

review / MARK JACKSON

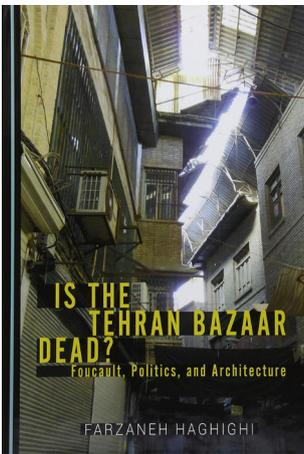
INTERSTICES 19

# Farzaneh Haghighi

## *Is the Tehran Bazaar Dead?*

### *Foucault, Politics, and Architecture*

Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018



For those old enough to remember, the years of 1978 and 1979 were marked by electrifying political events. In a geo-political climate dominated by neo-liberal policies that emerged with Thatcher and Reagan, the Shah of Iran was deposed, fleeing to the United States, with the Ayatollah Khomeini returning from exile in Paris to establish an Islamic government. What form would such governmentality take: a Muslim Shiite governmental reason that would be neither Arab nor Sunni, non-aligned with pan-Arabism or Pan-Islamism?

Michel Foucault visited Iran twice in 1978 to gain first-hand an understanding of how this governmental reason would be formed. He wrote some thirteen separate articles, mostly for French and Italian newspapers, reporting on how he understood this event that would not be named “revolution”. In concluding one such article for *Le Nouvel Observateur* in October 1978, he comments: “For the people who inhabit this land, what is the point of searching, even at the cost of their own lives, for this thing whose possibility we have forgotten since the Renaissance and the great crisis of Christianity, a political spirituality? I can already hear the French laughing, but I know that they are wrong.”

Indeed, Foucault was heavily criticized for what some termed his “folly” in Iran, for mistaking the ideal of an Islamic political will for an ultimately repressive theocracy. More recently, there are book-length studies that have revised that reception to Foucault’s political analyses, one by Afary and Anderson (2005) referenced briefly by Haghighi, and even more recently, Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi’s 2016 *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment*.

The same year that Foucault visited Iran, he delivered his “Collège de France” lecture course, *Security Territory Population*, introducing the notions of governmentality and security. Ghamari-Tabrizi suggests that Foucault’s encounters in Iran set him on other paths for thinking the question of political will, and the fate, in Europe, of what he called a political spirituality.

This perhaps overly extended introduction to Farzaneh Haghighi’s book on the Tehran Bazaar aims at placing aspects of Foucault’s thinking in some broader political contexts of Iran. It is also important to recognise, as Haghighi outlines comprehensively in her book, that the Tehran Bazaar during various political upheavals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been a locale or site

for galvanizing resistance and demonstration of political will. This was certainly the case with the return of Khomeine, and has been the case in subsequent turbulence.

With Donald Trump's reinforcing of stringent economic sanctions against Iran in January this year and his reminder to especially France and Germany to fall into line or be treated as hostile to United States interests, the Tehran Bazaar is again an epi-centre of agitation and political expression, especially around the issues of currency exchange and availability of US dollars for Bazaar traders. Haghighi's book goes into considerable detail on historico-political understandings of the founding of the Bazaar, its subsequent socio-political agencies and its urban and architectural morphologies.

The book undertakes this detailed and thoroughly researched accounting for an architectural object, in order to radically question the grounds upon which such scholarship rests. This is a book that introduces just how Foucault's approaches to history, power and human agency require us to reconsider, from the ground up, how to question the "encounterability" of things.

With this strategy in mind, the book follows a curious, though highly successful structure. Knowing full well the kinds of limitations she will bring to more conventional socio-political analyses or urban-architectural analyses of the Tehran Bazaar, Haghighi undertakes such analyses according to the precepts of key scholars in those fields.

Foucault does not get mentioned. This is to say, Haghighi does not bring critique immediately to conventional scholarly accounts of the Bazaar in terms of historical, sociological, political, urban and architectural analyses. We are somewhat lulled into the security of securing our object of study, quantifying and qualifying "it" as somehow objectively knowable.

Two early chapters of the book undertake this securing. Then, there comes the seismic rupturing in a chapter on Foucault, and especially on Foucault's notion of "event". It is instructive that Haghighi takes "event" as a central concern rather than, for example, aiming at providing accounts of the Bazaar in terms of archaeology, genealogy and governmentality as subsequent modalities by which Foucauldian analyses are generally encountered.

"Event" is especially pressing, as there is no real and decided explanation for just what it is. "It" is essentially aleatory, chance, as much as governmental reason. As Haghighi notes: "By considering the Tehran bazaar as an event, one might be able to explore this marketplace at a micropolitical level. Moreover, such a perspective allows one to incorporate the chance encounter as an element of investigation, which can open possibilities for the emergence of the *not-yet-thought*. As chapters two and three suggested that the socio-political and architectural discourses reduce an event to a known incident, the Foucauldian chance event acknowledges the rise of the unknown" (151).

There follows three more chapters that narrate the bazaar as event. The first narrates "death" as event, the second "movement" and the third "resistance". Just how Haghighi undertakes these narratives is instructive for how we are able to invent (or event) along with Foucault.

The narrative of death that haunts the bazaar is a focus on two chance elements that Haghighi encountered in her own travels to Tehran. One is a socio-political

encounter with roller-doors that now come to signify closure. Crucial to her approach, Haghighi emphasises practices: practices of occupying premises and modalities of occupancy for which roller-doors are elements in a broad geo-economic connectivity that takes in the manufacture of aluminium as much as it does access or its denial to particular traders within the bazaar.

The second element encountered is the ritualised photographic presentation of forebears within the perimeter of a trading establishment. Again, Haghighi emphasises that display of images is a practice, or complex relation of practices, rather than being reducible to discursive meanings of objects. Roller-dooring and photographic displaying are events, “eventalising” as power-knowledge relations constituting the spacings of the bazaar, their segmentations and contiguities as micro-political.

The chapters on movement and resistance engage further depth in Foucauldian analyses, and further understandings of practices immanent to inhabitations of the bazaar. Crucially, these three chapters revisit precisely concerns thoroughly engaged in those earlier chapters on the socio-political history of the bazaar and urban-architectural morphology of the building, though do so in such a way that palpably and politically draws out the failures in that earlier scholarship to account for what is genuinely *living* as practices of “bazaaring”.

Haghighi emphasises at the commencement to her book that we cannot take the Tehran bazaar as a “case-study” for a broader Foucauldian approach to architecture. By the conclusion of the book we recognise why this emphasis is made. To define a case-study is to define a particularity within the broad schema of universals. With the notion of event, we need to replace this grounding division with one of singularity, enabling the aleatory to rupture any sense of universality or totality. That having been said, it is not difficult to recognise just how Haghighi has ruptured many of the well-worn pathways by which we think of, analyse and define architectural objects. In this, we learn, from her approach, to think our own exemplars otherwise.