This book highlights the border crossing experiences of Shahram Khosravi, as an undocumented border transgressor escaping war and the 1979 Islamic Revolution starting from his country of origin Iran, through the rugged mountains of Afghanistan to Pakistan, India and later making his way through Europe to Sweden, now his new country of citizenship. Khosravi, belongs to an affluent Iranian Bakhtiari family from Isfahan. To avoid a two-year compulsory military service in the army and embrace martyrdom, he decided to leave Iran for Europe in search of a better life. His parents financed his illegal travelling by sending him money for his survival and covering the cost/charges of his dal lals/brokers. Khosravi travels from one country to another crossing through the rugged regions, living in big cities and passing undetected through airport security where the immigration officers were already bribed by his brokers.

Khosravi, examines how, “Illegal’ border crossing challenges the sacramental aspect of the border rituals and symbols, as a criminal act deserving punishment” (3). He further states how an auto-ethnographic text, “allows migrants to contextualize their daily experiences of illegality through exploring abstract concepts of law translating them into daily cultural norms” (5). The book divided into nine sections comprises of an Introduction, seven chapters and a Coda followed by an Appendix which lists Khosravi’s Co-travelers, the illegal undocumented migrants and their desired destinations discussed throughout. The preface mentions two scenarios: first 1987 the beginning of Khosravi’s own ‘illegality’ stepping into the barren land and the rugged mountains on the Iran and Afghanistan border. He mentions how, “If I take a step forward, I will not be the same person, I will be an ‘illegal’ person and the world will never be the same again. That night I took a step and my odyssey of ‘illegality’ began”. And the second scenario is 2004, when a 50-year-old Iranian Transgender commits suicide in a Swedish detention center due to depression and lack of proper medical attention which caused her to overdose herself with pills.

As an undocumented illegal racialized migrant Khosravi encounters countless agents, Dal lals/brokers (listed in the Appendix) working for human smugglers or human transporters, as I read them, who share their border narratives about illegal border crossing techniques guiding their clients how to avoid arrests as border transgressors. During his illegal journeys, he makes a few acquaintances Pooya, Masoud and Khalil through his informants in various cities, while living in low cost hotels in Pakistan and India where he witnesses sexual vulnerabilities of illegal migrants often manipulated by their agents and negotiated masculinities within refugee camps and detention cells due to fear of deportability.

Reflecting upon his experiences as an undocumented person Khosravi discusses how, “separation from family is an extended consequence of migration which creates enormous distances between families over time. Illegal migration is a one-way road with no turning back once you step onto it” (22). He discusses how New Delhi became a huge market for purchasing European passports often sold by backpackers for a few hundred US dollars. He emphasizes upon the fact that; how a few extra hundred dollars could drastically change the destination for undocumented migrants from one continent to another. He recalls how, “USD 500 more took Masoud to Canada and him to Sweden. How USD 500 shaped our lives very differently” (57). Khosravi’s dal lals took care of his illegal travel costs and gave him a fake Greek passport to
travel to Europe on route to Sweden as a Greek tourist visiting India. Khosravi had embarked on this journey of ‘illegality’ from where there was no turning back for him.

In this book, Khosravi discusses intersections of race and gender negotiating masculinity creating a community of migrant illegality, border transgressors and homelessness due to the fear of deportability and displacement because of strict migration policies influenced by race. Khosravi, now an Associate Professor of Social Anthropology at Stockholm University, shares his own experience of being racially discriminated in Europe at Bristol airport, England for his Middle Eastern looks. Khosravi mentions, “how my Swedish citizenship disappeared at the racialized border due to my face. The border requires me to live up to my passport while others pass through” (97-98). He also shares stories of numerous undocumented migrants living in invisible passivity practicing self-surveillance due to fear of being deported. Khosravi, himself as an illegal migrant lived passively, an invisibly assimilated life of hospitality in Pakistan and in Afghanistan fearing incarceration and deportability.

In conclusion, Shahram Khosravi does a good job writing this compelling and a very informative book. I found this book significantly important around the discussions of border crossings and border transgressions. The author uses self-reflection of his own border crossing experiences as an ‘illegal traveler’. Khosravi’s discussion about border illegality is relevant and convincing given the fact that borders just as a piece of land for many can create an ‘illegal migrant’ if crossed without proper documentation. This book is also relevant since the author shares a detailed account of his ‘illegal border crossing’ experiences with the reader exposing them to the struggles and hardships of not only becoming an undocumented migrant but also to know how it feels to be one. Khosravi, also discusses the role of border guards at most border crossings questioning those who enter legally and dehumanizing the illegal border crossers forcing some to negotiate their masculinities to stay undetected. Overall, I enjoyed reading the book and felt every immigrant should read it to get a sense of the struggles when people decide to take a step forward to achieve and fulfil their dreams of a better life. Some do it strategically in a legal way but some take a step forward towards ‘illegality’ which changes their life forever. And this is a story of such a step taken forward which changed his ‘life forever’. 