Zuzanna Olszewska. *The Pearl of Dari: Poetry and Personhood among Young Afghans in Iran*

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REFERENCES

Zuzanna Olszewska. *The Pearl of Dari: Poetry and Personhood among Young Afghans in Iran*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015, 288p. (Public Cultures of the Middle East and North Africa)

- 1 This book is an ethnographic study of a circle of Afghan poets in the Iranian city of Mashhad, who developed the literary institute “Pearl of Dari” (Dorr-e Dari). It astutely shows how they use poetry as a social practice to redefine their identity, position themselves in the Iranian cultural sphere and seek emancipation from widely shared images of Afghans as victim refugees. The focus of the study is on the tensions between the way they conceive and experience personhood. The practice of poetry is very much alive in Persian-speaking countries and this book masterfully shows how it is used and practised. Each chapter extensively quotes and analyses poems by the Afghan poets. Olszewska also narrates vividly her own discoveries and limitations as an anthropologist, giving account of how fieldwork changed her.
- 2 The first two chapters describe the history of the Afghan presence in Iran, the context of the precarious situation of Afghan refugees in post-revolutionary Iran and the development of a class of Afghan intellectuals. Chapter 3 and 4 focus on the Afghan literary institutes in Iran after 1979 and specifically on Dorr-e Dari. The last two chapters detail the use of the topics of love and personhood in their poetry, and the difficult balance the poets must find between traditional ideas of marriage and modern forms of love, and between revelation and concealment.

- 3 This book is an essential resource for scholars of contemporary Persian literature and of contemporary Iranian society, as well as for scholars interested in innovative literary history.
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AUTHORS

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