Alice Bag’s memoir, *Violence Girl: East L.A. Rage to Hollywood Stage* (2011), is an enlightening piece that recounts the author’s life growing up as a Mexican American in East LA, to becoming one of the most innovative punk musicians during the 1970s. Alice’s biography is not only an entertaining and historical page turner, it is also a revelatory piece that sheds light on the often ignored influence that women and people of color had on punk music. One of the book’s many strengths lies in Alice’s effort to contest the conclusive notion that the innovators of punk were all white and male and that New York City and London were the only cities at the forefront of the movement. In fact, one of the main lessons that can be taken from Alice’s sincere and broad-minded autobiography is that life is full of dualities and is more multifaceted than society often acknowledges.

Alice Bag (Alicia Armendariz) was born in Los Angeles, California in 1958 to parents who had migrated to the United States from Mexico. The first part of *Violence Girl* consists of Alice’s experience growing up in a Spanish speaking household, her parent’s thriftiness due to their poverty, and the domestic violence that occurred between her father and mother. One of the central themes of *Violence Girl* is Alice’s family. Ironically, Alice was very close to her father: a man who physically and mentally abused Alice’s mother. As an adolescent Alice describes herself as a social outcast, fat, and nerdy and it isn’t until she discovers her love of rock music (primarily Elton John) that she begins to form her true identity. As Alice’s love of music grows, she meets other like-minded girls and they start an all-female band. The rest of the book is centered on Alice’s involvement with punk. In 1977 Alice and Patricia Morrison formed what would be Alice’s most well-known band: The Bags. As the punk scene reaches its height, Alice finds herself wrapped up in a fast paced lifestyle laden with...
alcohol and drugs. Ultimately, she searches for peace and reconciliation with her father and eventually discovers her love for teaching.

What is so compelling about Alice’s memoir is that it focuses on the influence that female musicians had on the punk scene in the 1970s. After attending a Patti Smith concert in 1976, Alice learns that what makes Smith’s performance so provocative is her “raw sexual androgyny” (136) and not a sweet voice and a conventional appearance. As the founder and lead singer of The Bags, Alice is also credited for being one of the first punk singers to adopt a hard core style of singing. As Alice explains, the group’s’ music was “loud, belligerent, and frenetic” (283). Alice’s uncharacteristically feminine approach to performance and feminist philosophy are what make Violence Girl such a powerful and liberating read.

Another positive aspect of the book is the effort that Alice makes to bring attention to the overlooked importance that non-Anglo culture had on the punk scene. As a child, Alice Bag grew up speaking only Spanish in her home and it wasn’t until she went to public school that she learned English. As a family pastime, the Armendariz family would go to the movie theater to see classic Mexican films. Actors and singers such as Pedro Infante and Lucha Villa influenced Alice’s music and she accredits her “emotive style of singing” (42) to them. Often the individuals that are most famous and acknowledged for being the founders of the evolution of punk are white men. However, Alice successfully shows in Violence Girl that it is also hispanic women that deserve to be recognized as the early founders of punk.

As much as Alice, her family, friends and fellow punks make up the long list of characters in Violence Girl, it is also the city of Los Angeles that is one of the principal characters in Alice’s memoir. Alice skillfully brings the reader into the Los Angeles punk scene by vividly describing places such as Hollywood, Whittier, the Canterbury apartments, and the Sunset Strip. Furthermore, just as Alice reveals the forgotten influence that women of color had on the punk movement, she also aims to inform the reader that LA was a burgeoning cultural Mecca in the 1970s despite its reputation as a superficial, celebrity playground.

There are life events and anecdotes in Violence Girl that are repetitive and make the memoir longer than it needs to be. However, criticizing Alice’s memoir for not always following standard writing techniques would
be like criticizing a punk song for not adhering to the traditional criterion of composing music. In fact, what is admirable about Alice’s autobiography is that it was written similarly to a punk song: straightforward, energetic, the chapters are short just like most punk songs, and Alice is not afraid to throw in her share of vulgarity.

Despite the many serious events that occurred in Alice’s life, she is a woman with a witty sense of humor and this is noted throughout Violence Girl. Her ability to address her disturbing past while simultaneously maintaining a steady sense of humor is courageous and uplifting. Violence Girl: East L.A. Rage to Hollywood Stage is a book that I highly recommend.

Aja Roberts
Tulane University

The Eighth Amendment to the US Constitution, passed in 1791, reads: “Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.” Yet, what can be lawfully considered as excessive or a cruel punishment has been a matter that still nowadays causes much debate. That the United States of America has the largest incarceration rate in the world, with most convicts being either African-Americans or Latinos, is another issue of debate. Traditional representations of justice depict it as a woman blindfolded, meaning justice’s equality to all persons and its blindness to prejudices. Reality, however, proves the judicial system to be not so egalitarian. The likelihood of being imprisoned in the US dramatically increases if one is Latin-American or African-American, with the result that Latinos today are “the fastest growing group in the U.S. prison system” (2). Latino prisoners in the US is the subject of Behind Bars, an edited collection which includes an introduction and eighteen chapters structured around four sections – the issues, the lived experience, the art of resistance and the way forward.

In the introduction, Oboler points out that prejudices against Latinos, reinforced by stereotypical and negative representations in the media, plus the “crimmigration” legislation that made illegal immigration a crime are responsible for this increase in the number of Latinos in prison. The different aspects of life in prison for this community are explored in the following chapters. The first part, “The Issues,” surveys the current situation at the same time that it traces its roots. José Luis Morín, in analyzing the present trends and challenges, finds that patterns of ghettoization, racial profiling by the police and the erroneous idea that Latinos are aliens (actually, 60% of them are American-born), and that the war on drugs has almost exclusively focused on minorities, have all contributed to the existing situation. Morín dates the perceived inferiority of Latinos back to the Mexican-American War (1848), further reinforced by the annexation of Puerto Rico. David Manuel Hernández exposes that Latino immigrant detention is far from being a new phenomenon, but rather a long-standing state of affairs, with examples to be found between the two World Wars.

M. Carmen Gomez-Galisteo
Alan Eladio Gómez’s chapter connects the Prison Rebellions (1969-1972) to inmates’ rights movements as well as international social movements, showing that, instead of being an isolated occurrence, they were part of a larger global panorama.

Just as the war on crime has hit Latinos the hardest, the strictness of juvenile justice policies has imprisoned hordes of African-American and Latino young people who committed crimes which were not violent or serious, contends Victor M. Rios. The effects of these policies on Latinas are the focus of Laurie Schaffner, who sees this population segment as manifold marginalized because of their young age, their gender and their belonging to a minority group. Beyond the individual cases, the effects of incarceration are far-reaching and transcend the inmate and his family, as felon disfranchisement negatively impacts the neighborhoods with high ex-inmate rates, Juan Cartagena explains. Because inmates lose the right to temporarily vote in 48 states (permanently, in 11 of them), their areas of residence’s voting census is negatively affected.

The second section explores their authors’ first-hand experiences in several capacities. Mercedes Victoria Castillo recounts how her writing signs warning of driver’s license checkpoints (used as a method to identify illegal aliens), while legal, almost led to her being arrested for inciting riots. Laura E. García’s role as an interpreter for the public defender’s office in Chicago makes her call for professional interpreters to replace the police staffers who often do the interpreting. Otherwise, the arrested might inadvertently give out information prejudicial to their case, relieved as they are of finally finding a Spanish speaker, forgetting that this speaker is actually a police officer or staffer. The necessity for the interpreter’s unbiased and impartial labor is particularly evident while reading Erik Camayd-Freixas’s testimony, where he shares his hard experiences interpreting during the ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) raid of Agriprocessors, Inc., in May 2008, the largest ICE raid ever. Other aspects of the Latino prison experience are covered by Dicxon Valderruten, whose chapter deals with the close relationship between HIV/AIDS and incarceration, while Marcia Esparza explains how she came to found Latinas United for Justice in 2004.

Art can emanate in the unlikeliest places, such as a prison, as the third section, “The Art of Resistance,” shows. Not only can artistic inspiration be found in prison, also redemption, as Víctor Alejandro Sorell...
claims. This section analyzes the work of artists/inmates Leonardo Peña, Óscar Lopez Rivera, Elizam Escobar, Carlos Alberto Torres, and Leonard Peltier. It includes poems by raúlrsalinas, as well as interview with him by Alan Eladio Gómez and another with Rafael Cancel Miranda (by Gabriel Torres-Rivera), a poem of his also being included.

Part 4, “The Way Forward,” looks into how to convey and improve the prisoners’ conditions. Juanita Díaz-Cotto tackles the ethical and methodological issues in collaborative research methods and B. V. Olguín calls attention to the devastating effects of the war on terror on Chicano prisoners, especially on those who convert to Islam.

All in all, the broad scope of this work allows the reader to gain a broad perspective on Latino incarceration in the US. From the first-hand experience of interpreters to the artistic outlet of inmates’ suffering, unearthing the roots of the problem while offering suggestions for the future, Behind Bars is a well-researched and thoroughly documented book, and indispensable for all of those interested in this topic. Prisoners, in the words of Carlos, imprisoned in New York, are afraid of vivir en el olvido (living but being forgotten); this book is testimony that they are not forgotten.

Michael Innis-Jimenez’s book Steel Barrio: The Great Mexican Migration to South Chicago, 1915-1940 is a thorough documentation of the secondary migration of Mexican communities to the industrial Midwest. The book fills in a discernable gap in Mexican and Chicano historiography that exists between the end of the Mexican Revolution and the beginning of the Bracero program in 1942. Compared to the volumes dedicated to Mexicans and Chicanos in the southwest, the secondary migration of Mexicans to the rust belt has been largely a footnote in immigration historiography. Data on housing and segregation for Chicano and Latino communities is thin, particularly for the time period in question. This is in part because neither federal agencies nor the census collected housing data on “hispanics” prior to 1970. Social scientists researching these issues are often forced to extrapolate from the more robust data from African American communities as a proxy because the two racialized groups often shared space within cities. This is what we see in Chicago.

But quantitative research by Nancy Denton and Douglas Massey show that the segregation of African Americans is more intense and consistent in most major cities than any other racialized group. However, much of their data on Chicano or Latino communities doesn’t go back nearly far enough to make any definitive claims. Now, in part to thanks to work like Jimenez’s, we understand that this gap dates back at least to the 1920s. Thus it confirms that standard understandings of institutional housing discrimination - racial steering, lending, realtors, covenants, zoning - do not always graft onto the experience of Mexican and Chicano communities. But we still lack sufficient qualitative details.

Jimenez breaks his text into three parts: recruitment, resettlement and solidification. His early sections lay out the reasons companies in Chicago sought workers specifically from Mexico and the intricate system they employed to accomplish it. Fact is, they were courted and most of the elaborate recruitment systems that Jimenez itemizes were smashing successes. Jimenez’s analysis silences any arguments that the rational and impersonal forces of supply and demand lured Mexican workers
to Chicago. Manufacturing companies were not passive or ambiguous about what they wanted. They bird-dogged people from all over North America because they wanted workers from outside the region to buffer their operations against union militancy. Mexicans resettling in the United States following the devastation of the revolution seemed ideal candidates. Companies like US Steel poached Mexican workers from the railroads, agricultural companies and even their local competitors. They hired from kin networks among migrants themselves, they invested in advertising campaigns throughout the southwest and used labor contractors to recruit workers still in Mexico.

Jimenez uses the remainder of his text to detail how Mexicans carved out a physical and political space amidst segregation. He hits the same note several times throughout that this is not a story of assimilation. Assimilation and similar enclave frameworks are canned ways of lumping all immigration experiences into the same modular narrative. That being, a new immigrant group encounters bigotry from previous groups. Said newcomers persevere until discrimination gives way to acceptance. Such unimaginative notions were not designed to capture the texture and syncretism of Chicago’s Mexican Southside. Nor can such contrivances explain the persistence of institutional discrimination. The level of detail Jimenez goes into to prove his point is exceptional. Mexican migrants created what he calls a third space. Borrowing the term from David Gutierrez, a professor of history at the University of California San Diego, the term describes a portmanteau of political and cultural defense strategies that Mexican and Chicano communities have used to build community in the United States. Southside was a dynamic, transnational community that had its own mutual aid associations, political advocacy networks, work organizations and churches that brought cohesion and political strength to a young community.

The idea that Mexicans had a politically active community in pre-depression Chicago invalidates many popular assumptions about the political activity of Mexican and Chicano communities. Chicanos and Latinos, for instance are supposedly the “sleeping giant” of electoral politics that could exert enormous influence if ever they were roused from their a-political slumber. They don’t vote. They’re hard to unionize and rarely agitate for change. None of these were ever true. For example, Jimenez dedicates an entire chapter to how they organized and fought
deportation during the Great Depression. Mexican south-siders went to
court, petitioned their consulate for legal assistance, they enlisted the aid
of settlement houses and wrote appeals to Spanish language media outlets.

The text’s triumphant tone however, at times belies the brutality
that is racialized segregation. Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, two
preeminent sociologists of segregation, prove that there is nothing subtle
or informal about racial segregation or its economic consequences. The
Mexican community in Southside may have thrived but scholars should not
minimize the long-term consequences of segregation. The premise of the
entire book is that Mexican newcomers were confined to the oldest, most
run-down parts of Chicago and that their segregation was motivated by
overt racial animus. But Jimenez did not detail the institutional mechanics
of segregation - the racial covenants, realtor steering, intimidation,
discriminatory lending, physical violence - and their relationships to the
community.

Isabel Wilkerson, as a point of comparison, took a different tack
in her analysis of the Great Migration. African American segregation was
formal and explicit. Their exclusion was written into housing covenants,
agents refused to show housing to her interviewees, banks wouldn’t lend to
them, landlords refused their applications and cities passed ordinances to
contain African American families. When formal institutions failed, white
communities sometimes resorted to violence. The most obvious evidence
of this was the Chicago race riot of 1919. Rioters ransacked and burned
the properties of landlords that rented to African Americans. They were
not exempt. The absence of any similar analysis in Jimenez’s text only
raises questions as to how Mexican migrants navigated these institutional
barriers.

The book overlooks its most important insight for the field: Mexicans
living in south side were not segregated to the same degree as African
Americans. This small detail has profound implications for historical
understandings of housing discrimination among different racialized
groups. Jimenez is uniquely positioned to delineate how the institutional
treatment of Mexicans differed from that of their peer migrant group
in African Americans, but he never develops it. Jimenez concedes that
many of the institutions that named African Americans did not explicitly
mandate the segregation of Mexicans to areas of Southside. Pooling data
from Jimenez and Wilkerson, institutions were explicit in regards African Americans but not quite to the same degree for Mexicans.

This is fascinating because it implies that Mexicans were segregated in a more informal manner than African American migrants. The existence of institutional unevenness, no matter how subtle, gives researchers an early data point confirming that the character of housing discrimination between these two groups, though similar, was never interchangeable. Unfortunately, asserting that their experiences were different doesn’t tell us much about how Mexicans were treated. The dearth of quantitative or qualitative detail about housing during this period is a major gap in Chicano historiography. Perhaps Jimenez will take up this issue in subsequent work.

Joshua Troncoso
San Jose State University
Book Reviews


“There was no one else. No one to weave bone to flesh to blood, breath to life to blood. No one who could see what I saw, the streams of currents of golden light arcing inside their flesh, their bone. No hands but mine that pull out the rewoven skeins of their fragile spirits. I gather their dry bones together, breathe the flesh back until everything is illuminated” (130).

Appearing in the titular story, “la huesera, or, flesh to bone,” these phrases tell of a mystical process of spinning tales, of an author who possesses the singular ability to speak the lives of others in her unique role of creating life from remains. In *flesh to bone*, ire’ne lara silva does exactly this as she conjures spirits, magic, and memories and molds them into the nine tales that makeup her stunning collection of short stories. A Chicana writer living in Austin, Texas, lara silva is a Cantomundo Inaugural Fellow, the 2014 Recipient of the Alfredo Cisneros del Moral Foundation Award, a Fiction Finalist for AROHO’s 2013 Gift of Freedom Award, the 2008 recipient of the Gloria Anzaldúa Milagro Award, and a Macondo Workshop member. Her first collection of short stories, *flesh to bone* (2013) received the 2013 Premio Aztlán and Second Place for the 2014 NACCS Tejas Foco Award in Fiction. Named the May 2014 Book of the Month for the National Latino Book Club/Las Comadres, it was also a finalist for ForeWard Review’s Book of the Year Award in Multicultural Fiction. This collection’s prose is as poetic as it is evocative, filling its pages with intensely emotional stories, striking a balance of beauty, monsters, and violence that captivates the reader in both terror and empathy.

silva’s writing is strikingly textured as she draws upon the senses, asking us to smell, touch, see, hear, and feel through the text as she evokes silence and sound, light and dark, desire and pain. Although written in English, a sprinkling of Spanish and Nahuatl words remind us of the multicultural past into which her work reaches. The first story in the collection, “hunger/hambre/mayantli” presents the arrival of Adrian in the lives of Luisa and her brother Luis. Adrian, though, is no regular stranger—he has died years before and returns as a ghost. Nor are Luisa and Luis ordinary siblings. Misunderstood by their mother and different from those
in the “normal” world, Luisa tastes words and lyrically threads sounds and languages together while Luis reads the world with his eyes, focused so intently on sight that he often finds himself deafened to sound. Playing with this, silva writes the body’s presence through the sensory: fingers covered in hot wax explore numbed touch, the tongue tastes slivers of glass, a dead boy’s words burn and wriggle underneath skin. All three characters find themselves with the help of each other as the body is felt and explored through the senses. Haunting and tender, this story’s characters explore how to feed hunger in many forms.

In addition to provoking our senses, silva’s words draw upon myths to awaken nightmarish creatures and magical encounters that instill both fear and healing. In “hiding place,” a child huddles in a closet, afraid of both her mother’s boyfriend and the cucuy, a sort of bogeyman-equivalent in Hispanic and Lusophone cultures, that lurk outside. The following tale writes the legend of the llorona as a grieving, misunderstood mother wandering through time. A young woman scorned by love and life realizes her true form through brujería as she transfigures into an owl in story “teocolotl.” silva writes bodies. Some fall apart into piles of flesh and blood while others glow with pale copper or turquoise light. Some bones are etched with the glyphs of life while others are remains of murders. And at the center of all of these stories are women. silva’s characters often hurt in their solitude, distanced from fathers or lovers and straining to reconcile relationships with mothers and themselves. In “duérmete” the main character “bear[s] weight against her bruises,” fighting to begin her life again after years of domestic abuse and rape (66). She finds some solace in the cleansing of an old woman’s bones, peace in the realization that scars can add to perfection. The woman in “desembocada/the mouth of the river” discovers spiritual healing in the blue light of the Virgen de Guadalupe, another at the roots of the huisache tree and, in one case, a woman eases her pain with a violent revenge.

Intense intimacy imbues each story as silva wounds us with the sorrows of her narrators. They lose the lives growing inside of them in waves of blood, a brother and his lover are victims of heartbreaking crimes of violence and hate, and families suffocate to death in train cars as they immigrate to the US, and a daughter struggles to care for a dying father she resents. At the end of “la huesera, or, flesh to bone” silva dedicates the text to “the women of Juarez, for women everywhere” (136). Maite narrates
her disappearance from the border city, her body torn apart and left in the
desert, her spirit healing herself and weaving countless others “like stars
tossed in the sky” back to their bodies, themselves. And thus, through
stories of rape, torture, domestic violence, and death, the frightfulness
of the supernatural creatures and ghosts highlight the altogether more
terrifying horrors of reality. In these stories, the scariest monsters are often
human.

In *bones to flesh*, ire’ne lara silva finds beauty in grief and breathes
life into the remains of destruction. She writes of the terrifying beasts,
supernatural and human, and of the terrors that grate us from within as
well as from without. These nine short stories connect through interwoven
themes of women and their families, absence, death, solitude, and loss.
Physical pain pulses through bodies as spirits wander, searching for
freedom hitherto unfound within the flesh. Many pages are painful, some
horribly gory, others oddly freeing, but all are captivatingly beautiful as
silva weaves bone and flesh with her words.

Lauren Reynolds
University of Virginia
The fifteen stories in this slender volume read like a somewhat disjointed novella. Little by little, in bits and pieces, we learn the story of the Rodríguez family, focusing on Daniel Rodríguez, a middle-aged, divorced college professor who is also the narrator of most of the stories. The book’s main theme is the very timely one of immigration and its consequences in the lives of immigrants.

The stories are framed by two episodes in which Daniel finds himself waiting to cross the border from Mexico to the US. In the first episode his father, “who left for the other side and never came back,” and who is now “a blurry memory of a figure saying good-bye from a doorway and driving away in his car,” (3) has just died. When the border guard asks Daniel what he is bringing from Mexico, he wants to reply, “Nothing more than my dead,” but instead simply replies “Nothing.” In the episode that concludes the book, the border guard asks him where he is going, and he replies, “¿A dónde voy? Home. A mi home,” but then goes on to say that at that precise moment, he doesn’t know where that is (120). The bilingual, Spanglish reply is symptomatic of the fact that he doesn’t really feel “at home” in either English or Spanish.

In fact Daniel’s life has been one of rootlessness. He is a wanderer, a vagabond, who is compelled to keep moving and feels most at home in airports. Born in a small, mostly Mexican-American farming community in Northern California, Daniel was first uprooted at the age of thirteen when his abusive alcoholic father abandoned the family and his younger sister was diagnosed with cancer. His mother was forced to send the other children to live with relatives for a couple of years. At that time “he tried to make himself hard, no longer wanted to feel, had to make himself numb to everything” (85). As a teenager, because he was very bright and a good student, the other kids “saw him as a nerd or a coconut [i.e., brown on the outside and white on the inside] who had rejected his own raza to be white” (99). Later, Daniel attends Dartmouth College, where he has little in common with either the upper-class Anglo students or the Hispanics from wealthy families. He experiences similar alienation in graduate school.
and in the academic community. Though he does not feel comfortable in white society and prefers to live in areas with a large Mexican-American population, he views his own community with a jaundiced eye. His opinion of the Hispanics he meets in Southern California is that “Self-hate leaked from their skin. They were the ones who came from money but denied it, as if being upper-class were a disease. They wanted to be farmworkers and claimed to be authentically attached to the land so they could say that they knew discrimination” (14-15). In fact “Hispanic” in this book is a code word for “affluent/assimilated.” However, his attitude toward “Chicanos” (social activists) is similarly ironic if somewhat less hostile. The book is full of examples of the cruelty with which Mexican Americans treat each other. For example, one character, María—who calls herself Betty—says that another, “Andrea, was nothing more than a chava who, since she couldn’t be white, opted to be an exotic Latina” and that “any interest that Andrea had in the plight of the poor was nothing more than show” (24-25). The narrator, however, informs us that in fact “Betty” herself came from privileged roots and would never know suffering.

Daniel’s marriage breaks up because his wife finds him distant, lacking emotions and empathy. He has a number of fleeting affairs with different women—some of them carried on simultaneously—but all eventually break up because of Daniel’s inability to commit. He understands that this is because he can’t bear to lose control and fears that a deeper, lasting relationship would lead inevitably to suffering.

So he just keeps moving, driven by “insatiable longings for elsewhere” (117). The penultimate chapter in this book, “Snapshots of People I’ve Known,” is a series of poignant, nostalgic sketches of people he has met in Turkey, San Francisco, Mexico City, Madrid, Amsterdam, Cholula, Iowa City, Pennsylvania, and Tijuana, among other places, “the people I’ve known and their forms of departure” (117).

Michael McGaha
Pomona College

The landscape is flat, sparsely populated, and about as awe-inspiring as a bale of hay. The few who still live here obstinately hold on to outdated values and traditions; they have lost touch with the progressive coastal areas of the US due to a stubborn conventionality, which, according to the stereotype, leads to an uneducated, unsophisticated perspective. Nothing really moves, change only comes gradually and so slowly that it is barely perceivable. These are some of the conventional notions about the American Middle West that Robert Wuthnow sets out to challenge in his book Remaking the Heartland: Middle America since the 1950s. Instead of a region in cultural deadlock, paralyzed by economic and ideological changes it could not keep up with, Wuthnow founds his study on the basic assumption that the heartland states have seen a “positive transformation” since the 1950s and views the region as a “vibrant contributor” to the US economy (ix).

The book is grounded in thorough archival research and the author has gathered a substantial amount of data that covers the entire 20th century and at times even goes back to the period of early settlement. The bare facts of numbers and statistics alternate with anecdotes taken from the same archives or from extended interviews conducted by the author himself. Each chapter begins with an exemplary excerpt from a Midwesterner’s life that illustrates the development the respective chapter sets out to discuss. Those anecdotal accounts of individual lives get a little out of hand at times and take up much more space than scholarly thoroughness requires. It is mostly in these passages that an overly positive and almost nostalgic picture of the region and its inhabitants shines through.

Wuthnow pragmatically avoids any larger discussion about the exact location of the Middle West and its borders. He briefly mentions different perceptions and opinions in the first chapter and then delimits his notion of America’s heartland states to Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, the Dakotas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. The history of the town of Smith Center in Kansas, from the first settlers through the beginning
of agriculture and the Great Depression until today, serves as an example of the development in the Middle West. In Wuthnow’s view, economic recovery from the Dust Bowl era in the 1940s and 50s, of which he paints a much less glamorous picture than the national media did at the time, set a new ground stone for the region’s economic and cultural significance for the rest of the country. Comparison with other towns and counties in the region contrasts the history of Smith Center and provides a more differentiated perspective. Particularly the connections between income inequality and migration illuminate how statistics often give a distorted, overly positive image of life in the Middle West during and after World War II.

Another point highlighted is the immense importance of widely accepted institutions and well-established institutional and social structures in those communities that managed to survive and sometimes even profit from demographic changes and the consequences of scientific progress. Due to economic depression, families had become considerably smaller and many had to relocate. During the 1940s it was more and more common to rent a farm instead of buying or inheriting it. Sidewalk farming, suitcase farming, and off-farm jobs to supplement the family income increased. At the same time, scientific and technological development, such as stronger tractors and more resistant crops, let farms grow in size, which often meant living even farther away from one’s nearest neighbor. Communities with stable institutions and long-grown social networks were much better equipped to adapt to the structural changes this brought. The Middle Westerners Wuthnow interviewed for his book emphasize the meaning of family and neighbors, of traditions and established structures. They take pride in their resourcefulness, their particular ironic take on life, and most of all in the land they inhabit. The relationship between the land and those who live on and from it plays a central role in Wuthnow’s observations. “Land can take on an almost mystical quality as part of a family’s identity,” as he points out (90). As opposed to ground, which is what is being farmed, land also refers to notions of home and of landscape. And yet, the negative stereotypes of a rural and rustic life persist, even though it seems less acceptable nowadays to express them in print publications. Quotations from internet forums prove this point.

Wuthnow mentions many of the infrastructural, economic, and socio-cultural changes that come with population decline, new forms of
agribusiness, and the shift from many distinct small towns towards a large mesh of outspread suburbs and satellite towns attached to the few large cities. However, one would have wished for a little more critical analysis that can bring to light how all the aspects mentioned in the seven chapters interlock. When the text mentions how institutions such as a teachers’ college or the vicinity of large industries can help small towns to withstand the economic threats of population decline, this provides an opportunity to draw some heretofore unobserved connections between the individual topics of the book’s chapters. The large quantity of data gathered for each of the chapters could easily substantiate a more holistic view. Unfortunately, the text rarely seizes this opportunity. The study would have profited from some additional theoretical insight. When it comes to the shifting relationship between rural and urban areas, particularly the socio-economic consequences of declining rural population and the growth of suburbs that depend in a different way on large cities, David Harvey’s theoretical groundwork seems imperative to consider. For the historical context of systemic and institutional developments, Norbert Elias’ theory of the civilizing process might have provided a better basis for critical analysis than some of the details of individual lives.

Wuthnow presents an impressive amount of data and has researched sources and archives that many others might have overlooked. His interviews provide a number of helpful insights into the very practical and palpable effects of the changes in the heartland states during the past decades. The initial assumption that the Middle West has seen an overall positive development since 1950, however, cannot be confirmed by the study. Most passages that attempt to prove such a positive development must be read as the interpretation of an author personally and somewhat sentimentally attached to this claim and to his topic. This is a highly informative volume about the recent history of the Middle West and the re-shaping of most of its institutions and businesses. Readers interested in a comprehensive overview of the recent socio-economic history of America’s heartland will find its wealth of data a valuable source of information.

Wibke Schniedermann
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Besides her natural beauties and touristic attractions, Turkey offers various enigmas to the curious observer. Turkey has often been ranked as the most anti-American country while youngsters have often expressed their determination to make their American dream come true, seeking ways to study and live in the States. As American targets have intermittently been attacked by fundamentalist terrorists in big cities of Turkey, the men and women on the street are enjoying their time in Starbucks before making their choices among Hollywood blockbusters. Anti-American legacy has a long and established history in Turkey but talking about the States assuming a sterile objectivity of a scientific mind still poses a challenge.

Türkkaya Ataöv’s Amerikan Başkanları – Amerikan Başkanlık Seçimlerinde Yaşanan Rezaletler (American Presidents - Infamous Presidential Elections in America) seems to be caught on the horns of a similar dilemma. Türkkläya Ataöv is a renowned professor of international relations who served in distinguished universities in and out of Turkey as well as being a columnist, a political activist, and ardent advocate of the official thesis of Turkey on Armenian genocide. He has had almost 50 years of published research on international relations and political history, including Amerika’da Hıristiyan Kökentendinciliği (Christian Fundamentalism in the United States), Amerika, Nato, ve Türkiye (The United States, NATO, and Turkey), Federasyon, Başkanlık, Yarı-Başkanlık (Federation, Presidential System, and Semi-Presidential System), Amerikan Emperyyalizmi Doğuşu ve Gelişimi (American Imperialism- Its Genesis and Progress) and many more. Therefore, Ataöv’s historical and political character makes it really hard to confine any discussion of the book to its mere content and context. The book itself stands out as a political manifesto of the author, a historical document of fraud and shame, and beyond that, “an epiphanic awakening” for the blindfolded crowds of Turkey. Ataöv clarifies his intention of enlightening the masses in the foreword, warning the readers that this book unveils “political games, monkey business of the political machinery, ruthless lies and dirty tricks in American politics” (9). Ataöv piles up a huge archive of written documents and testimonies on presidential elections and provides
a comprehensive bibliography for the researchers but also he, personally as a student and a researcher, testifies to the contemporary history of the presidential lineage and presents a (very) subjective account of his observations. While this duality in the personality of the author may as well be taken as an advantage considering a general audience of popular non-fiction, Ataöv’s story-telling voice often interrupts the authenticity and formality of the historical documents. Except a simply informative and brief introductory chapter, Ataöv pursues an informal authorial voice to unravel the secrets and scandals behind the presidential elections and presidential eras in 29 chapters, with a special emphasis on more contemporary examples – chapters on Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama take up the half of the book.

Ataöv does seem to follow a scientific method and rely on a vast bibliography to support his claims. He certainly provides in-text citations and footnotes throughout the text when he presents encyclopedic information about the presidents, but he deliberately fails to do so especially when he is supposed to explain how presidents of the United States were cooperating with mafia, having extramarital relations, or drowning in fraud and corruption, even while he quotes full statements and testimonies. Once dazzling readers with gossip and hearsay, Ataöv doesn’t hesitate to attach awkward parallels to Turkish politics for example the PKK guerillas and the Kurdish problem. His criticism of American presidents becomes most disturbing when he spices up his accounts of infamy with the tittle-tattle of homosexuals (56, 123), alcoholics (28, 64, 223), and rascals (79, 136, 157, 172, 178) in the Oval Office.

It takes away all the fun to read the book with a red pencil at one hand to correct that Elia Kazan was born in İstanbul, not in İzmir (130) and with a dictionary on the other to understand some coined words like baştanimaz, izdeş, ağarasi, işmerce, gizdüzen, günlük, and yumurta ofis most of which don’t exist in most Turkish dictionaries and the rest are misused.

Ataöv’s book is a good read for the general audience; they will probably be satisfied with the scandalous stories of American presidents and justify their conspiracy theories about the political machines in American elections. However, the book promises only a little to a conscientious researcher with its gossipy content and biased authorial comments. It is almost undeniable that American democracy is ill-structured and there is
much to be criticized in the characters and deeds of American politicians. Nevertheless, political opposition, once insufficiently and improperly done, is inclined to become farcical and unreliable, which eventually reinforces the imperialist ideology against which, I believe, Ataöv sincerely struggled all his life.

Works Cited


Murat Göç
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Kevin Sites, a wartime journalist, chronicled twenty civilian casualty stories in worldwide active war zones in his first book In the Hot Zone: One Man, One Year, Twenty Wars. His new book approaches wartime casualties in a different way: by interviewing veterans returned from war about their experiences. As should be expected, most of the stories are gruesome and horrifying. However, it is Sites’ hope that allowing the soldiers to unburden themselves of these stories may alleviate some of the post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms the individuals face, as well as allow the audience of his book to better understand what soldiers in combat undergo.

Why take on such a difficult topic? Many soldiers, returned from their war zone, resort to “the numbing devices of alcohol, drugs, violence and empty sex” (xxii) rather than working through traumatic experiences through grief and mourning processes. By not addressing actions taken in the war zone, or perhaps by denying them altogether, Sites worries about the “crippling social and economic consequences for the United States, including substance abuse, domestic violence, crime and the staggering medical and mental health care costs of providing for those veterans after their return and into old age” (xxii). Further, there seems to be a presumption that many or most veterans suffer from psychological ailments, when some soldiers and veterans may simply accept the realities and harshness of war better than others. Sites ultimately believes the self-induced denial that soldiers feel is indicative of a larger, societal eschewal of the effects of war: “A society ‘protected’ from the reality of war can rewrite the narrative, shaping and forming it into something less terrible and costly by emphasizing only the heroism and triumphs rather than the dark, ugly deeds that occur with much greater frequency than we care to imagine or discuss” (xxxii). The purpose, then, of Sites’ book appears to be as much a confessional as an indictment of society’s complacency with what war entails.

The book’s structure is divided into five thematic parts (“The Killing Business: What’s It Like to Kill in War?”; “Things That Stain the Soul: What Can Never Be Forgotten”) with two chapters within each section.
representing a particular soldier’s story, including a brief overview of the soldier before entering the Armed Services and his reasons for enlisting. The author gives details, often quoting from lengthy interviews conducted in person with the participant, about wartime experiences, then details how the individual responded to those events upon returning home. The contributors are almost wholly American infantrymen (one wonders why an author who spent so much time covering worldwide conflicts could only find one foreign soldier to contribute to his book) and most fought in the Middle Eastern wars of the early 1990s and 2000s. The complete absence of any female soldiers, whose experiences and coping mechanisms may be quite different from their male counterparts, seems a particularly glaring omission.

Another weakness, perhaps more obvious, are the very subjects Sites uses to compose the narrative of his book. Some instances described are verified with documents from the US Military and news reports, but early in the book, Sites indicates that his research subjects, even his status as a journalist (“just a few rungs above pond scum in the military hierarchy” (xxvi)), could significantly handicap his project. He admits that his participants, “will remember imperfectly, with omissions and additions and perhaps lost players and parts” (xxxiii). This, compounded by the fact that the stories, by their very nature, are difficult to tell, means that the reader must approach much of the material with a degree of skepticism.

Despite these drawbacks, Sites manages to procure compelling and varied wartime experiences and home front reactions from his participants. As expected, many turned to destructive vices upon their return home. Many suffer from PTSD, or other psychological disorders. However, some stories are particularly redemptive, such as First Lieutenant Thomas Saal’s story from the Vietnam War (“Hung on a Cross”). After witnessing appalling acts by his countrymen, Saal returned to the United States. His status as a celebrated high school English teacher and married father to four daughters masked decades of substance abuse. News reports from the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts started to appear in the mid-2000s, and triggered remembrances of Saal’s time in combat. He suffered a nervous breakdown, and admitted himself to a psychiatric ward. Upon his discharge, he began working with volunteer organizations that help Vietnam War veterans, including a homeless shelter for war veterans and Warriors’ Journey Home, which “involves bringing Vietnam veterans back
to Vietnam to confront the war” (180). He now writes poetry as a means to cope with old memories. Instances such as these are when Sites’ book is at its strongest: demonstrating that positive coping mechanisms yield healthier war survivors, and, by extension, more productive members of society.

Where the book falters is in its indictment of the public’s complicity to do more to help returning veterans. Veteran healthcare reform, especially in mental health services, would seem to be an obvious fix for many of these men. However, Sites only mentions that problem cursorily in different chapters, and never directly addresses a remedy to these systemic problems. He does, however, plead with his readership to “implore and help” veterans, “not simply for their service, but for their willingness to help us understand [their experiences] just a little bit better” (278-9). While this is an admirable, perhaps even necessary, sentiment, this reviewer is left with a feeling of consternation as to how to open up such a dialogue. While this book successfully illustrates soldiers’ trauma, it falls to the reader to imagine how one might practically enact the social change for which Sites so eloquently advocates.

**Works Cited**


Sarah Lubelski
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Ethnographic studies can sometimes contain either controversial approaches or be somewhat dry. The reasons for these approaches or linguistic distance can be author bias, or political, ethnic, and sociological stances in the groups being studied, or in society. Harel Shapira, on the other hand, takes a decisively apolitical but personal approach with his ethnographic analysis of a hyper-political group and topic — that of the Minutemen, an organization and grassroots movement of the post-9/11 period in the United States. Shapira accomplishes his objective stance on such a subjective ethnography by focusing on some of the individuals of the group rather than trying to generalize about the group’s politics. In the introduction of the book, Shapira states that in order to answer the questions about who the Minutemen are, and what they stand for, “instead of focusing on the Minutemen’s beliefs and attitudes — their ideology in the broad sense — we need to focus on practices” (3). This theme is repeated many times throughout the book, and Shapira keeps his writing focused on the practices of several members of the Minutemen, and their motives, in addition to their activities.

The Minutemen were a hot news topic over several years in the mid-2000s, when America was trying to recover from a collective societal trauma produced by the 9/11 New York disaster, and several related news scares that followed, such as anthrax and home protection; then the Iraq war soon began. The news headlines at the time regarding the Minutemen told about a popular vigilante movement whose purpose was to help an undermanned Border Patrol keep dangerous or unwanted aliens from crossing the southern United States border. As mentioned in the book, President George W. Bush once gave tacit approval for the Minutemen and their activities.

Shapira instead emphasizes the individual natures of the persons involved in the Minutemen, and demographics of the group, and its practices — rather than the cause they are promoting, and the border crossings they were supposedly trying to prevent. Throughout the book, Shapira downplays the politics and the superficial appearances of vigilantism or conservatism. The group demographics are also of key importance in this
study. The vast majority of Minutemen were older males, and ex-military. This is significant, because the Minutemen were more focused on lifestyle than with substance or politics. To them, their lives were nearly over, with their best years, and best skills used in the past during their military service. The group was organized and ran patrols like military, giving the members a feeling of usefulness and importance. The military was the life they missed, but they were not allowed to re-enter the military to fight in Iraq, because of their ages. Shapira makes the point that although the stated goal was to keep out illegal aliens, the real intrinsic purpose was to enable these individuals to live a military-style life, and to assert their idea of protecting an America that was at risk of being lost: traditional, conservative, and isolationist — the Jeffersonian democracy and libertarian way of life. The lifestyle also includes the carrying of guns, but they are probably never used except for target practice only mentioned once in the book. Most of the men wear guns on patrols.

Shapira repeats the theme of practices being more important than politics many times through the book. Such repetition might become tedious if not supported with varying and distinct authoritative evidence. Shapira indeed provides both detailed minutia of his own observations, and citations of well-known scholars of sociology — all of which provide solid support about why the Minutemen were not merely conservative vigilantes, but people with a dream to improve themselves and the country they love, even if they do this with misguided and inappropriate methods.

Shapira was fortunate to have a family characteristic that may have opened up some of the Minutemen volunteers to his ethnographic research: his father was a military officer in the Israeli army. In his initial interviews, Shapira provided full disclosure that he was writing a PhD dissertation for a Sociology study. His first day at the Minutemen camp, he was practically kicked out, because he was perceived as a liberal student. Then the next time he came back, he wore his dad’s army jacket, which blended in with the typical army fatigues that most of the Minutemen volunteers wore at the camp. When asked by his first interview that day if the jacket was his, he said truthfully that the jacket was his father’s, given to him, and that he had gone on patrol once with his father in Israel. After this, Shapira was warmly welcomed as a friendly interviewer by several of the Minutemen he interviewed. Even though not an insider, over the months and years, author seems to take on sympathetic attitudes towards the Minutemen.
The reader might sense a certain amount of pretending on his part, or becoming more like the informants in his study, but Shapira seems to handle this with high integrity. Although he writes sympathetically about the friends he made, he always reverts back to a more objective and clinical view in all of his chapter conclusions. He always asks permission to interview, and keeps his main contacts informed of his other activities when appropriate. Near the end of the book, Shapira decides to meet and spend time with the Samaritans, an opposing group to the Minutemen. The Samaritans main goal is to offer food and water to immigrants crossing the border. Shapira asked the camp leader of the Minutemen if he would mind if Shapira interviewed the Samaritans, and the answer was affirmative. There are a few instances, however, when the writing comes close to ridiculing some of the group or individual practices, because of the outrageousness of what is happening. Two examples come to mind; one is when a Minuteman who was not a veteran and had no experience with guns ends up buying and carrying many guns in his vehicle when on patrol. For the most part the book is fair and objective, with a few exceptions such as these.

The temptation to sensationalize extremist movements, such as the Minutemen is certainly evident in the popular press by the large number of such sensational books published every year, even from purported scholars. However, Shapira resists this urge, and keeps his study honest, ethical, and even somewhat clinical — as is appropriate for any good sociological ethnography. At the same time, he gets his hands dirty, and becomes like an insider, living with the Minutemen for many months over a period of years. The result is not only an absorbing ethnography, but an incredibly entertaining good read with a nice spot of humor throughout, offset by a high dose of sincerity. Shapira’s balanced approach is quite rare, because he spends much time revealing close details of a conservative movement that was a precursor to the Tea Party; and he accomplishes this by writing with a level of empathy, balanced with professionalism that is refreshingly rare in today’s political climate. Waiting for Jose would be a very suitable supplemental textbook for any Sociology or Political Science course dealing with issues of immigration on the United States southern border.

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That Robert Creeley was one of the most important and influential American poets of the twentieth century is magnificently confirmed by this handsome selection of his letters. The book spans sixty years of correspondence and delivers an enriched sense of how friends, family and (some) literary feuds profoundly shaped Creeley’s life, work and poetic imagination. The fact of this book, its bulk – despite its being only a selection of Creeley’s letters – shows clearly, and with new care and detail, the importance of the act of writing for Creeley. As much as in his famously anxious and hesitant poetry, these letters catch him in the act of thinking through what is this world we inhabit, how does our attention to it shape our sense of being. At the end of a late poem, “Goodbye” (Life & Death, 1998), he writes: “I want no sentimentality. / I want no more than home.” After reading these letters we get even closer to Creeley’s clear-eyed avoidance of sentimentality and his restless desire to find somewhere he could call home.

His “persistent restlessness,” as he calls it in a letter to Louis Zukofsky (29 Dec. 1964; 286), is the recurrent theme of these letters. This is evidenced not simply in the startling number of different homes from which Creeley sent these letters, but also in the fascinating (and rapid) switches between registers and concerns in the letters. An early letter (15 Apr. 1950; 27-8) to William Carlos Williams epitomises Creeley’s quick-fire style of restless correspondence. It switches from discussion of reading W. B. Yeats, to Ezra Pound and the issue of “false history”, from the “nature of reality” and what constitutes “the REAL American culture”, to struggles – as editor – with recalcitrant contributors to the journal he was then putting together, and it starts by examining his loneliness working as a chicken farmer in New Hampshire by noting that “I couldn’t live here if my own language wasn’t whole.” Creeley’s concern, as these letters make clear, is with an immediate and extensive experiencing of the world he inhabits.

This lends this book – because it spans the whole of Creeley’s career – a strong feeling of a life lived both fully and assiduously. There is also, because of this, a powerful sense of Creeley’s practical and pragmatic (that
is, unsentimental) attention to things in the world (whether books and ideas, say, or chickens and household exigencies). But such attention shimmers with emotional and symbolic significance, marking Creeley’s thinking about the world as vital and important, asking us to look at it with a renewed clarity of detail and feeling for what really matters. We encounter, thus, a request to his mother (15 May 1945; 8) to send a new glass eye to him in Burma (where has was stationed on Army service), having “cracked […] quite mysteriously” the one “which I got in Calcutta.” Or, in late 1961, we feel the bitter reality of the accidental death of his step-daughter, Leslie, bite so hard that in letters to various friends (Charles Olson, Jack Kerouac, Denise Levertov, William Carlos Williams, Ed and Helene Dorn) it is almost inexpressible. Having briefly sketched out details of the “impossibly tragic thing which happened” (251) to the Dorns, he writes: “So that says it, please.” The powerful wrench of his tragedy is felt precisely in that “please”; however painful the occasion, sentimentality will not help. These two examples – the oddly surreal, the tragic – show how this book works not just as a profound record of a poet’s singular vision but also how it tells a larger story of the concerns that have animated twentieth-century thinking.

All of this, then, is to affirm that the editors have managed, with grace and finesse, to carry out the three aims for this book that they set out in its introduction. First, they tell Creeley’s “story”; next they “track his thinking” over six decades, and finally, they tell a “larger story” (xxvii) of twentieth, and twenty-first, century America. There are omissions, and a sense (because we see only Creeley’s letters, not those of his correspondents) that we are seeing only one side of the story. This is especially the case with Creeley’s various disputes with editors and critics, or with Kenneth Rexroth over the affair he had with Rexroth’s wife. But, there are new things revealed throughout this book – previously unpublished letters to Olson; ones that give far more detail of his friendships with Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Ed Dorn, with Louis Zukofsky and – wonderfully – his friendship with Denise Levertov, where both act, in turns, as each other’s poetic mentor and pupil; and overall, there is a gradually unfolding trajectory of a literary life moving from unsettled restlessness to one – finally – grounded in home and delight in his young family. Given the fact that the Creeley-Olson correspondence from 1950-52 runs to ten hefty volumes, it is hardly surprising that this Selected Letters is – despite its bulk – partial. What
is remarkable, though, is the monumental achievement of the editors in selecting material that brings the whole of Creeley’s work and concerns so vividly alive. Here (unlike Ekbert Faas’ biography of Creeley, which is partial in another sense) Creeley’s voice is clear and tells a fascinating story, one central to American poetry since 1945.

Creeley’s wanting for “no more than home” comes to be acted out across the span of this volume, through its attention to the everyday specifics of his life as he lived it. In the final letter (actually, email) of this book – to Michael Kelleher, written just three weeks before he died – Creeley details driving to the Mexican border (“the Rio Grande”) and delighting in the “glorious physical scene” (423). He ends by exclaiming “—would that the world were all so specific.” Documenting the man and the careful specifics of his poetic attention, this *Selected Letters* is an essential companion for anyone reading Creeley.

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Frankel’s *Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity and Resistance* deals with issues surrounding gender and sexuality that are being discussed by fans of the show on various fan forums. The show itself has been on air (on HBO) since 2011 and has enjoyed immense popularity both in the U.S. and abroad since its launch. Based on George R. R. Martin’s fantasy book series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the show has also been criticized for its gratuitous display of explicit sexuality and violence, as well as its portrayal of nudity – nearly always female. At the same time, the show has also been paradoxically praised for its feminism and its representation of powerful women – women who either contend for reigning power themselves (Daenerys), those who manipulate the holders of power (Cersei), or those who carve a niche for themselves to loyally fight in the midst of patriarchy controlled warfare (Brienne, and to some extent Arya). There are on the other hand women characters who primarily identify themselves through their spouses or children (such as Catelyn), those whose femininity is shown as weakness (like Sansa), and numerous prostitutes that are fetishized (Shae). The book speculates on each character’s position and tries to pinpoint the weaknesses of seemingly “strong” characters, as well as the strengths of seemingly “weak” characters.

Valerie Estelle Frankel has already written several books on the series [*Winning the Game of Thrones: The Host of Characters and their Agendas* (2013), *Winter is Coming: Symbols and Hidden Meanings in Game of Thrones* (2013), and *Symbols in Game of Thrones: The Deeper Meanings of Animals, Colors, Seasons, Food, and Much More* (2014)] as well as on other popular series and films. While obviously in high command of her subject matter, it is also obvious that she expects the same from her reader. The main difficulty in reading this book is its careless and swift meandering between the novels and the TV series, which is hard to follow. With every character discussed, the writer also compares the representation in Martin’s books with that of the show, creating frequent tangents that mostly confuse the reader. While the book displays one of the actors on the show on the cover, it is never certain whether any chosen topic will be discussed as
relating to the show or Martin’s book series. Likewise, some characters from the novels that were not visualized on the show are discussed as well as characters invented solely for the commercial concerns of the show.

Another element that I found confusing was the need to ground claims in historical fact. Although Martin is said to have been inspired by certain events in British history (mainly the Wars of the Roses) in creating the fantastical world of *Game of Thrones*, it seems to be rather far-fetched to try to point out parallels where they simply do not exist. While historical ties are intriguing at times, claiming that a character performs an action because that’s how it would be done “in medieval times” is anachronistic at best. At times, *Women in Game of Thrones* seems to take it upon itself to “prove” that the series parallels medieval history through claims such as: “By today’s standards the marriage [between Daenerys and Drogo] is shocking but in medieval Europe where Martin’s series is based, this was far less so” (148). As previously stated, much of this information does serve as fascinating anecdotal information, yet adds another dimension to the already confusing novels-TV show-history triangle that the writer tries to cover.

That being said, the discussion revolving around the use of Jung’s archetypes and tropes in the series is both thought-provoking and refreshing. Frankel links the characters both in the books and on the show by identifying the anima/animus aspects of the warrior woman, the bodyguard, the pirate, the career woman, the widow, the femme fatale, the crone, the maiden, the trickster, and so on. While the interest in including every single character is a little overwhelming, the analysis is certainly thorough and worthwhile. The feminist concern in establishing the strengths and weaknesses of the woman characters in *Game of Thrones* does not waver throughout the book and, although many likable characters who seem taboo-breaking at first glance are heavily deconstructed (by the end of the book Daenerys remains the only positive role model), the book is persistent in establishing a firm grounding in its definition of a strong woman. The book would be best for readers who are acquainted with Martin’s books, and who also follow the series.

Berkem Gürenci Sağlam
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This book comprises a series of case-studies focusing on Turkey’s potential for entry into the European Union in different areas. It begins with a theoretical piece looking at the ways in which the concept of “Europeanization” is viewed in other countries, arguing at the same time that Turkey adopts a completely different model, based on a “bottom-up” approach inspired by the AKP (Justice and Development Party). But has this approach actually altered existing beliefs in Turkish identity? Çiğdem Nas’ piece argues that it has, although she tends to look at the concept in general terms. She believes that the entire process of applying for membership of the European Union has “Europeanized” Turkish identity; this might be true, for example, of those involved in the process of applying for membership, but can hardly be said to apply to people living in the East of the country. Nonetheless it is certainly true that the process of applying for membership has led to constitutional changes – in one piece Beril Emrah Öder argues that certain anti-democratic laws have been removed. Whether this has led to significant changes in the day-to-day business of government is another matter: in June 2013 the government’s response to the disturbances in Gezi Park suggest that the anti-democratic mentality is still paramount in many politicians’ minds, allied to a reluctance to countenance alternative viewpoints. This knowledge significantly affects the way in which we might perceive Selcan Öner’s piece on the European Union’s impact on Turkish civil society. Whereas the idea of Europe might have instigated a new belief in the importance of “social learning,” we doubt whether that same idea has had too much impact on society as a whole.

The same also goes for the granting of minority and women’s rights. Sevgi Uçan Çubukçu argues that democratizing legislative reforms adopted by the AKP, as a way of strengthening the country’s application for membership led to a significant expansion in women’s rights. NGOs also benefited from the new reforms, using them to expand their ideological agendas. This might be true, but we still have to bear in mind the pronouncement of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that all families should have a certain number of children in order to ensure the future health of society. Behind this
pronouncement lurks a very traditionalist belief in gender roles, in which women are expected to assume responsibility for the home.

In foreign policy we observe a similar contradiction. Özlem Terzi argues that since 2007 the government has shifted significantly away from Europe in terms of its foreign policy. Partly this is due to economic circumstances – with Turkey finding new trading partners in the Middle East and Asia – and partly due to political concerns, especially with the European Union remaining so indifferent to Turkey’s membership application. While Terzi argues that foreign policy has been “Europeanized” in general terms since 2002, there remains a mutual suspicion between Turkey and the European Union about one another’s motives. This was once again brought into sharp focus as a result of the Gezi Park disturbances, when much of the trouble was blamed by the government on the malign influence of foreign “infiltrators” from Europe. This suspicion has also had a significant effect on Turkey’s migration policies. Catherine Macmillan shows that Turkey has been very slow in embracing notions of freedom of movement, especially when compared with their Central European neighbors.

Since this volume appeared in 2012, numerous events have had a profound effect on Turkey’s application to the European Union. Although the editors argue that this process began as long ago as 2006, incidents like the Gezi Park affair have shown that divisions between Turkey and Europe remain as deep as ever. On the other hand, Europeanization continues to influence the Turkish political system, as well as civil society – at least in the west of the country. This is an interesting paradox, suggesting, perhaps, that governments in Turkey are in a sense out-of-touch with the daily realities of social and political life. Perhaps the book might have benefited from a more nuanced definition of what “Europeanization” actually signifies; and whether it represents different things to different subject groups. Maybe the entire concept is too essentialist: perhaps we need to look at the ways in which it is reconstructed in different socio-economic contexts. Nonetheless the book offers a series of frameworks of how the idea of “Europeanization” has been interpreted in different policy areas; this might provide the basis for more nuanced interpretations in the future.
**Book Reviews**


This volume, edited by İpek Eren Vural, has the objective of evaluating the impact of European integration on social policy development since the launch of the Lisbon Strategy. The Lisbon Strategy or Lisbon Process was a development plan devised in 2000 to make the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy, in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs, higher rates of employment for men and women, adequate pension schemes and greater social cohesion by 2010. At the end of the 10 year period, however, the general consensus was that strategy progress had been uneven and disappointing. One of the main reasons for this was the global economic crisis of 2007–2009.

The book, which is the product of four years of collaboration, contains five main parts. The first offers a comprehensive assessment of European integration and the impact of policy coordination among member states through the Lisbon Strategy. The next three parts offer assessments of the Strategy’s impact on the national social policies of senior member states, new member states in Central and Eastern Europe, and one candidate country, Turkey. The last part compares the findings of the contributors and assesses the impact of the 2007–2009 economic crisis on the prospects for EU social policy integration.

Among the issues and policies explored in this volume are: employment, poverty, flexicurity (i.e., the combination of labor market flexibility in a dynamic economy and worker security), pensions, the welfare state, and gender equality. Drawing primarily on time-series data provided by Eurostat, the contributors generally find that while there has been some policy convergence in Europe, it varies by convergence type, time period, and the specific policy area.

Contributor Julia S. O’Connor, of the University of Ulster, describes four strategies for conceptualizing convergence: 1) ‘growing together’ (i.e., states becoming more similar to each other), 2) catching-up by some countries with smaller, weaker economies, 3) ranking change convergence,
and 4) minimizing distance from an exemplary model. The book generally focuses on the first two. Part three looks at how the economic stratification of post-Communist EU member states has shaped social policy. Of these countries, chapters three (O’Connor) and four (Otto Holman) address the issue of catch-up convergence with respect to the integration of Ireland, Greece, Spain, and Portugal. The authors of chapters five (Karl Hinrichs) and seven (Jan Drahokoupil and Martin Myant) examine the issue of pensions, their relation to other social expenditures, and the roles national politics and history play in mediating international pressures for pension convergence.

Chapter six (Marcel Fink) focuses on flexicurity and questions the extent to which Denmark should be seen as the prototype of the flexicurity model promoted by the EU. Denmark’s social democratic Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen had coined the term ‘flexicurity’ in the 1990s. In chapter eight, Noemi Lendvai speculates that the economic crisis and the socio-economic shock it caused may be more significant than EU governance in forging EU convergence. Asuman Göksel (chapter 9) examines gender equality and inequality in employment in Turkey. She notes that although equality between men and women is written into the Turkish constitution and equal pay rights exist in Turkish Labor Law, achieving gender equality as envisioned by the Lisbon Strategy has been a challenge. For example, the Turkish parliament failed to pass a bill on parental leave right that would have brought Turkey more in line with EU policy. In chapter ten, Galip L. Yalman offers a critical assessment of poverty alleviation strategies as they relate to Turkey. He notes that market reforms without redistribution have not alleviated poverty in that candidate country.

All of the chapters were competently written. Each offers rich data. Persons interested in the EU, policy realization, and the relationships among EU enlargement, convergence, and global economic pressures will find this book a valuable resource.

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Book Reviews


The issues of confrontation and commitment of Turkey to the west has been controversial since Ottoman Empire. However, with the abolition of the caliphate and sultanate, and proclamation of the new way of governance; republic, Turkey felt the need of taking a side in one of the most chaotic battlefield for both itself and for European countries. Through the book, Ekavi Athanassopoulou’s chronological way of Turkey’s concern about its security diverts the reader from looking at the issue from one perspective to see both European and later on American perspectives. Another significance of this book stems from the fact that Athanassopoulou’s interviews with active participants in Turkey’s process of becoming the member of NATO gives the reader so many interesting points to be covered later on the book. Though Turkey had seen itself as a keystones of confrontation during the Cold War and commitment for western world had its most fruitful days in Turkey, for western world, Turkey was just a security corner in the Eastern Europe.

In the literature of American and Turkish History, there are countless studies concerning the American (forming a side itself) or Turkish standpoints during Cold War years. However, as Athanassopoulou fills, there is hardly any study dealing with the upcoming stages for Turkey. Keeping in mind what Stalin said in 1945 about taking control of Black Sea and straits turning Turkey into an easy toy, Turkey had not wait too much to ask for the support from western countries and finally but indirectly from America. This relation has mainly provided by British encounters as it was clear that they could not carry the burden of supporting Turkey against Soviet Union. At this point, it can well be said that the reason why British and Americans supported Turkey is just related to world’s prospective balance. As a developing power, Soviet Union’s possible annexation of Turkey would lead bigger problems for both British and Americans. In 1947, with the Truman Doctrine, Americans clearly showed that they could handle the economic cost of this support towards Turkey and Greece. Despite of the support given, Americans were reluctant to give Turkey – as it is on the borderline with Middle East - some specific
guarantee of security against Soviet Union. This reluctance had its time till the outbreak of Korean War in which the US needed a lot of foreign military support which was mainly provided by Turkey and Greece. That support enabled Turkey and Greece to be accepted to NATO. In a sense, it was a collective agreement by two sides: Turkey was going to send the military support if the US, the dominant decision-maker in NATO, accepted them into the organization.

The other main point that the author has made throughout the book concerns that even though Turkey was a small state of power in an era of great-power confrontations, it gradually became a state which could get a full membership of NATO organization without any concessions in terms of the problems around Middle East. With the full membership of NATO in addition to economical support with the Truman Doctrine and an improved security agreement, Turkey finally realized its long-reaching mission of getting of recognition by western communities which dates back to mid-nineteenth century. This had to do with the attempts of Kemal Atatürk who tried to westernize the whole country in a short time. Though getting a full membership of NATO seems fair enough for Turkey, it still pursues full membership for European Union, as well in which the European countries question how western Turkey is just as it was questioned in the process of Turkey’s getting a full membership of NATO. This shows that the relationship of Turkey and western countries is as important as it was during the Cold War years.

Kemal Gider
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Served in bustling cafes throughout Turkey and its global diaspora, Turkish coffee with its powerful aroma and unique roasting and preparation techniques, evokes a rich sense of history, tradition and cultural identity. Despite being a small proportion of today’s multi-billion dollar industry, it is integral to our understanding of the origins and global dominance of one of the world’s most popular beverages. This book aims to demonstrate the important historical and cultural links between international coffee consumption (particularly in Europe) and Turkish coffee culture developed during the Ottoman Empire. In a rather bold statement the authors suggest that “the turning point of Turkish expansion in Europe simultaneously marks the beginning of coffee’s conquest […] and is possibly the foremost contribution of Turkish to European culture” (37). The authors reinforce their argument through a unique blend of traveler accounts, memoirs, folklore and visual imagery including material artefacts, photographs and artwork. This rich combination not only demonstrates how Turkish coffee culture links to today’s global industry, but also its central role in shaping the political, economic and social lives of Turkish communities.

The book is divided into two sections: A Brief History of Turkish Coffee and Coffee in Turkish Folk Literature. The narrative style, layout and approximate A5 size, suggests that it is aimed at a general readership. The first section provides the overarching narrative of coffee’s humble beginnings and subsequent proliferation against the backdrop of the rise and fall of the Ottoman Empire. Tracing its route from Ethiopia to Yemen during the late 14th–and 15th centuries, we find that the first consumers were dervishes who drank coffee in order to remain awake whilst praying at night. When the Ottomans conquered Yemen under the reign of Sultan Süleyman I, coffee soon became commonplace in the palace and in wealthy homes and spread rapidly throughout the empire until it was the beverage of choice for all occasions. By the 17th century, coffee had become the second most consumed article after grain and one of the Ottoman Empire’s most profitable businesses.
The rise of coffee consumption was also directly linked to the establishment of coffee houses during the Ottoman Empire. Despite several periods of prohibition and attempts to ban these establishments, they endured and flourished over the years. Coffee houses became forums for various communities of male citizens (Sufis, professors, government officials, bureaucrats, and others) to share ideas, be entertained, play backgammon, gossip and occasionally stir up social opposition. They were instrumental in shaping social, political and economic life across the empire.

As the reader finds out in the second section of the book, Ottoman coffee houses were not only places where poets, writers or philosophers could share ideas, they were also spaces where their art could be performed, critiqued, and developed. The folklore section provides a selection of riddles, proverbs, songs, terminology and performing arts that have been inspired by or associated with Turkish coffee culture. While some of these oral and performative aspects (such as shadow puppet theatre) are no longer performed in these establishments, the book ends with fortune telling drawn from coffee grounds, a tradition which continues to be ‘an important vehicle of social interaction’ particularly amongst women.

The book’s greatest strength is the integration of visual and folkloric elements making the book itself a rich historical and visual archive. The selection of images of outdoor coffee houses, museum collections of coffee stoves, cloths and paintings, old postcards and shadow puppets, all serve to create an intimacy with the content transporting the reader and giving them a heightened experience of the sights, sounds, smells and textures of coffee culture during the Ottoman Empire. Archival sources are an excellent means of bringing fascinating detail to illustrate the everyday reality of a time period, and the authors do well in collating and curating very interesting source material.

The book’s greatest weakness is the lack of cohesion and sequencing between chapters, archival material and sections. As it stands, the history and folklore sections seem like separate bodies of work cobbled together. There is no chapter linking each section, nor a conclusion to tie the content together. The book ends with fortune telling, with no reference as to how and why Turkish folklore is essential to understanding coffee’s role in the development of Turkish socio-political structures and Turkish culture.
today. In addition, the reader could have been greater facilitated in respect to the section on history, if a timeline and map of the Ottoman Empire was provided in order to accurately place the events in a sequential order and geographical context.

Aside from cohesion and sequencing, another weakness of the book is its lack of content relating to contemporary Turkish coffee culture. The back flap makes reference to the ‘revival of coffee drinking in Turkey as a result of ‘international coffee brands and coffee house chains’. One would assume that this revival is one of the reasons why the authors chose to write the book, yet there is no reference to its consumption and practice in the 21st century apart from the chapter on making and serving the beverage. If the authors had included content on contemporary practice they would have not only strengthened the book’s argument but also expanded the readership and created a piece of work that seemed less an exercise in nostalgia and more a celebration of living traditions and customs.

The amount of time and effort it took to collect such fascinating photographic and archival material is testament to the authors’ passion for Turkish coffee and their belief in its contribution to Turkish history, folklore and cultural traditions. This book may be best suited as an accompanying text to an exhibition in which the objects and material presented in the book could be brought to life and the content elaborated upon through discussions and presentations. Whether drunk at home, shared between friends or served at a coffee house, Turkish coffee forms part of the cultural practices that people still identify with closely today, and which can be seen as a means of understanding Turkish culture, values and traditions. Despite its limitations this informative book inspires an appreciation for Turkish coffee’s long-standing contribution to life within and beyond Turkey’s borders.

Nafisa Fera

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Deniz Cenk Demir


The body of anthropological literature on Turkey is growing considerably. During the last two decades, anthropologists have started to examine the very dynamics and bases of the Turkish polity from different angles. However, despite these burgeoning studies on Turkey, the anthropology of medicine and its intersections with politics as well as the culture of Turkey are still scarce. In this vein, Christopher Dole’s work provides a new framework to overcome this gap. At the intersection of medical and socio-political anthropology, Dole’s work is quite exceptional in the sense that he successfully captures the intimate fragments and elements of social, cultural and political textures of Turkish polity in the time of agonizing years of 1990’s Turkey. In other words, Dole focuses a very contentious subject: the religio-cultural healing practices of contemporary Turkey.

Under the secular order of Republican Turkey, the religious therapeutic practices are often subject to severe public criticisms and sometimes prone to criminal prosecution, as Dole pointed out. However, these healing practices survived throughout the years and are still prevalent. Having been introduced to the brief history of Turkish Republican secular reform and its suppression of certain Islamic practices, the reader would understand the difficult task Dole successfully undertook in his research. After introducing the background of main secular republican pillars of Turkish modernization, Dole focuses on the field of medicine as the most crystallized form of this secular modernization. He then brings the discussion of republican dreams and projects of “rational, scientific, secular” medicine into our attention through the story of Mustafa Kemal’s personal doctor Dr. Refik Saydam and excerpts of a widely circulated journal of the time, Ülkü’s vision of medicine for “new” Turkey.

In the following chapters of his diligent research, Dole offers a controversial yet thought-provoking framework for the study of Turkish secularism, which challenges the dominant paradigms of secular-Islamic dichotomy of Turkish polity. He concentrates on the margins of this evident but complex phenomenon of Turkish secularity by looking at
the religious healers and the people, who had been under their sphere of influence. Observers of Turkish politics might be familiar with, at the time of Dole’s research in 1990s and early 2000s, Turkish public opinion was full of scandalous portrayals of such religious healers including self-claimed saints (evliyalar), variety of mediums and hodjas, who deal with jinns (cinci hocalar). In this context, Dole brings two particularly striking stories along with the other rich narratives to the reader’s attention: Zöhre Ana, a self-proclaimed Alevi saint and İbrahim, a cinci hoca, who calls himself a medium in the “modern” sense.

These two leading stories in the rich inventory of ethnographies reverberate throughout the book in order to elucidate the intricate and complex relationship between secularism and Islam in the context of Turkish modernity. By looking at two distinct but interrelated cases of religious healing, Dole engages in discussions of the secularism’s politics of aesthetics and marketization of therapeutics of piety. These concurrent themes convey our attention into the unfolding historical fragments of suppressed practices and figures of the folk Islam via manifestation of religious healings as “sites of return” in contemporary Turkey.

Especially, in Zöhre Ana’s case, this return is more conspicuous. As a religious healer of an Alevi saint, Zöhre Ana’s legitimacy is in complete cooperation with the symbols of Kemalist ideology. Her public statements, her dergah (convent), her publications and even the saintly narrative of her genesis coincided with Kemalist symbolism. What we see in Zöhre Ana’s case is not simply an instrumental strategy of appealing to Kemalist symbols to protect herself from the public fury or state’s persecution. In fact, she faced criminal prosecutions too although her case did not take substantial public attention compared to cinci hoca. However, what we see in this case an internalization of this Kemalist secularism and the transformation of it into a site of return of the suppressed elements of folk Islam through secularism’s politics of aesthetics. More broadly, instead of focusing the obvious restrictive conditions of Turkish secularism and its limits to the communities, Dole prefers to emphasize how the secular symbols and secularism’s politics of aesthetics can be a possible source of legitimacy and recreation for – as in Dole’s terms - “those modalities of exilic religious life,” which were once suppressed by the earlier Republican secular reforms.
These seemingly paradoxical, nay perplexing intertwinements of Turkish secularism nevertheless offer new opportunities to understand what is operating behind this phenomenon. To comprehend better what is functioning behind actually lies in its contrary form as Dole said: “To understand the politics of secularism in Turkey, one must understand its politics of piety” (44). Dole’s emphasis on this approach is important because his ethnographic accounts link with the history of secular reform in Turkey. Therefore, it should not be wrong to say that to understand the history of secularism in Turkey, one must also understand its history of piety. The history of the forced closure of dervish lodges, saint tombs and Islamic hermitages in the early years of the Republic in the name of secularism connects with the backdrop of these stories in the book in a sense that, Dole implicitly denotes where the operating forces of Turkish secularism are in conversation with the religious symbols of folk Islam.

In the story of Ibrahim the *cinci hoca*, Dole casts another dimension to the discussions on religious healer. By paying attention to the most disdained figure of the time, Dole urges the reader to view the issue from another perspective. As a participant observer of the religious healing practices in Ibrahim’s case, Dole discovers the anxiety of ethical concerns of Ibrahim, the *cinci hoca*, as a pious Muslim. Moreover, Dole highlights Ibrahim’s successful adaptation to the new market conditions through professionalization and meticulous care of his job as a religious healer. Widespread considerations of these religious healing practices as backward, quackish and dangerous for the secular regime and corrupt for the Islamic *sunni* orthodoxy, the discussions on the *cinci hoca* respond the otherwise through the generative forces of the capitalist market. Seeking legitimacy and struggling to survive under the conditions of an authoritative secular order and a harsh capitalist market, the religious healers and their practices may paradoxically appeal to the orthodox piety, secular aesthetics and business ethics at the same time.

One of the shortcomings of the book is its failure to embed the detailed ethnographies of religious healing practices in the turbulent political setting of the time. The years that Dole conducted his field research were the most contentious moments, and the main ethnographic figures of his analysis were some of the most controversial characters of the 1990s and 2000s Turkey. Indeed, the Turkish political scene was the stage of an acrimonious Islamic-secular controversy, which triggered
a process of long-term military involvement into politics, also known as February 28 post-modern coup d'état. Even though Dole’s ethnography was definitely at the heart of these events, the book does not discuss the 28 February Process, in which the secular military unseated the Islamic party from the office. Readers should have been informed about the coup process and their reverberations in those discussions. All in all, apart from this important negligence and lack of political setting, Dole’s theoretically rich discussion shows how history of Turkish secularism provides new dimensions for broader analyses on Turkish polity. In this case, Christopher Dole’s exceptional study fills an obvious gap, also contributes further to the corpus of ethnographic work and presents new opportunities of academic and intellectual accounts for future anthropologists and social scientists.

Deniz Cenk Demir
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In the summer of 1982, in Andros, Greece, four young wandering tourists from Zurich steal a gold locket from a deserted chapel on a hilltop during their sightseeing adventures. Deciding to sell it when they get to their ultimate destination, they move on hitchhiking towards Istanbul. In the meantime, Oran Crossmoor’s grandfather in New York receives an anonymous mystery letter mailed from Turkey that reads: “It is time to repent. Come find me. The jewels will show you the way. The beautiful, magical, tragic jewels.” Motivated by the mystery of the letter, the 26-year-old American Oran sets out for İstanbul to meet his Turkish mother’s acquaintance, Leyla Aslanoğlu, a rich old woman willing to come to terms with her past, and also to face the painful memories he had locked away for four years. While he was working in Istanbul taking photographs for a book, Oran had met a nice young Turkish lady, Elif, with whom he had intentions towards marriage. Unfortunately, Elif got killed at a demonstration at Istanbul University and Oran stayed away for these four years, hoping the pain would go away. As he is window shopping at the Covered Bazaar, Oran finds a gold locket at an antiques dealer, and instantly remembers seeing it in family albums and hearing about it in his grandfather’s stories. It was a family treasure that had disappeared about fifty years ago, and it was the mystery letter to the grandfather that brought it out from among long-forgotten memories once more. That the locket’s origins date back to the 1520s’ Island of Rhodes remains unearthed.

Thus starts a modern quest, literally for the four pieces of an old treasure believed to have magical powers and metaphorically for the pieces of a family history with many a mystery. This quest strongly binds together two families, those of Crossmoor and Aslanoğlu, in ways that keep the mystery alive until the last pages of the novel. At the same time, it sheds light upon the interconnectedness of two histories and two cultures – Turkish and Greek – through the shared experiences in Smyrna during the Great Fire. The constant shifts in the setting, from 1982’s Andros and Istanbul to 1922’s Smyrna and Samos, are so well crafted that the novel provides a very pleasant reading. Moreover the climax is constantly deferred, and
the beguiling questions remain intact: will the Aslanoglu family give up their professed rights over the treasure or will the Crossmoors take it home after years of yearning? Will Oran’s interest in Beril, Leyla Hanım’s niece, replace his love for Elif? More importantly, will each character come to terms with their respective family histories?

Gates’ expertise in archeology and art history must surely have lent the story the inspiration. However, not all expert academics make natural fiction writers. That is where the ingenuity lies: history, mystery, and romance are so brilliantly engraved that the readers will anxiously look forward to sequels to this Escape. Anyone who is familiar with the settings and the communities involved would surely feel at home with this representation as it sounds to be coming from within. In other words, Gates writes like an insider rather than an outside observer. Although the novel could very well have done without its subheading, An Historical Mystery Novel, as it generates a preconditioning, Gates’ delicate craftspersonship makes the novel an amazing success. At present, close to the 93rd anniversary of the Great Fire of İzmir, Escape from Smyrna reads as a tribute to the communities on the two sides of the Aegean that shared a history that must have been beautiful, magical, and, at the same time, tragic, just like the jewels that initiate the quest in the novel.

Defne Ersin Tutan
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The Turk Who Loved Apples: And Other Tales of Losing My Way around the World.


The Turk Who Loved Apples is a personal narrative written by the former Frugal Traveler writer for the New York Times, Matt Gross. In his chapters, Gross takes us through some of his adventures in Vietnam, Kyrgyzstan, Taiwan, and Turkey, among other countries. Each story is an attempt by the author to come to terms with the physical, mental, and emotional challenges of being a traveler, turning a profit from traveling as a writer, and finally the ethical burdens that many Western, specifically, American travelers, impose upon themselves when visiting developing nations. While amusing at times and helpful with moneysaving tips, Gross’s book is largely a failure as a travel guide. The book succeeds, however, in inadvertently revealing some aspects of American exceptionalism, and the real or imagined divide that prevents many Americans from understanding the rest of the world.

Gross seems eager to set the record straight about his personal history, experiences, and motivations that were often criticized by readers of his articles in the Times. While a majority of this book is self-indulgent histrionics, Gross encapsulates for us the present condition of the intellectual class of American travelers—the travelers who desperately seeks experiential knowledge in order to become more cosmopolitan selves, the travelers who bestows upon themselves more importance than will ever be given, and the travelers who are unable to escape their own self-awareness in a thoroughly modern world.

Unfortunately, Gross doesn’t provide much insight into the places he visits, which are many, but rather, insight into the realities of being a concerned traveler. No doubt many travelers have, and will continue to have, similar feelings about their impact on the environment, for example, or giving money to the poor and wondering whether it helps or hurts local economies, and the search for “authentic” experience. It is Gross’s background of privilege that becomes the monster on his back that slows him down, not the weight of his pack. Gross struggles so with his own notions of American class that they frequently cloud his experiences with
people he meets, and prevents him from bridging cultural and linguistic barriers.

One concern about Gross’s approach to frugal travel is the lack of effort to equate “frugality” with “simplicity.” At no time does Gross attempt to strip down to the essentials of understanding a place or a people or a history; instead, frugality seems to mean the curation of the same experience that a wealthy traveler would have, but at a cheaper price. The goals of the frugal traveler seem to be the same as the wealthy traveler. Gross cannot for the life of him get away from himself, and this is incredibly annoying.

Perhaps most striking is his lack of concern for other human beings. Gross professes to lose track of the people he meets in his travels only to remember them by the characters he creates through his writing. Gross is utterly too concerned with his own intrusive role as the “traveler” or the “author” to process genuine interaction. There can be no interest in the substance of his stories, because there is no substance, only attempts at style and exploration. His nod to Barth and Nabokov by addressing his “dear reader” is ridiculous. He seems to liken himself to Ambrose, the character in Barth’s short story, “Lost in the Funhouse,” which only succeeds in exposing his reliance on superficiality and on fiction.

*The Turk Who Loved Apples* is intended for educated, conscientious travelers seeking consolation for their fear of the unknown and encouragement in overcoming cultural barriers. Overall, Gross is entertaining enough, but the insecurities he reveals in his writing are perhaps more telling of an American condition.

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