

Blake Atwood, *Underground: The Secret Life of Videocassettes in Iran*

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/abstractairanica/55249>

DOI: [10.4000/abstractairanica.55249](https://doi.org/10.4000/abstractairanica.55249)

ISSN: 1961-960X

Publisher:

CNRS (UMR 7528 Mondes iraniens et indiens), Éditions de l'IFRI

Electronic reference

Max Bledstein, "Blake Atwood, *Underground: The Secret Life of Videocassettes in Iran*", *Abstracta Iranica* [Online], Volume 44 | 2022, document 3, Online since 30 November 2022, connection on 31 August 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/abstractairanica/55249> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/abstractairanica.55249>

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REFERENCES

Blake Atwood, *Underground: The Secret Life of Videocassettes in Iran*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2021, 252p. (*Infrastructures*). ISBN 978-0262542845

- 1 This book provides an excellent addition to literature on Iranian cinema by examining video, with a particular attention to its “underground” circulation during the ten-year ban on video (1983-94) issued by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG). Atwood’s argument about the significance of video as a result of this period is twofold: firstly, that video provides a valuable entry into a broader understanding of the Iranian underground (i.e., activities conducted in defiance of state policies and guidelines); and secondly, that video facilitated the development of the underground within post-revolutionary Iran. As Atwood demonstrates, an examination of video, the ban on it, and people’s response to the ban illustrates dynamics between citizens and the government in the Islamic Republic. Atwood shows this primarily through oral history, in which interviews with people involved with the circulation of video during the ban discuss their experiences. The interviews are complemented by brief but insightful close readings of films, where Atwood analyses ways in which filmmakers have represented Iranians’ relationship with video through cinema. The thematically organised chapters apply these methods to show the importance of video in Iran from five distinct but complementary points of focus: the ban and its production of the underground, the infrastructure of underground circulation, the dealers who created and maintained the infrastructure, the role of video in Iranians’ understanding of the post-revolutionary state, and memories of video culture post-2010.
- 2 These chapters offer a novel and important perspective on post-revolutionary Iranian cinema. Few scholars working on the topic have approached it with Atwood’s level of

attention to materiality. Atwood's specific focus on the material conditions of video circulation shed light on an important and previously under-studied aspect of the consumption of cinema within Iran. The use of oral history to discuss this issue is a revealing but infrequently used research method in scholarship on Iranian film. Students and scholars with interests in film and media studies, especially with a focus on circulation and/or the Middle East and North Africa, will benefit from this lucid and informative book.

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