
Brandeis University

Karimi, Pamela. Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran: Interior

The book examines Iranian domestic life and consumer culture, in the contexts of
private and public spheres, and in the broad scope of history, from the Qājār dynasty
(1870–1925) to the current time. It is an interdisciplinary study weaving a dense web
between the disciplines of anthropology, history, architecture, Iran studies, politics
and gender studies. The book argues that Iran's modernization is not solely situated
inside political frames. It focuses on gender, modernism, post-colonialism and the
Cold War, consumerism, Shi‘ite Islam and Iranian education to illustrate a more
complex picture of modern Iran. The nuanced discussions offer invaluable specifics
on the aforementioned contexts, making the book not only insightful and illuminating
but also more readable and interesting, for both Iranians and non-Iranians. The book
also displays how Iranians envision the West throughout history. The author begins
each chapter with an introduction offering background information as a useful
assistance to the general readers.

The first chapter, ‘The hovel, the harem, and the hybrid furnishing’, considers
how a chair, a Western commodity, enters Iranian domestic life and moves from
an ornamental to a useful object. Exotic commodities, like Western furniture in Qājār, became normal in the Pahlavi dynasty. Interestingly enough, the exoticism of American and Russian products disappeared in the Islamic Republic. The spatial and gender analysis of andarūnī (female space) and bīrūnī (male space) are thoroughly explored, with some robust ethnography. Female education and women’s homemaking skills affected the domestic spaces, and the culture and religion of Western missionaries (Christianity) influenced the male-dominated society; for example, husbands spent some time playing with their children.

The second chapter, ‘Renewing the nation’s interiors’, argues that the traditional boundaries of private and public space in Iranian homes fades away during Reza Shah’s reign (1925–41). Shah built asymmetrical buildings along the lines of Bauhaus architecture, educated society about single-function spaces such as bedrooms, introduced new furniture, and encouraged monogamy and women’s work outside their domestic spaces. The study of aesthetics is contextualized with colonialism, modernism and gender studies, and Iranian architecture is traced from the revival of Achaemenid and Sassanian architecture in the cherishing of Iranian Zoroastrian identity, to combining the Neoclassical European style with some features of Safavid Islamic architecture, to functional modernist architecture. The lack of entertainment spaces in the design of condominiums did not satisfy Iranians. They also became unhappy about the distribution of facilities in the oil city of Ābādān, as they felt segregated by social position. Anti-Pahlavi clergy, especially Mudarris, condemned Shah’s modernization because of its social and economic injustice. The chapter highlights that Iranians made spaces suitable for their daily life by constantly and actively adapting themselves.

The third chapter, ‘The Cold War and the economies of desire and domesticity’, uses ethnography, history, intelligence documents, economics and politics to discuss the interference of Russia and the US in the domestic life of Iranians. The Soviet Union promoted communism and the simplicity of life: for example, the Tudih women’s publication, Our Awakening, encouraged women to avoid cosmetics. Yet the US generated the Point IV Program and established a home-economics department to teach women housekeeping. The new facilities, such as washing machines, chest freezers, vacuum cleaners and so forth were consumed by the majority of Iranians. The ideas of single-function spaces and the new furniture, especially chairs, were naturalized. The ownership of the new commodities got much attention, exhibiting the class status that created social problems. The use of ethnographies and some stills from a film, Under the Skin of the Night, greatly helps the reader to follow the discussion.

‘Selling and saving piety in modern dwelling’ analyzes the clerics’ (mainly Imam Khomiyni and Āyātollah Shirāzi) encounter with modern commodities, conversing about the material and spiritual, and purity and filth, in both domestic and public
places. The chapter is primarily an intense examination of the relationship between
religion and space.

I wished the author had had room to elaborate further on homes specifically. Nonetheless, the fifth chapter, ‘Gendered spaces and bodies out of place,’ continues
the Islamic considerations of the fourth chapter, concentrating gender and women.
The author shrewdly asserts that the segregation of men and women is deeply rooted
in traditional beliefs. Education in relation to domesticity and consumer
culture in the late Pahlavi era is discussed, including Queen Farah’s contributions to
teaching in Iran, such as establishing the Advanced School for Girls. The
Pahlavi dynasty sought to build a society in which women and men could socialize
healthily. They changed the segregated boundaries of private and public associated
with female and male spaces. Nevertheless, the Islamic revolution reversed these
efforts, and emphasized the spatial segregation of the sexes. The author gives a
summary overview of Islamic Republic scholarship, such as ʿAli Haddād-Ādil and
Zahrā Rahnavard’s books, that believe in the truth of Islam and the spirituality of
Shi’ite ethics, especially of the headscarf. Some scholars made an analogy between the
(generally female) body and home spaces as a way to redefine gender roles.

The relationship of body and gender has become very complicated recently in
Iran, especially Tehran. The author touches upon some complex aspects of public
and private spaces, acknowledging the reversals of the Shah era in Islamic spatial
usage, and that private spaces became more secular in Islamic Republic.

The integration of different cultural styles of architecture is studied by means
of excellent ethnographies. ‘Hidden’ domestic culture and its use of space make
matters even more complicated, with, for example, mixed-gender parties inside
homes. Writing succinctly about the complexity of Iranian everyday life, domesticity
and consumer culture has been an enormous task, and is a key step towards
understanding modern Iran. Karimi used different methodologies in her research,
from her anthropological fieldwork in Iran to archival methodologies deriving from
different disciplines in order to present strong, polyphonic and original voices, that
are not biased, and which will actively engage a diverse readership.

Ali Pour Issa
Visiting Professor at the University of Tehran