

The diasporic condition: ethnographic explorations of the Lebanese in the world, by Ghassan Hage, Chicago, the University of Chicago Press, 2021, xvi+220pp., \$27.50(paperback), ISBN 978-0226547060

Increasingly few groups of people, whether linked through familial relations, shared culture, or national membership, are insulated from the dynamics of transnational migration. This has long been true in the Lebanese case, for which, according to Ghassan Hage, capitalist modernity and transnational migration are inextricably tied. In his new book, *The diasporic condition: ethnographic explorations of the Lebanese in the world*, Hage examines the phenomenological, affective, and moral experiences of people whose way of being in the world encompasses multiple 'places' or milieus. The book departs from Hage's previous work which foregrounded race and racism in host societies, and rather builds upon his enduring themes of existential mobility, stuckedness, and inhabitation in the intimate view of diasporic culture it offers. This is made possible not only by Hage's membership in the Lebanese diaspora and the exceptional access granted to him by his research participants, but also by the extensive reach of his ethnography and keen eye to the psychosocial dynamics that shape migrant subjectivities.

Hage distinguishes the diasporic condition by its lenticular and anisogamic dimensions. Whereas 'lenticular' refers to the migrant subject's multiplicity and the constant comparisons such multiplicity engenders, 'anisogamic' points to the inherently unequal exchanges such comparisons evoke. Such a condition therefore involves, according to Hage, the 'entanglement of multiple realities that are continually present and that differ in the way they are inhabited, their affective quality, and their intensity' (7). A Lebanese woman living in Montreal longs for her homeland and strategically over-valorizes Lebanon, dwelling more in Lebanon than in Montreal despite her physical location. A young Lebanese man who has for years desired to migrate to Australia existentially inhabits his destination already – until his visa is approved. As a result of this hoped-for future becoming suddenly achievable, he is affectively pulled back into the present with his family in Lebanon and becomes riddled with self-doubt. This, Hage suggests, is the crux of diasporic nostalgia: 'it is the propelled-into-the-world subject yearning for the homely subject it is constantly leaving behind' (104).

The diasporic subject's multi-situatedness is thus a key dimension of the diasporic condition. As opposed to affirming migrants' sense of being metaphorically torn between two places, Hage contends that they are in fact 'split', being 'present and situated in both places' (77) concurrently, irrespective of where their physical body may be and without having to travel between places. His notion of multiple inhabitation challenges any clear-cut distinction between embodied inhabitation and nostalgia, while also underscoring migrants' privileging of the spatial – here versus there – over the temporal – then versus now. Reflecting on the frequent use of 'ambivalence' to characterize the migrant subject as uncertain or wavering between multifarious places or identities, Hage writes that 'fragmentation is a mark of their appreciation of the lenticular reality they inhabit and are part of, rather than simply some psychological traits that

make them hesitant or fragmented subjects' (98). From this viewpoint, and the suffering it generates notwithstanding, fragmentation might also be considered a dexterity that some migrants develop over time as a result of their multi-situatedness.

Throughout the book, it is noteworthy that Hage holds the universal relevance of his ethnography and specific application of his case study in delicate balance. On the one hand, part of his central argument is that 'Lebanese diasporic culture is the culture of Lebanese capitalist modernity' (4). If the diasporic condition is a transnational way of being in the world, Hage argues, it is also an essential element of being Lebanese. On the other hand, he also affirms the universal significance of the diasporic condition beyond not only the Lebanese case but as also appealing to those who are not part of a diasporic milieu. Both migrants and non-migrants alike can be steeped in a 'viral environment' (23) of migration so that, although they may be uniquely affected, one need not migrate to participate in, or become enveloped by, diasporic culture.

Indeed, one of the book's strengths is Hage's approach to diasporic culture by way of diverse entry points. In addition to tracing phone calls, international visits, and the flow of remittances to demonstrate inter-familial communication and connectedness, the book highlights individuals' use of cultural artefacts to affectively construct transnational spaces of belonging. An unusual spice added to a traditional Lebanese dish produces the same aroma in distinct households belonging to members of the same transnational family. The way tea is served, variety of Johnny Walker placed on the table during family meals, or brand of clothing worn by children at family events all constitute vantage points from which to examine shifting class and gendered relations of power. Bare walls in the room of a Lebanese emigrant may indicate that she has just recently arrived, Hage suggests, or that she is resisting settling in, not yet prepared to accept her migration, or postponing her 'sentiment of betrayal of the "mother country"' (129).

Hage's is a beautiful book which gives its readers an intimate look at the promises and disappointments of sustaining a transnational life, encompassing multiple generations, households, geographies, and migration dispositions. With ethnographic fieldwork spanning four continents over a period of twenty-five years, it offers untold insights into the diasporic family, exploring gendered expectations, money management, the handling of internal conflicts, and the pursuit of divergent aims by way of migration. The book excavates some of affective, moral, and existential quandaries presented by transnational living, proposing empirically grounded answers which resonate from the particular to the universal. While its contribution reaches well beyond the realm of migration studies, this book will no doubt be of special interest to those who work alongside transnational migrants and diasporic peoples for what it reveals about diasporic subjecthood and the interlaced situations of migrants and non-migrants alike.

Elise Hjalmarson
Department of Anthropology and Sociology
Geneva Graduate Institute
elise.hjalmarson@graduateinstitute.ch