

## Migration and diaspora

AIDANI, MAMMAD. *Narrative and violence: ways of suffering amongst Iranian men in diaspora*. xiv, 136 pp., bibliogr. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013. £55.00 (cloth)

Mammad Aidani's *Narrative and violence* explores the diasporic identities of Iranian men in Australia and the United Kingdom. He braids together extracts from interviews, his own reflections on violence and exile, and philosophical insights from the likes of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. The aim is to explore intimate structures of feeling: pain, suffering, memory, and violence and its aftermaths. At times beautifully written, the text is held together by a consistent focus on the ways in which people simply go on in their everyday lives. *Narrative and violence* is an invitation to think with the author and his research participants about individual and collective experiences.

Readers should not expect a comprehensive overview of the 1979 Iranian revolution, the Khomeini or Khamenei regimes, recent geopolitics, or even a social-scientific map of the Iranian diaspora. This is not a work of objective history or comparative anthropology. There are many passages in the text in which the author reflects on Iranian history and politics, but these passages cannot be taken in isolation and do not form a coherent whole. Rather, history and politics are presented in fragments, perhaps as history and politics are experienced by Aidani's interlocutors. When one reads about the post-1979 political landscape, then, one sometimes yearns for greater detail and stronger connections to international scholarship. At times, Aidani gives us Iranian history rendered as the history of the people, from below. He makes reference to what 'the majority of Iranians' did or felt without sufficient attention to his own acts of interpretation.

In chapter 1, on the social nature of suffering, the author insists that the violence and fear generated by successive Iranian regimes are felt in the register of lived knowledge for members of the diaspora. Again and again, *Narrative and violence* insists that violence and fear are thoroughly social, both in their (geo)political causes and in their experiential consequences. Chapter 2 is ostensibly about cultural identity but dwells on Iranian politics before turning to the tortured bodies of survivors. Some of the statements in this chapter are striking. Majed, for

instance, says, 'The torturer could not see what he was doing because I was absolutely nothing to him' (p. 67). Years later, Majed is a refugee living overseas, and Aidani is quick to note how his invisible wounds are reopened by the cold, instrumental category of the refugee and blind public stereotyping.

Chapter 3 offers a reinterpretation of the 1979 revolution. Gilles Deleuze once remarked that all wars are private affairs, and here Aidani gives us the rupture that is 1979 from the perspective of individual and collective suffering. But we might legitimately ask: what is 'suffering'? One interlocutor, Omid, wonders if we are not in fact discussing a 'sickness' or even depression. However, the moment to seek precision is lost (pp. 81-2) and suffering, instead, becomes a category for thinking about Iranians in exile. Chapter 4 takes up this category again by meditating on the remembering body and the Iran-Iraq War. The men whose voices are elicited in the text often describe the impossibility of telling their stories, as if the work of remembering and representing is too indelicate for the painful tasks at hand. *Narrative and violence* is an effort to work with research participants to find sensitive ways to tell the painful stories of Iranians in exile.

This short book tracks many of the same themes as do contemporary anthropologists working on violence, suffering, and everyday life. Some will find an easy home for this book as secondary material in anthropology courses on violence, trauma, or migration and exile; others interested in the Iranian diaspora will find it to be well written and intellectually stimulating. But anthropologists versed in the literature on violence, suffering, and everyday life may also read it as a missed opportunity to add to our understandings of how people live with suffering. Aidani's attention to context and narrative attempts to turn words into meaningful voices in this text, but voices are meaningful in ordinary life, and it is the texture of the everyday that I hope will be the focus of Aidani's future work.

MARK MAGUIRE *National University of Ireland Maynooth*

GRAU, KNUT & SAMULI SCHIELKE (eds). *The global horizon: expectations of migration in Africa and the Middle East*. 199 pp., figs, illus., tables, bibliogr. Leuven: Univ. Press, 2012. €39.50 (paper)

The study of migration has undergone promising developments in recent years.