

universe where the feeling of belonging to Lebanon and Shiite Islam has become an important political issue. For instance, during *Ashura* celebrations or political events – such as the war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006 in Lebanon – the Shaykh's followers (including Senegalese converted to Shiite Islam (pp. 173–200)) show solidarity with their compatriots and co-religionists in difficult situations (p. 117). In return, although linked to the latter, these Lebanese – Shiites or Maronite Christians – remain attached to their country of adoption, which they protect from subversive influences coming from elsewhere, including Lebanon.

Thus, Shiite Islam has succeeded, in collaboration with Sunni movements and Sufi orders, in securing a place in the Senegalese religious space. However, despite Shaykh al-Zayn's reforms, including the introduction of new forms of expression of the faith (*Ashura*, *mut'a* marriage or temporary marriage, etc.) that are in common usage (p. 229), Leichtman acknowledges that this strategy has not prevented the development of a Lebanese class with freedom of thought and more pragmatic in religion practices: a large part of the Lebanese community continues to claim to be merely 'Muslim' and pays less attention to certain Shia rites.

In short, this book gives us a part of the history of the Shiite Lebanese community that settled outside its original land. As this migratory enterprise was more a West African reality than specifically Senegalese, the analysis could have better accommodated a comparative approach. The author has tried to do this but her analysis is limited to a comparison of the flow of migrants in these countries – particularly Côte d'Ivoire (p. 35) – without including the social dynamics (integration, citizenship, etc.) linked to this phenomenon. This lack of comparative approach also appears when she addresses the attitude of young Lebanese towards their *marja'* and Shiite Islam. Indeed, although Leichtman easily explains the freedom of these young Lebanese in the expression of their faith, she does not analyse this change in the prism of the socio-political context – with the evolution of social perceptions of the notions of *ndiguel* – which has seen the authority of the shaykhs of Sufi orders crumble in recent years in Senegal.

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Cawo M. Abdi, *Elusive Jannah: the Somali diaspora and a borderless Muslim identity*. Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press (hb US\$94.50 – 978 0 8166 9738 0; pb US\$27 – 978 0 8166 9739 7). 2015, 296 pp.

Elusive Jannah explores the question of how the diasporic condition affects the lives of Somalis around the globe. In this well-written book, Cawo Abdi argues that displacement leaves a permanent mark as those in the diaspora remain in search of a home. She furthermore shows how 'place matters' by providing rich empirical descriptions of life for Somalis in the United Arab Emirates, South Africa and the United States. Yet in all these places, as Abdi argues, the search for cultural, religious and social belonging continues, often combined with a search for legal, economic and physical security. While the depth of fieldwork in these three very different contexts varied considerably, Abdi largely manages to portray convincing descriptions of people's lived experiences and the stark differences between some of their concerns, depending on where they live.

The book's introduction sets the stage for this comparison and adds the context of the research by positioning the researcher and elaborating on methods. It places

the book in the theoretical landscape of diaspora and transnationalism, and furthermore highlights a challenge for researchers working with refugees and diasporas: the fact that people's life histories and motivations are more complex than is recognized by legal categories. The first chapter then provides an overview of contemporary Somali migrations, describing causes and routes over time.

Chapter 2, the first of the three core empirical chapters, discusses life in the United Arab Emirates, where Abdi spent the least time, while facing the most restrictions on her research. At the same time, she manages to capture the context well, which she describes as being defined by partial belonging and temporary visas. She shows how religious identification is not sufficient for a full sense of belonging as not having access to rights clearly restricts people's options of creating a home. She also highlights the great differences between different categories of Somalis living in the UAE, who include those who came before the war, returnees and transnational entrepreneurs with footholds in the West, and newer groups of unskilled migrants and maids. Of course, their situation is determined not only by conditions in the UAE but just as much by their assumed resources and potential to contribute and 'fit in'.

Chapter 3 describes Somalis in South Africa, based on a range of extensive fieldwork periods and stays between 2007 and 2013. South Africa is described as being defined by insecurity in racialized spaces, which is contextualized by a short description of South Africa as a highly segregated and racialized society, which often clashes with Somalis' self-perception. Abdi furthermore describes in great detail how Muslims, and in particular Somalis, pool resources and provide assistance and charity in ways that enable many more to survive than would otherwise be the case. The chapter focuses on livelihoods, economic survival and entrepreneurship, although it also places this in the context of xenophobia and violent attacks.

Chapter 4, the last empirical chapter, discusses the lived experiences of Somalis in the United States, where many of those in the UAE and South Africa hope to move. Yet at the same time, it is also a place that individuals move *from*, once they have received the much-prized US citizenship. Others maintain transnational ties and dream of return. Abdi describes Somali experiences in the US as 'slippery Jannah', 'Jannah' meaning paradise and linked closely to Islam. She chooses this description because of the challenges the American model poses to the Somali community, in particular with regard to gender relations and poverty.

The book offers important perspectives on refugee life in contexts that are normally understudied, such as when regional refuge is provided in a range of ways. The first strength of the book is its empirical richness. Through many quotes from her informants, Abdi manages to illustrate the uniqueness of people's lived experiences in different contexts. A second strength of the book is the fact that it builds on a multi-sited ethnography that clearly highlights these differences. While it does hint at the many connections between the three national contexts, and in the case of the United States explicitly discusses transnational ties, the nature and implications of the transnational – and not just diasporic – nature of Somali life could have been made more explicit. A third strength of the book is the way in which Abdi manages to balance writing about the extremely constrained conditions that her informants live in without necessarily losing sight of the fact that they are resourceful individuals who relate to and aim to cope in these conditions.

Elusive Jannah provides an important contribution to diaspora studies, migration studies and Somali studies. The book is timely considering the increasingly restricted political climate. It fits within a growing genre of multi-sited ethnographies on refugees – including many on Somalis. These ethnographies largely take a similar approach to *Elusive Jannah* in focusing on refugees' agency in

extremely confining conditions. While the book provides a very sound and interesting account, it is thus difficult to see to what extent it moves beyond this existing literature. In particular, there would have been potential for the author to take her empirical findings further theoretically, for example by elaborating more on the idea of refugees being 'in perpetual passage'. There have been many attempts to theorize this conception, both in relation to belonging and in terms of rights and duties. The literature on liminality, uncertainty and resilience, but also the citizenship literature that Abdi touches on, provides interesting debates that Abdi could have used to position herself and her empirical findings more strongly. Even so, *Evasive Jannah* remains a powerful ethnography that sheds great light on the challenges, perspectives and strategies of Somalis in different national contexts.

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Maybritt Jill Alpes, *Brokering High-risk Migration and Illegality in West Africa: abroad at any cost*. Abingdon and New York NY: Routledge (hb £110 – 978 1 4724 4111 9). 2017, 234 pp.

Studies on African overseas migration usually come in two flavours: they construe migrants either as opportunity-seeking adventurers or as victims of globalization. Jill Alpes' book on Cameroonian overseas migrants stands out as a welcome alternative as it focuses on the power of the social. She does so by adopting an extended case-study approach: the book revolves around insightful portrayals of biographic narratives and detailed descriptions of the social practices of only a handful of individuals – the migration brokers James and Walther; aspiring migrants Claire, Josephine, Pamela and Victorine; and the author's research assistant, Delphine. Thus, the book is at odds with the academic practice that is increasingly becoming fashionable (no doubt following from shrinking research funding): to make generalizing statements based on apt illustrations. The book instead delves deeply into the layered, often contradictory, motivations as well as the social forces driving ordinary Cameroonians to venture into overseas travel, subtly linking individual issues of *bushfalling* (the local vernacular for overseas migration) to collective problems of involuntary immobility.

The first part of the book (Chapters 1 and 2) deals with the fascinating world of migration brokers. Far from being the rogue, ruthless dealers in human flesh prevalent in the trafficking discourse of (Western) migration policymakers, Alpes situates these key actors in the social practice of everyday life. Migration brokers cultivate relations with aspiring migrants, and they are usually valued by them. Alpes thus sheds light on a challenging riddle: migration brokers are not particularly successful (the book is replete with stories of unsuccessful migrants) yet their position remains surprisingly unchallenged. Aspiring migrants distinguish sharply between different social categories: *feymen* (fraudsters), *dokimen* (hustlers of administrative documents) and *big men* (migration brokers proper). So long as an intermediary succeeds in portraying a genuine sense of sincerity, he (few are women) generally does not risk loss of social prestige. Impression management appears key: esteemed brokers emanate a sense of being connected to state structures, and they are able to suggest a vast network of overseas contacts – even though few of them are actual globetrotters.