


organization of the work and disrupts the flow of the narrative. If the author had incorporated the travel accounts into the other chapters, treating them in the same manner as other primary sources, the book would have been more coherent and concise.

Overall, the book will significantly contribute to the fields of urban studies and the social history of cities, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, by offering an original analysis of Tehran, not as a taken-for-granted place in which sociopolitical events occur but as a dynamic space that produces and is produced by social processes. While cities like Cairo and Istanbul have been extensively covered in English academic literature, Tehran, an equally influential city in the region, has been noticeably absent when it comes to its spatial aspects. However, Rezvani Naraghi's *A Social History of Modern Tehran* successfully fills this gap. It provides valuable insights and becomes an invaluable source for scholars, instructors, and students of Iranian studies, Middle Eastern studies, and everyone interested in contemporary urban history.

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## **A Landscape of War: Ecologies of Resistance and Survival in South Lebanon**

**Munira Khayat (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022). Pp. 286. \$85.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 9780520389991**

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Many readers living in the United States or other places distant from war zones are used to thinking of war as an event, bounded in time. Wars are supposed to begin and end, whether brief, like Israel's July 2006 war on Lebanon, or prolonged, like the US war on Afghanistan. *A Landscape of War* disrupts that temporal understanding of war, providing readers instead with a lyrical and poignant ethnographic detailing of lives lived alongside and within war as a continuous state. Reminiscent of Patrick Wolfe's theorizing of settler colonialism as a structure rather than an event, war here is a necropolitical structure infusing daily struggles to make a living, raise a family, and resist by persisting.

To theorize life in war, Khayat coins "resistant ecologies," a concept that beautifully encapsulates relations among humans, and between humans and nonhumans, that work to "make life amidst returning seasons of devastation" (p. 4). "Resistant ecologies" connects *sumūd*, steadfastness, to landscape and its seasonal rhythms as they cycle alongside war's ebbs and flows. In building her argument, Khayat thoughtfully recuperates "resistance" from recent theoretical decline, showing how one can honor it as a local way of living without diluting the depth and complexity of the workings of power. In taking resistance seriously again, she reminds us to be clear about for whom and from whence it was foreclosed, underscoring how we source theory in her intervention.

Khayat's use of landscape as method, "as in-habitation, experience, and embodied practice" (p. 28), reaches richly toward ontological renderings of land-as-being alongside depictions of cultivation, navigation, and spaces that produce both life and death. Tobacco is in relationship with human beings, oaks harbor sentient spirits, goats and humans share the dangerous pursuit of navigating foodscapes. These multispecies relations best exemplify



resistant ecologies, inhabiting the book's heart (and my favorite chapters). Chapter 3, "The Bitter Crop," carefully analyzes tobacco-human relations of cultivation, gendered production, and circulation on global markets, taking us into the weeds of survival in a landscape hostile to growing much else. Khayyat deftly navigates tobacco's contradictions, harmful yet life-sustaining, by showing us how people use it to make a living under impossible conditions.

The human-goat relationship takes center stage in chapter 4, "How to Live (and Die) in an Explosive Landscape," as goats' capacity to meander fields of unexploded ordnance makes them invaluable partners in sustenance and livelihood. Here the author depicts in harsh clarity the degree to which the Israeli state has targeted land and livelihood in South Lebanon, deliberately "seeding the earth with deadly explosives" (p. 131). These resistant ecologies are deliberate: goats graze in the lushest spots, which are lush because they are untouched, untouched because they are dangerous. The temporal disruption of dominant narratives of war are made all too real—and devastating—when we meet Abu Nimr, who lost his goatherd son Ali to a mine just a few years before he himself died the same way.

Khayyat's sensitivity as she writes these stories is moving and resonant of her deep ethnographic sensibility. That sensibility infuses chapter 6, "The Grey Zones," and her discussions of "the ambiguities of coherent, cohesive framings in smashed and broken worlds and ... the moral difficulties of collaboration as a mode of survival in places of war" (p. 183). Jihad, for example, is portrayed with care, as Khayyat refuses to render judgment on his choices while frankly sharing his contradictory actions. We come to understand that Jihad, an economic collaborator with the Israeli occupation, may also be part of a resistant ecology. At least, Khayyat enjoins us, we must strive to ethnographically understand "the complexities of resisting and surviving war" (p. 199) even when we cannot morally comprehend the strategies deployed.

At times, *A Landscape of War* flirts with the autoethnographic. We are treated to rich sensorial depictions of Khayyat's experiences of war within and beyond the ethnographic frame. Authorial decisions about how much of oneself to include in an ethnography are never simple. In Lebanon's rapidly shifting political landscape, predicting how these decisions will be read in various futures complicates them further. At times, I think the reader could benefit from greater problematization of her own positionality or perspectives—for example, it would have been instructive to hear more about the effects of class, sect, and gender on her relationships and access to various spaces—but for the most part, Khayyat deftly uses her presence in service of her arguments. The line she walks—holding firm to a politics committed to resistance while maintaining both ethnographic compassion for those outside those politics and critical perspective on Hezbollah's institutionalization of resistance—is a thorny one.

In addition to pushing scholars to rethink the relationship between war and life, *A Landscape of War* makes an important geographic intervention. Centering South Lebanon productively shifts methodological focus away from Beirut and its surrounds. Equally important are its connections to Palestine. Israeli state and state-sponsored violence permeates the landscape, and, as Khayyat reminds us, the Lebanon-Israel border remains the only international front in resistance to Israel's settler-colonial project. Khayyat's fieldsite is (also) the Galilee. Initially, her note about this regional connection seems understated, delegated primarily to the first footnote, but through her ethnography, we come to understand the border as both ludicrous and unstable. Conceptual overlaps in *ṣumūd*, cross-border relations that sustained people economically, and kin ties sundered by its violence demonstrate that, regionally, South Lebanon and Palestine are part and parcel of a larger context. At the same time, *A Landscape of War* sits alongside a growing number of outstanding recent ethnographies of Lebanon and should be in conversation with them. It joins the rich theorizing on violence that has emerged in that scholarship; for example, in work by Muzna Al-Masri, Sami Hermez, and Lamia Moghnieh. In keeping with Khayyat's explicit decolonial emphasis and focus on theorizing war from the Global South, I would have liked to see the book engage


these and other Lebanese scholars' ideas in building the theoretical framework upon which its key intervention of "resistant ecologies" rests.

I highly recommend *A Landscape of War* and have no doubt that it will be useful to scholars of the region, as well as more broadly to those interested in these questions of life under conditions of accumulated crises. As it is accessibly written, I plan to teach it in undergraduate classes on the Middle East, as well as in a class on borderlands. In the decade plus between when Khayyat began her fieldwork and this book's publication, Lebanese politics have twisted and the layers of catastrophe piled up. Economic conditions are certainly worse as I write this review than they were when Khayyat sent the book to press. The staying power of this book is how it models a way to think outside accumulated disasters as discrete events, how to use ethnography to render life under a constant state of precarity and violence. Khayyat's approach, ethnographic sensitivity, and relentless focus on "living with" rather than "living despite" scale up and apply broadly to accumulated crisis in both other locales and on a planetary scale, because people do continue to live and work and raise families and hold celebrations, even when those looking in from the outside cannot quite imagine how they do so.

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## Assyrians in Modern Iraq: Negotiating Political and Cultural Space

**Alda Benjamen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022). Pp. 258. \$99.99 hardback. ISBN: 978108838795**

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*Assyrians in Modern Iraq* examines the methods and approaches Assyrians employed in their efforts to cultivate varying political and cultural spaces in the second half of the 20th century. In engaging with local and diasporic networks, Assyrians levied their political and cultural positionings to create and reinforce relationships with leftist, oppositional, and centrist movements. To Benjamen, this maneuverability allowed Assyrians to advance their concerns, preserve their culture, and cultivate alliances with diverse political organizations. Rather than presenting Iraq's minorities as either socio-politically tenacious, docile, or agents of imperial powers, Benjamen confronts monolithic perspectives on Iraq's minorities. Benjamen's building blocks consist mainly of complex and diverse sources accumulated from the Iraq's National Library and Archives in Baghdad, as well as libraries and collections held in Mosul, Erbil, and Duhok.

Following a tantalizing preface that situates the book within a larger canon on identity and pluralism in the Middle East with periodical gestures toward prevalent theoretical framings on minoritization and anti-sectarianism, a concise introduction unfurls lengthy cultural, environmental, sociopolitical, and transnational histories of Iraq's "ancient Christian community" (p. 1). The first chapter highlights how employment in Kirkuk's oil industry yielded broad socioeconomic mobility for some, and politicization and labor organization for others. Benjamen centers Assyrians in the formation and transformation of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) pinpointing patterns and ruptures that led to their urbanization, politicization, and disenchantments in leftist and oppositional politics. Discussing various