

underlines how certain sections of the prison were renovated, while the ward associated with leftist prisoners was demolished and replaced with a decorative garden. Through such examples, Çaylı convincingly demonstrates how both presence and absence contribute to processes of erasure and the production of a space of selective commemoration.

As for Diyarbakır Prison, Çaylı argues that through the mobilization of symbolic dates by memory activists during protests and the subsequent violent reaction by authorities, space is temporalized and time becomes spatialized. He analyzes the recent murals painted on the outside walls of the prison by Kurdish art students from the local university and compares this beautification campaign with histories of torture and forced labor in the prison, as prisoners were made to paint the hallways and interior walls with nationalist and racist slogans, in addition to scenes from Turkish history. This painting-as-torture culminated in the self-immolation of four prisoners in 1982, who secretly collected the highly flammable painting materials and used them to burn themselves alive in protest of the ongoing torture at the prison.


While *Victims of Commemoration* is thoroughly researched and convincingly argued, at times some stylistic points hinder the flow of the narrative. The book relies on extensive footnotes to furnish important background, some of which might have been integrated more seamlessly into the text. In the introduction to the book as well as in the individual introductions to each of the three parts, the author departs on sometimes dense theoretical explications, which, while situating the arguments within relevant literature, could have been layered with ethnographic material to further illustrate the arguments. While the ethnographic material presented is rich and evocative, the inclusion of additional descriptions of the author's fieldwork experiences and the narratives of local interlocutors would have further enriched the overall story. Finally, some ethnographic anecdotes, such as the story about the aftereffects of the 1915 genocide as symbolized in apricot trees, would have benefited from further discussion and analysis.

Overall, *Victims of Commemoration* provides a rich exploration into the politics of violence and memory in Turkey with a focus on the spatial and architectural aspects of commemoration. Çaylı's contribution is a valuable introduction to recent histories of violence against marginalized groups in Turkey through the in-depth exploration of three important sites of memorialization, and demonstrates how these sites become spaces of contestation between state actors, memory activists, and locals. This book joins a growing body of literature on the intersection of memory, violence, space, and place in post-Ottoman lands and will be of interest to scholarly audiences in multiple fields, from anthropology and geography to history and Middle East studies.

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Unknowing and the Everyday: Sufism and Knowledge in Iran

Seema Golestaneh (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023). Pp. 256. \$99.95 cloth, \$25.95 paper. ISBN 9781478019534

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Every once in a while, one comes across a book in which a singular decision on translation exposes the author's poetic gift. For those with a passing acquaintance with Sufism—the mystic orientation in Islam that subsequently developed into more institutionalized Sufi



“orders”—the term *maʿrifat* refers to a special mode of knowing often glossed as “gnosis” in Western academic parlance. Derived from Arabic, the word in Persian simply means knowing or knowledge, and by extension, wisdom (*ḥikmat*) or even “traditional heritage” (*turās-i taqlīdī*). In Seema Golestaneh’s intricately woven *sufrih* of a book, titled *Unknowing and the Everyday: Sufism and Knowledge in Iran*, the author makes a consequential decision to translate *maʿrifat* not as gnosis or knowledge, but as “unknowing.” “We might posit non-knowledge not as a form of antiknowledge or metaknowledge but rather as *an awareness of that which we do not know, an engaged awareness that we know nothing*” (p. 4, emphasis original). So claims Golestaneh in the introduction of the book.

Just as “unlearning” in our humanistic academy implies not so much a refusal to learn as a deep commitment to an epistemological as well as ontological refashioning of one’s world to expose the injustices that underpin earlier forms of knowledge, so is *maʿrifat* a call to a paradigm of knowing in which knowing that one knows not is the critical condition for any worthy advancement on the spiritual and intellectual path toward the divine. To demonstrate the significance of this point, Golestaneh draws on four ethnographic case studies in which she “trace[s] the affective and sensory dimensions of *maʿrifat* as it influences the mystics’ understanding of text and authority (chapter 2), the self (chapter 3), memory (chapter 4), and place (chapter 5)” (p. 5). In the inaugural chapter she walks the reader through the entanglement of Sufism with the modern history of Iran, from Ruhollah Khomeini’s training in Sufism to the continual grip of *tasavvuf* on eminent Iranian clerics.

Of particular interest in this first chapter is Golestaneh’s disambiguation of three key terms at times used interchangeably to refer to Sufism: namely, *irfan*, *tasavvuf*, and *sufigari*. *Irfaan* is a kindred term to *maʿrifat*, *tasavvuf* is an Arabic term formed as the gerund (*masdar*) of the verb *taṣawwafa*, meaning “to be a Sufi” or literally, “to be wearing wool” (the word *sufi* is but a later derivation from *taṣawwuf*), and *sufigari* is a still later Persian creation. *Sufigar* means, quite literally, “a person doing what the Sufis do,” and *sufigari*, in a somewhat tautological manner, refers to “the thing that a person doing what the Sufis do does.” The tautology already gives the word a somewhat pejorative air, as is so often the case in the circle of Iranian theologians critical of what they consider the disreputable practices of wandering Sufis (e.g., “idleness,” “opium smoking,” and “begging”; p. 33). Although Chapter 1 also includes an introduction of the Nimatullahi Order among whose loosely affiliated members the author carried out her fieldwork, this institutional identity seems somewhat tangential, if at all relevant, to the ethnography and the main argument of the book.

Those familiar with classical Islamic scholarship will know the weight of textual hermeneutics in this tradition; regardless of one’s speciality a student will first have to be something of a minor philologist before advancing to the next level. In Chapter 2, Golestaneh demonstrates how the interpretation of poetic texts constitutes a major site for knowledgeable shaykhs to deny (thereby unknowing) their own authority and give way, now to the intuition of the inner heart (*qalb*), now to the ultimate openness and impenetrability of poetry. The author here draws extensively from the transcript of the interviews she carried out with two shaykh interlocutors, a practice that greatly befits the argument she tries to make, for is not dialogic pedagogy the very method that defines the philosophical approach linking the Iranian shaykhs to their Arabic and Greek predecessors of earlier times? If Chapter 2 is about the unknowing of authority, in Chapter 3 Golestaneh moves on to examine how the self and the body are annihilated (*fanā*), or rendered unknown, through popular *zīkr* rituals (remembrance of God). This chapter shares with Chapter 4, “Unknowing of Memory,” attention to a tension that perhaps many ordinary Sufi followers, past and present, would have to grapple with in their spiritual pursuit: to what extent is their attempt to annihilate the self and dissolve themselves in the oneness of God only an escapist evasion of worldly worries? Or do the two at all contradict?

Following this same train of thought, in Chapter 4 Golestaneh describes a remarkable act of active forgetting after the municipal government of Isfahan demolished a shrine for Sufi gathering at Takhteh-Foulad (the steel throne), an open-air cemetery at the heart of the city.


Although some Sufis continue to lament the destruction, others seem to have embarked on a journey of willful amnesia. The way this amnesia manifests itself is worth noting. “No, you must be mistaken. There was no tomb there,” one said when being interviewed (p. 149). Another stated, point-blank, that “there was never any building in Takhteh-Foulad” (p. 149). By Golestaneh’s own admission these are awkward moments in fieldwork. They are moments of arrest in the sense of hindering further inquiries, but also, by not offering a verbal explication, the interlocutors leave space for contending conjectures, all equally plausible: Did the anthropologist use the wrong word to refer to the demolished building and cause confusion by doing so? Are the Sufis in question so traumatized by the experience their minds have blocked out the memories altogether? Or have they been so terrorized they feel uncomfortable sharing their thoughts with an outsider anthropologist? Or, perhaps, as Golestaneh argues in the book, they are involved in an act of resistance in which, by deliberately forgetting and thereby overcoming the trauma, they are able to rebuild a continuity on the spiritual level in which the razing of a material shrine in no way interrupts their mystical pursuit. All of these are conceivable scenarios, and all of them may have been present simultaneously among the Sufis involved.

In the last chapter, Golestaneh turns her attention to the use of sound among young Sufis. With characteristic subtlety and the tenderness of a poet she describes how the hosts of a Sufi gathering gently tap on a *daf* (frame drum) to produce music just loud enough to guide interested participants to their destination without soliciting excessive attention from other passersby, or unwanted interference from the government. The gentle rhythm acts like the wafting scent of incense to draw the seekers of mystical truth to the warm embrace of poetry and *zikr*. Golestaneh’s writing throughout the book is lucid and effective, frequently poetic. The book is heavily descriptive and does a wonderful job dissecting the nuances of the many interviews it cites. *Unknowing and the Everyday* is a solid piece of scholarship; it also can be considered a beautifully crafted memoir of a wandering Sufi of an academic, lost in the charmingly mystical landscape of contemporary Isfahan.

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Between Banat: Queer Arab Critique and Transnational Arab Archives

Mejdule Bernard Shomali (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023). 224 pp. \$25.95 paper. ISBN: 9781478019275

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Between Banat is a search for queer ancestors and queer futures. Both searches—for queer Arab ancestors and queer Arab futures—are driven by a pivotal question: “What would it mean to be queer, Arab, and OK?” (p. 138). Mejdule Bernard Shomali seeks answers in community histories and archives, exploring how queer Arab women, *banāt*, and femmes are represented (or erased) and how they represent themselves. Moving between languages, genres, and temporalities, the book examines diverse texts ranging from popular golden-era Egyptian cinema to contemporary Arab American novels, from activist-published autobiographical writing to graphic novels, films, apparel, and print produced in multiple Arab geographies and diasporas. By juxtaposing these diverse texts and analyzing them through the lens of “queer Arab critique,” Shomali assembles a transnational Arab archive that