

The Politics of Gender Segregation in Iran

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Boundaries in Motion: Sisters, Citizens and Consumers Get on the Bus



Happy and Healthy in the Mothers' Paradise: Women Only Parks and the Expansion of the State



Soccer Goals and Political Points: The Gender Politics of Stadium Access



Re-Placing Women, Remaking the State: Gender, Islam and the Politics of Place Making

Research Questions

. What is the story of gender segregation policies in postrevolutionary Iran?

. How do various administrations justify their creation and expansion?

. Who uses gendersegregated spaces, and what meanings do they assign to them?

. What does the transformation of gender-segregated spaces show us about the changing modalities of state power in Iran?



Women in Place offers a historicized and contextualized reading of gender segregated spaces in Iran and seeks to answer these questions as it takes us on a historical tour of postrevolutionary Tehran by examining three illustrative sites of gender segregation: on city buses (chapter 2); inside the Mothers' Paradise, the first of the four women-only parks in the city (chapter 3); and outside the closed doors of Freedom Sports Stadium, where women are banned from attending men's sports matches (chapter 4).

Through these case studies, the book examines how the state establishes itself and retains its role as the ultimate arbiter of gender boundaries by regulating women's presence in public spaces.

To research gender-segregated spaces and the Iranian state, I had to go back to Tehran, where I grew up, studied, and worked as a journalist from 1996 to 2002, prior to moving to the United States to begin a PhD program. This book is the result of more than nineteen months of systematic fieldwork in Tehran between 2008 and 2014. I collected data through participant observation and conducted 132 formal and informal interviews with women who use the spaces I focus on, as well as state and city officials. I have revisited my research sites frequently ever since. I also undertook archival research of over nine hundred newspaper reports from the Iranian Newspaper Archive Database at Ettelaat Institution, the archives of Zanan and Zan-e Rooz magazines, the online archives of various presses, municipal records at Tehran City Council, and parliamentary procedures on gender segregation from 1979 to 2014. Turning my hometown into my research site had its own pearls and perils, which I discuss extensively in the book's introductory chapter.

Methodology

Contribution to Literature

Gender Segregation



In my attempt to address the inertia of prioritizing and reifying religion in the discussion of gender segregation, in this book I contend that we need to move away from an essentialized notion of an Islam that is invoked in these policies and that shapes these spaces. I argue that the Islamic character of these spaces is hardly fixed. It is itself the product of social and political struggles: a blueprint continually invented and revised at the same time as an elusive fuzzy destination, always in dialogue with the domestic and international challenges and opportunities the Islamic Republic faces. Contemporary political exigencies and political competition and calculations indeed constitute a significant factor in the promotion and institutionalization of gender mixing and/or gender segregation. A closer look into the political dynamics that mobilize or even (re)invent traditions or regimes of gender segregation can shed more light on gender segregation than poorly sub stantiated references to long-established, fixed religious traditions.

Contribution to Literature

Gender Segregation



Whereas gender segregation refers to a host of diverse modes of administering and ordering physical and social space and the position of gendered subjects therein, and while gender boundaries shift and remain open to contestation, the state's practice of that segregation acquires its unity at the level of representation, a representation that dissimulates the diversity of its forms and meanings... Therefore, I argue that the Islamic state is the producer of a gender-segregated spatial order, but at the same time it relies on that order to invent itself as precisely that: an Islamic state

Main Argument



Although gender segregation has remained in principle a central feature of the Islamic Republic, it is important to argue that the gender segregation regime of the 1980s was characterized by an emphasis on exclusion, closure, and prohibition, whereas the gender segregation regime of the 2000s is characterized by the prominence of inclusion, opening, and provision. In both cases, however, segregation is a means through which gender difference is activated and women's access to public space is regulated by the state. Specifically, I contend, for reasons that I elaborate on later, that gender-segregated spaces shifted from functioning as spaces of exclusion that restricted women's movements in the city to spaces of inclusion that facilitated, even if under male skepticism, their presence in urban public spaces.

Two
Regimes
of
Gender
Segregation

Mode of	Gender Segregation Regime I	Gender Segregation Regime II
Regulation	Prohibition	Provision
Subjecthood	Moral Subject	Citizen
Discourse	"Islamic"	"Secular"
Gender Domination	Exclusion	Inclusion

1980s



- The State prohibits women's outdoor exercise
- Discourse → Islamic morality
- Segregation > Exclusionary
- Women > Moral subjects

200s

- The State provides exercise spaces for women
- Discourse > Public health
- Segregation > Inclusionary
- Women > "Unhealthy" citizens





- The State prohibits/restricts women's bus ridership
- Discourse -> Islamic morality
- Segregation > Exclusionary
- Women > Moral subjects



- The State provides women with extra bus space
- Discourse -> "Right to the city"
- Segregation > Inclusionary
- Women > "Mobile" citizens

Buses



- Stadiums
- The State prohibits women's sports spectatorship
- Discourse, Islamic morality
- > Segregation -> Exclusion
- → Women → Moral subjects

- The State prohibits women's sports spectatorship
- Discourse > Inability to provide security & protection
- Segregation \(\rightarrow Inclusion \)
- Women > "Vulnerable" citizens

GENDER SEGREGATION

across

SPACE 8 TIME

© A GLANCE

Contribution to Literature

The Islamic State



As far as Iran is concerned, studies of state formation largely emphasize the state's religious dimension or its (trans)formation as a theocratic state. In addition, most studies of the Iranian state focus on the state's negative, prohibitive, and repressive power. In these studies, the resilience of the Islamic Republic of Iran is attributed to its application of force, coercion, and repression. Overstating Iran's repressive power leads to the neglect of the various ways in which the state *enables* its desired effects, rather than (or alongside) disabling its undesired effects.

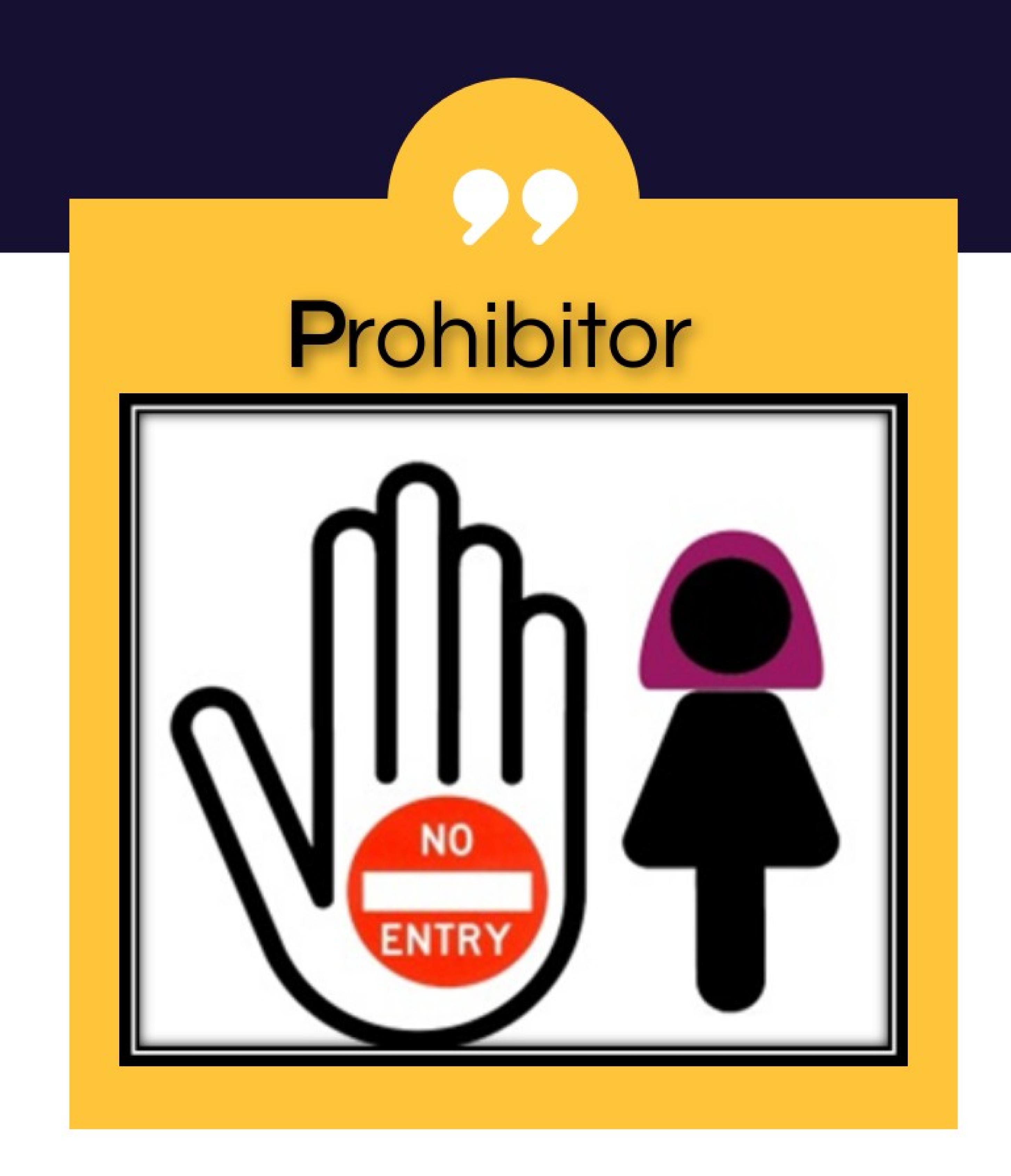
Furthermore, I contend, an analysis of the Iranian state's gender policies and practices is not complete without an understanding of the various actors involved, the entanglement of diverse sets of interests, and the subsequent tensions and struggles that unfold in everyday spaces over the form in which and the intensity with which these policies are implemented. Gender segregation policies may be ideologically motivated and are clearly not devoid of symbolic violence, yet as I demonstrate in the book, in order to be successfully implemented, they needed to incorporate a bureaucratic rhetoric of care and service provision provided by a state that was not immune to the global reach of liberal governmentality.

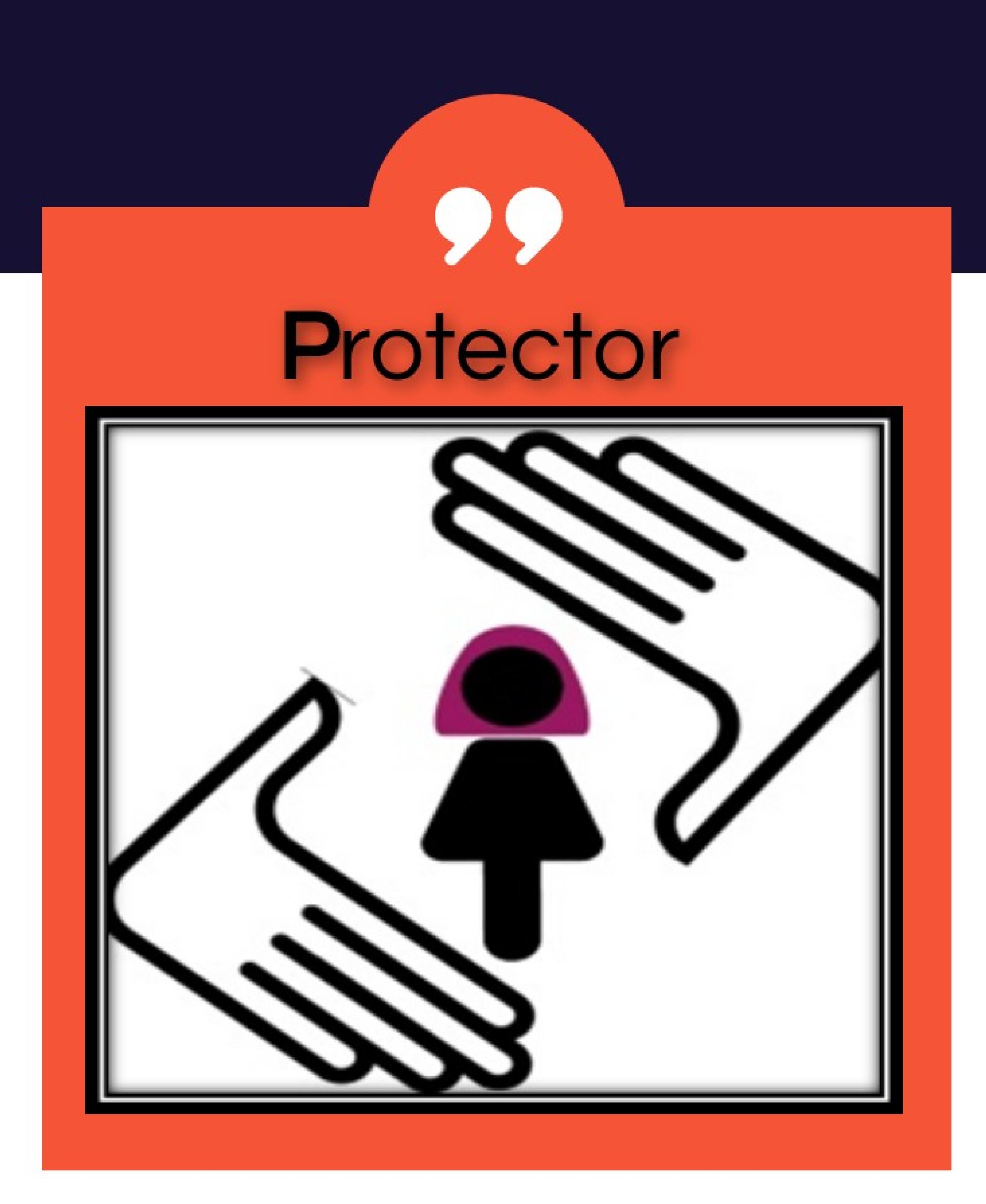
Main Argument

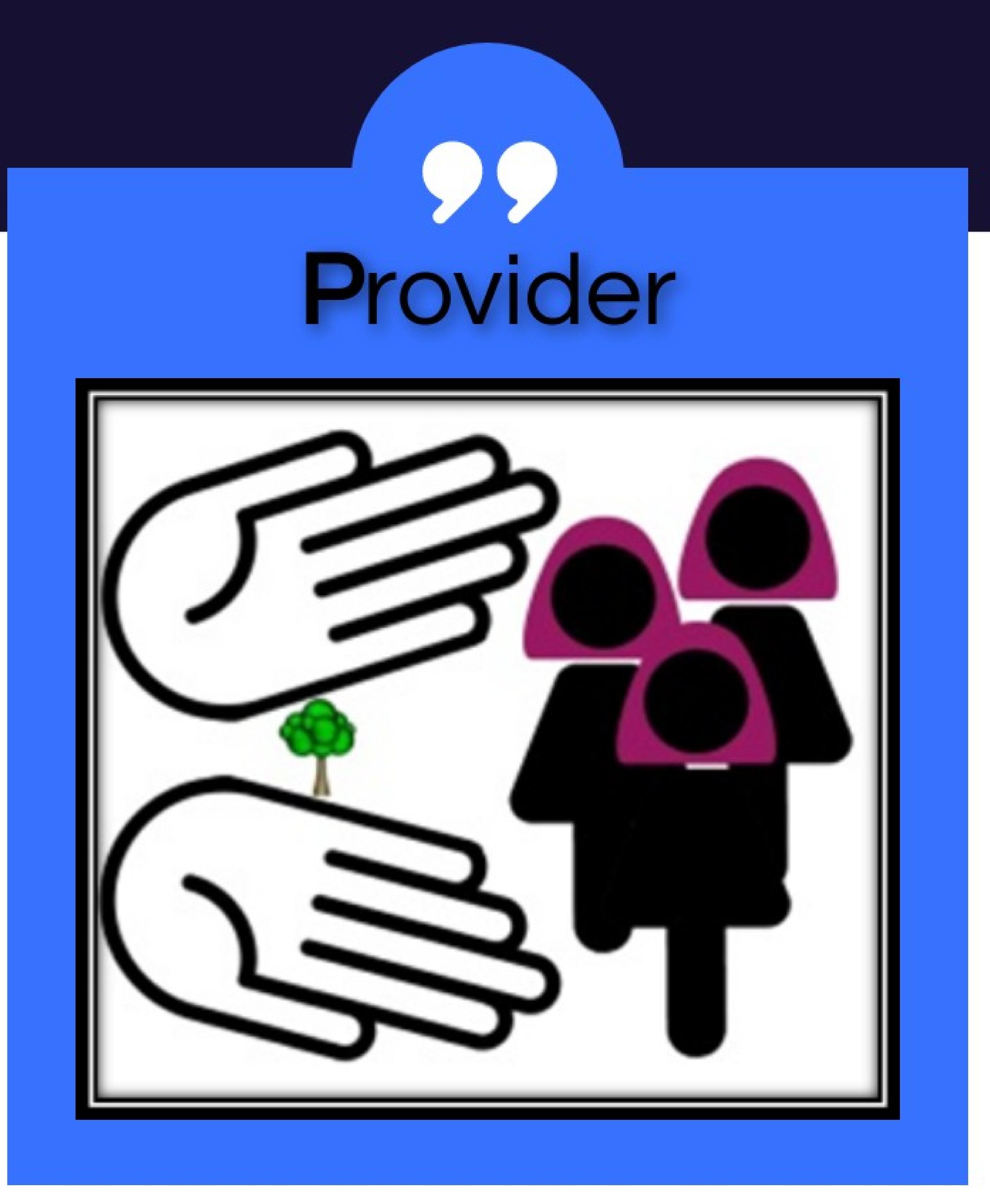


The shift from one regime of gender segregation to the other reflects, and is enabled by, a shift in the state's mode of regulation from prohibition—the disabling of undesired effects to provision, the enabling of desired effects. The movement from prohibition to provision, I demonstrate, is accompanied by a discursive shift from protecting women's virtue and chastity in the name of Islamic morality to protecting women's rights and safety in the name of secular liberal citizenship. This concept of protection is not immutable but socially and historically defined. Indeed, the Islamic Republic, in its early stages, had already transformed the traditional Islamic notion of male guardianship into state protection and thus had effectively appropriated it. In subsequent years the impact of social change—in the form of an expanding middle class and the emergence of a client/consumer mentality as well as the development of a bureaucratic logic, coupled with a liberal state understanding of protection as service provision rather than benevolent patronage, prompted further transformations.

Different Faces of the State







In Search of a Blueprint

"It's not like there was a manual about Islamization of the bus space. We did what we thought was right, what we were told was right. Did we make mistakes along the way? Yes, we did. It was all an experiment. We were creating the manual as we went."

- Valiollah Chahpoor, Former director of the Bus Company of Tehran, 2009 interview with the author

The "Islamic" and the process of Islamization itself are hardly predetermined, coherent projects. Lacking an authoritative blueprint or model for emulation, the Islamic city has been a vision to be discovered, to take shape through a complex process of searching for its features, its aesthetics, and its functionalities. It had to be located in religious and historical sources, in lived experiences and practices that constitute repositories of traditions, religious and nonreligious, in life in a modern, globalized world. The Islamic city has been, and still is, a project of translation.

WOMEN IN 8 OUT OF PLACE

Differential Exclusion/Inclusion

The terms inclusion and exclusion do not readily convey the complexity and multiplicity of women's experiences, gratifications, and predicaments of being in and out of place...

We need new concepts to understand the place of women in the city and their relationship with the state. Here are the two concepts that I develop in the book:

Flexible Sexism

While in the "eyes" of the state women are supposed to have a specific place in a system of gender difference and to be kept within its confines, The exigencies of domestic and international political, economic, & bureaucratic circumstances on occasions require the state not to rigidly police gender boundaries...

THANKYOU

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