

rectos or to present two busts of Patroclus by William Henry Fox Talbot that seem to be literally speaking to each other. In its presentation and in its willingness to consider the uncanny, this book has learned from Breton's *Nadja* ([1928] 2012) and Austerlitz's rucksack remains no less of an enigma in the centre of this slow, subtle, scholarly text than it is in *Austerlitz*. This is a book that rushes to no easy conclusions or blunt-edged arguments, but is all the better for that.

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## **CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY IN IRANIAN-AMERICAN SELF-NARRATIVE, MARIA D. WAGENKNECHT (2015)**

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 217 pp.,

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To experience a sense of transculturality entails an equilibrium of thoughts, attitudes and beliefs that an individual develops in a diasporic context, affected by variables of time, space and experience. Perhaps, the key in this reading of transculturality is the uniqueness of individual roles in imagining and complicating a community's shared identity. In *Constructing Identity in Iranian-American Self-Narrative*, author Maria D. Wagenknecht captures this element of transculturality in her analysis of the autobiographies of thirteen Iranian American writers and reference to ten others. Chief among them are Farideh Goldin, Roya Hakakian, Afschineh Latifi, Azadeh Moaveni, Afshin Molavi, Azar Nafisi and Nahid Rachlin. The book's corpus of primary sources documents various voices in the Iranian American community in terms of gender, religion and generation.

The book is intriguingly structured into three parts with a temporal framework. The first part engages with the past, which constitutes a critical ground for the writers to make sense of their identity. Wagenknecht traces the writers' victimhood narrative through their critique of the Islamic Revolution (1979) and its consequential disrupture of their lives. The narrative appeals to exilic collective memory that drives the writers' legitimacy, authority and relevance. This memory functions as a fertile ground for writers to imagine alternative narratives of Iran for themselves, distanced from the culture of mourning in

the country's institutionalized Shia version of Islam. Such alternatives include a glorification of the pre-1979 revolution that draws from pride in pre-Islamic Zoroastrian heritage and Persian history, an idealization of the 'Aryan roots' rhetoric that emphasizes Indo-European ancestry and a conversation around Sufi Islam as a viable school of thought that challenges traditional power structures. The totality of the writers' engagement with the past, argues the author, helps them cope with trauma and generate diasporic resilience.

The second part moves to the present to capture the writers' cross-cultural readings of language and body as important markers of identity among Iranian Americans. Expressing bilingualism, Wagenknecht contends, serves the writers' demands for agency that English provides in literature, and authority that Farsi renders through their works, which range in platform from US-Iranian bridge-building to cultural guiding to or critiquing of Iran. Meanwhile, the writers develop various responses to Iranian and American norms of corporeality. Whether coming to terms with their post-9/11 racialized visibility, expressing discomfort for being mislabelled as Arabs or Mexicans while celebrating their ethnic-racial ambiguity or conceiving clothing and sexuality, the writers present multi-layered understandings and negotiated readings of what it means to be an Iranian American.

The third part stretches from the present to the future as it continues to capture the writers' process of negotiation for their transculturality. Wagenknecht offers a reading of the existing chasm in autobiographical writing between first-generation authors who rely on fiction as a narrative style that preserves Iranian private-public decorum – a refreshing model unlike that of western confessional autobiography – and subsequent generations that opt for factuality and accuracy, a trend shaped by their distance from Iranian traditional reservations and US market demands for authenticity. The author continues to explore the generational differences in Iranian American self-narration as an inter-dependent medium, constructed in perpetual relation to one's family, community and ancestry. Trauma, nostalgia and racism are the three main factors that shape such medium. Perhaps, the final chapter, titled 'Persian Paradise and the American Arcadia', best illustrates the writers' diasporic fragmentation and offers a token of their imagined community's future. Narrating Iran as a lost paradise, which itself follows a binary neo-orientalist construction of prerevolutionary Iran as utopic and feeds a hungry American audience for exotic imagery, goes hand in hand with claiming America as a new paradise. This narrative is, however, simultaneously challenged and rejected by writers who cannot realize the 'paradise' image within existing nationalist narratives in Iran or the United States.

There are a few features that distinguish this book. It offers a timely and critical insight into the various representation strategies used by Iranian American writers – whether first, second or other generation – to reimagine their past and make sense of their present and future. Wagenknecht's choice of texts produced in the period 1995–2011 offers a snapshot of the impact of US Iranian cultural and political environment on generations of Iranians located at the intersection of an alienating religiosity embedded in the Iranian governing philosophy and a post-9/11 Islamophobia that uses racial profiling as its policing tool. The author's critique of neo-orientalist tones in the surveyed autobiographies, the US market influences and the uniqueness of Iranian ethnic autobiography complement Wagenknecht's considerate reading of the different factors shaping one's literary construction of diasporic identity. Equally important, the author acknowledges the pluralism of the Iranian

American community, and through this book, shows how it is quite impossible to generate a particular way of understanding the complexity of this heterogeneous group.

Despite its effective use of the writers' statements and thoughts, the book lacks contextualized readings surrounding the autobiographies themselves. Although the book is not primarily invested in reception-based enquiries, it could have benefited from a cursory look at the audience engagement with these works, whether in the Iranian American community or among readers in Iran and America. It is enriching to gain insight into the extent of the writers' impact, while recognizing the author's acknowledgement of the existing limitation in relevant secondary sources. Also, the book could have benefited from references to scholarly works, following the transnational turn in American studies, which explore the global configurations of US ethnic minorities and identities. Although Wagenknecht cites various scholars across the book, the theoretical framework is loose and does not explicitly articulate a clear conceptual engagement with existing identity-based works.

*Constructing Identity in Iranian-American Self-Narrative* is an important work concerned with the 'performance of identity' (2), in its author's words. It speaks to an increasing appetite for scholarship that captures the parallel growth in minority literature with transnational echoes. Members of the academic community and the public will find it useful in offering an account of an Iranian American complicated sense of agency in a globe fraught with reductions and over-simplifications.

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***NEVER ALONE, KISIMA INGITCHUNA (2014)***

Upper One Games, Anchorage, Alaska, and E-Line Media,  
New York, £3.99

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*Never Alone* was developed by Upper One Games and published by E-Line Media in 2014 on three platforms (Xbox, PlayStation and Steam) in Iñupiaq, with subtitles in ten languages. The story follows the Iñupiaq (Native American/Alaskan) girl Nuna and her pet fox as they survive arctic blizzards and other dangers with the help of nature spirits. One day, as they return to their village, they find that a 'terrible man' has destroyed their camp site. As they are running away, they come across a mystic owl man who sends them on a quest to find his lost drum. By working together, Nuna and her fox are able to retrieve it from the mischievous little people, gnome-like spirits who live underground, and as a reward receive a Bola (a traditional throwing weapon) from the owl man. They then have to use the Bola and fight the 'terrible man'. Finally, they make their way to the heart of the blizzard, where