

holy places of religious history. Saleh shows us through Ali's story how religious scholars were important in anticolonial politics, and that Hussein persecuted clerics and Shi'a. Ali uses reform Islam to critique rising sectarianism in the community and religious intolerance.

Another devout Shi'i who forms her political subjectivity through religion is Hadjar, who came to London from Iran, after her family was deported from Iraq to Iran and their belongings confiscated. Through Hadjar we learn about the deportation of merchants to Iran in 1980, following Iran's revolution. The Hussein regime painted those who identified as "Persian" under Ottoman rule as Iranians and a threat to the regime. These anxieties about "Persians" go back to British rule and the 1924 nationality law, which created second-class citizenship based on Ottoman categorizations. In Iran, denaturalized Iraqis faced state exclusions, economic hardship, and social stigma. Saleh explores through Hadjar's narrative how home is a shifting concept—Hadjar feels connected to but also set apart from the United Kingdom, Iraq, and Iran. She has a hybrid identity that is not fixed but rather continually in a process of becoming. Finally, Rasha's story introduces us to newly arrived immigrants and a shifting discourse within the Iraqi diaspora about authenticity. It is no longer the middle class who represents Iraqiness but those who endured poverty and suffering by staying in Iraq through Saddam's regime, especially women.

The life history method that Saleh employs could easily slip into presenting individual interlocutors as composites or "ideal types," but the author effectively does justice to each story's nuances and contradictions while also using the stories as springboards to discussing Iraqi history, politicization, and diasporic experiences in depth. *Return to Ruin* would be a welcome text for students to learn about Iraqi postcolonial history and the impacts of US imperialism at the undergraduate and graduate levels. These impacts have been so violent that many in diaspora now have nostalgia for the time of Saddam Hussein, while earlier many had supported US intervention because of how terrible Saddam's regime was. The hopes for return have died out among the diaspora. While many scholars of the Middle East know basic facts about Iraq, learning from Iraqis themselves is both illuminating and tragic. As an American, *Return to Ruin* was necessary reading, highlighting how my own imperial subjectivity is inextricably intertwined with theirs.

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Istanbul, City of the Fearless: Urban Activism, Coup D'état, and Memory in Turkey. Christopher Houston (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020). Pp. 242. \$34.95 paper. ISBN: 9780520343207

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Istanbul is a captivating city. Its picturesque landscape, limitless human activity, boisterous sounds, and layered architecture enfold people, and take them on unforgettable journeys. Christopher Houston's *Istanbul, City of the Fearless* explores how activists make, experience, and inhabit such a city, as they grapple with a volatile political climate and violent suppression of dissidents during the years leading up to and immediately following the 1980 coup d'état. Assembling vivid details and insights from extensive interviews with former urban activists, leftist revolutionaries, and right-wing nationalist militants into a complex narrative, Houston examines political and social life in Istanbul during one of the most turbulent periods in the history of modern Turkey. Intertwined in Houston's analysis are stories of people, who survived a great deal of cultural trauma and loss. Houston carefully navigates these experiences and provides a compelling analysis of the spatial politics of Istanbul in, what he calls, a social history of urban activism. *Istanbul, City of the Fearless* is not only an analysis of a historical moment or an event, but also a unique interpretation of the making of a city through conflict. It explores how urban activists make sense of the city, how they transform streets, neighborhoods, and factories; how they produce new places and

relate to each other; and how they perceive, experience, remember, and reinterpret events, places, sounds, objects, and other people. It is also an exploration of how Istanbul provides the stage for a dynamic political life; and, how many activists survived the violent junta regime.

I read Houston's aptly titled book as a scholar of contemporary urban social movements and space-making in Istanbul, and as the daughter of two former socialist activists, very similar to Houston's subjects. Houston paints a picture of a time period in Turkey that is both a source of trauma and displacement, and one that carries memories of deep connection to the city's landscape, its people, and their utopic visions of liberation. Throughout the book the details of the activists' relationship to space, as well as particular objects and sounds resonate in surprising ways for me as a person who experienced these memories via story-telling, and as a woman who made her own activist memories three decades later. While reading Houston's work, the ethnographic details he provides took me on a journey between my own experiences of the city and my memories of the fragmented stories told by my mom, dad, and their friends as they reminisced about the late 1970s and early 1980s with sorrow, anger, and joy. I have been a captive audience of their stories on how they hid or burned books, how their friends escaped into exile, the way they guarded leader figures in their groups that were targeted by the police and the nationalists, what they wore, what they read, and how they had learned that you could hear the screams coming out of buildings that were known torture sites. They told many stories that hold a myriad of emotions.

Indeed, like Houston demonstrates, places, objects, and songs, "hold memories" (p. 38). And these memories come alive with the sight of an object, a certain smell or, a song. Houston writes (p.39):

In body memory, the past is revived by its active entry into present actions. In just this way both urban violence and torture, too, are remembered by the body, in an ache, an itch, impairment, or trauma—an invasion of the body by its past that transacts memory, whether wanted or not.

I have vivid memories of my dad silently sobbing every time he heard Zülfü Livaneli's rendition of Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu's poem *Yigidim Aslanım*. While the poem was written about the revolutionary poet Nazım Hikmet, who died in 1963 and was buried in Moscow in exile, it became an elegy for all socialist martyrs—activists, journalists, and intellectuals alike—reflecting the deep grief people live with in the aftermath of such losses. The chapter "Activism, Perception, Memory" in particular is a salient example of how our memories and our perceptions penetrate our present experiences and practices.

In the same chapter, the story of the undercover police vehicle *gri-mavi van* (gray-blue Ford van) reminded me of the tale of another car, *beyaz toros* (white Renault toros) that similarly caused activists panic and fear. The *beyaz toros* is etched into the history of modern Turkey as a symbol of state-sanctioned abduction and assassination of largely Kurdish insurgents and leftist political figures. According to eyewitness accounts, throughout the 1990s, armed men in Renault-made toros model white sedans have stalked, harassed, and abducted political figures and activists, who were either never heard from again or found dead with signs of severe torture on their bodies. Internationally known as "enforced disappearance," this practice of violent suppression of dissident political subjects is often seen in countries that have a history of military rule, ethnic conflicts, and/or civil wars. Turkey has a long history of enforced disappearances, and the perpetrators have not been brought to justice. I have memories of my mom pointing out any *beyaz toros* we would run across while shopping for essentials. "There it is," she would say angrily, "There is the car that makes people disappear." A mundane object, an old, rusty, and what was once a middle-class utility vehicle now evokes sorrow and anger at the injustices endured by dissidents in the country. Thus, one of the most important contributions of Houston's *Istanbul, City of the Fearless* is to the emerging memory studies in Turkey—a nation with a long history of silencing and denial of its crimes against humanity. By documenting memories, perceptions, and practices of people who witnessed, experienced, and survived extraordinary violence, Houston helps expand the path of confronting past, as well as present, national traumas.

I want to briefly call attention to two additional contributions of this book. First, in the chapter titled "De-Ottomanization, Modernism, Migration: A Selective History of Istanbul, 1923–1974," Houston successfully traces the relationship between modernization, the political economy of urban redevelopment, and nationalism in the, at times violent, transformation of Istanbul's built environment,

demography, and social life during the first five decades of the republic. Without sacrificing complex details, Houston demonstrates how the intersections of Turkish nationalism, global economic movements, and the impetus for capitalist growth and expansion have produced the conditions of possibility for *gecekondu* (shanty towns), factory, and municipality to become political sites for urban activists.

The second is Houston's treatment of conflict and violence in this period. As Houston relates, the period just before and after the 1980 coup d'état is often reduced to violence. Houston moves beyond this narrative, and identifies the different forms of violence that has marked this period, and the complex meanings the political actors give to the violence they have expressed and experienced. He provides us ethnographic details of different forms of violence (such as punishment, revolutionary justice, dispossession, resistance, or heroism), and the complicated meanings activists assign to these different forms. Houston also corrects a faulty, yet persistent narrative that puts the blame of violence on activists and legitimizes the junta regime as the entity that restored social order. In contrast, Houston treats violence as multidimensional, and accurately describes the many destructive forms of violence the government and military deployed against political dissidents. This period haunts the lives of not only those who experienced it, but also the lives of their children who carry the weight of the generational trauma and wounds. As a scholar, and as a child born right at the end of the junta regime to parents who closely witnessed the cruelty of the regime, I appreciate Houston's careful and critical treatment of violence as an act and as a concept. Houston's analysis demonstrates, also, how significant a well-crafted ethnographic inquiry is to a holistic understanding of political life in periods of intense social and spatial struggle.

This book's weakness is not unique to Houston's work, but a common shortcoming of academic publishing. The narrative of *Istanbul, City of the Fearless* remains theory heavy and it relies on academic discourse and disciplinary jargon in a way that distances large segments of the public from its rich and very valuable discussion. I think Houston missed a unique opportunity here to connect to diverse groups of readers beyond academia, especially considering his collection of interesting and lively stories.

Overall, Houston's book provides significant and detailed insights into the unique political history of Istanbul, and an innovative approach to oral history and ethnography. Not only does it illuminate the complexity of experiences and the trauma of the late 1970s and early 1980s in Turkey, but also it gives clues as to how one might approach the social traumas of the contemporary moment. This book leads us on an intellectual path of thinking critically about memory, production of space, sensory relationships to urban environments, and violence. As an ethnographer of contemporary political life in Istanbul, and a person born and raised in Istanbul, living with immense love and longing for the city in the diaspora, I appreciate the new avenues of thinking *Istanbul, City of the Fearless* provides to the reader. *Istanbul, City of the Fearless* is a book that transcends disciplinary boundaries, and is useful as an exemplary framework to study political life and affect in contemporary Istanbul, as well as in other similarly complex geographies.

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Insurgent Aesthetics: Security and the Queer Life of the Forever War. Ronak K. Kapadia (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019) Pp. 352. \$28.95 paper. ISBN 9781478004011

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As the world currently witnesses a massive halt to *normalcy* due to two public health pandemics—COVID-19 and racism, we must not only survive but find ways to thrive under these precarious conditions. Ronak K. Kapadia's *Insurgent Aesthetics* offers another way of knowing and feeling the world beyond structural violence plagued by the emergence of global fascism, neoliberal regimes, carceral