

AIRPLANE MODE

Travels in the Ruins of Tourism



SHAHNAZ HABIB

An extract



This is a work of non-fiction. However, some names and identifying details of individuals have been changed to protect their privacy, correspondence has been shortened for clarity, and dialogue has been reconstructed from memory.

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ONE

A Guidebook in Konya



THE HAGIA SOPHIA WAS A MUSEUM WHEN I MET MEGAN under its roof. Now it is a mosque again, after previous lives as an Orthodox church, a Catholic cathedral, and an Ottoman mosque. But this was 2007, and I was standing under its dome, trying to take in fifteen centuries of interior decoration, when a young white woman touched my arm: “Excuse me, may I borrow your guidebook?”

Megan was backpacking through a number of countries with a fat Europe guidebook that did not go into a lot of detail about every monument. So when she could, she would borrow guidebooks from other tourists. I offered her my *Lonely Planet Turkey* and she quickly scanned the section on the Hagia Sophia. A few hours later, we were drinking saleg on the third floor of a nearby coffee shop.

Megan had set out from Amherst after a bad breakup that summer. She had started in Italy in June and now it was December in Istanbul, Europe’s final, dubious outpost. She had a ticket to Bangkok in two weeks and she was thinking of doing Turkey in one week and then fitting in a little Iran before that. While minarets seemed to sway in the breeze

outside our coffee shop's window, she ticked off Europe on her fingers. Bulgaria was still pretty. Albanian buses were not to be trusted. Don't choose between Madrid and Barcelona. In the two days that she had spent in Istanbul, she had already done Topkapi Palace, the Grand Bazaar, the ferry across the Bosphorus, and the museums. The most worthwhile ones, that is.

"What have you done so far?" she asked.

"This and that," I evaded.

I had been sleeping. No way could I admit this to Megan. But I had slept through every day since getting to Istanbul the week before. Waking up in the early evening, I would wander in circles in the market outside my hotel in an unfashionable neighborhood that happened to hold one of the cheaper hotels I found online. The market consumed me. The stacks of grape leaves and cabbage leaves. The animal carcasses hanging from hooks. The streetcar clanging its way through the middle of the road. A middle-aged man waited at the bus stop with his elderly mother, his hands holding hers tenderly. Schoolchildren on their way home paused at the entrance of a tiny mosque for a quick mumbled prayer. A group of young women in high heels and headscarves sashayed by in a flutter of style and confidence and secrets. Eventually, I would find some unspectacular dinner in one of the nearby lokantas and return to my hotel room. I felt lonely and intimidated and depressed. It was all a far cry from the glamorous travels I had imagined when I booked my ticket for Istanbul.

Back home in New York, my roommate had told me that

she thought I was brave to travel alone in Turkey. “Those places are scary,” she said. Walking through the market every day, I would often remember the shrug with which she had pronounced that and it would fill me with a kind of angry confusion. I thought then that it was because she was perpetuating the fearmongering stereotypes that Muslim countries are often portrayed with. But looking back now, I wonder if some of my confusion was also about my own inadequacy as a tourist. It was not just the fact that there was nothing remotely scary about this market; it was the contrast between her perception of me as “brave” and my own failure to live up to the adventurousness and intrepidity required of a good traveler.

This has happened to me again and again. In a new place, I am never adventurous; I am cautious. It takes me a few days simply to get used to stepping out of wherever I am staying. At first, I stick to the neighborhood, like an animal getting used to a new environment. I want to be curious and intrepid; instead, I am confused and lonely. (Jet lag does not help.) And always I am conscious of what a waste of time this is. If only I could just get up and go do things, how much time I could save. I am basically the opposite of Anthony Bourdain. Not cool, not adventurous. And vegetarian! As I walked around the market staring, asking in my feeble herbivorous voice, *Etsiz yemek var mı?*, I sensed each precious day in Istanbul turning like the pages of an unread guidebook.

For years I had dreamed of visiting Istanbul. Wanderlust codes our desires in different ways, and the software that

ran underneath my own wanderlust for Turkey was programmed by my reading. I had started studying Sufi poetry a few years before and was part of a mosque community in New York that traced its lineage to a Sufi mystic from Istanbul. I loved the contradictions of this poetry, how the seeming sensuousness gave way to a rigorous self-inquiry.

In a related contradiction, the more I wanted to travel, the less I could, thanks to bureaucratic mysticism. For several years, I had been unable to leave the United States. My student visa had expired, and in this tricky position, I could continue to live in the United States legally, but if I left its borders, I could not return. This meant not returning to India and not seeing my family for four long years while I tried to switch to a different visa. An employment visa was out of the question in the kind of low-paid jobs I had a talent for finding. When I worked up the courage to ask the filmmaker whose office I was running if he would consider sponsoring my visa, he suggested that I should go to graduate school so I could get another student visa. One immigration lawyer suggested incorporating as a business and hiring myself. Another one misplaced my passport for a few terrifying days.

As I worked through my immigration troubles, I kept thinking of Turkey. I distracted myself from my immigration conundrums by reading Pamuk novels, only half understanding them. I was drawn to the geometric rhythms of ilahis and started learning Turkish. And then finally one day my new visa came through and I quit my job (which would have been dramatic if I had an actual job and not a bunch of vague freelancing arrangements) and booked my

round-trip ticket to India with a stopover in Istanbul, and here I was.

When you read about a city, it is standing still, cryogenically frozen in an author's words. You pick up a guidebook and in its little guidebook prism, the city and all its history and culture are so neatly packaged for you. But when you are actually there, for instance, walking through the ancient Hippodrome, now a historic district teeming with backpackers, somebody will trample on your feet while taking a photo. Outside the Blue Mosque, office workers are eating lunch in the square with their backs turned to the building you have traveled halfway around the world to see. A young couple saying goodbye and lingering afterward will remind you that you are alone, that you have no one to share this journey with. Something ruthless in the city will poke you with an ice-cold finger and say, "Little tourist, you can have my palaces and minarets, but you cannot have me."

Many years later, I would return to Istanbul to live there for several months with my husband and daughter. The city would fall into perspective then, its neighborhoods mapping themselves into my memory, friendships blooming out of the rich soil of daily life. The translators and writers we worked with, fellow parents at the neighborhood school my daughter attended, the cranky musician who ran our favorite tea shop where each tea was named after a maqam, the fish restaurant where one of Istanbul's minor earthquakes shook our table. Alongside the ferries and palaces and mosques, we got to know the supermarkets and banks and minibus stops and lending libraries. Istanbul's monuments,

taken in small and regular doses, became beloved familiars to me in those months. The neighborhood market days became my shopping days, not sights to see.

I am so tempted to tell you about that trip; it's much cooler, more glamorous, easier to remember and relish. But what are we to do with the confusion and loneliness of traveling? Leaving the monoculture of the United States and landing in a nonchalantly multilayered and superbly hybrid city like Istanbul can be overwhelming. Some places test us, and traveling alone tests us, and my miserable first week in Istanbul is more interesting to me now than the happier times I have had in the city since then.

So there I was feeling a bit silly and a lot lonely when I ran into Megan, intrepid and adventurous Megan, who had already *done* so many monuments, though she had only been in Istanbul for two days. I could not even have begun to articulate the dull ache I felt. I was also intimidated by Megan, who dared to walk up to strangers and ask to see their guidebooks. Here I was losing myself in the shy silence that surrounds a solo traveler, my breath turning stale from lack of conversation, and there she was, stepping between continents with practiced ease. And so, even though I had a slight headache from hearing her talk—the beaches in Croatia are still quite empty, Belgium has surprisingly good coffee—I was delighted to listen.

And then she was gone. On the free map of Turkey that she picked up from the Tourism Information Office, she showed me her route, marked with arrows, and with the directness of an arrow, she zigzagged through Turkey. We

promised to stay in touch; maybe our travels would intersect again.

It's difficult to describe the water-laced über-beauty of Istanbul's bridges and mosques and ferries without sounding like a tourist brochure for Las Vegas. It took me a week to see everything that Megan had seen in two days. This is not because I was a slow traveler, savoring every moment. In fact, I spent one whole day scrolling Facebook and sending friend requests to former coworkers because I started panicking that I would not have any work when I got back to New York.

Aghast at how much time I had wasted, I moved into the backpacker hostel Megan had stayed at. On my first morning there, in the breakfast room I found that the free bookshelf where other backpackers left behind books was crowded with Rumis and Pamuks. On the television in one corner, George Bush was making a Christmas speech to troops in Iraq. One of the breakfast servers said something funny and the others started laughing. I wanted to stay behind and find out what was said and why it was funny. But I felt the weight of my guidebook and all the sights I had not seen yet and so I left the warm breakfast room and the sound of laughter and walked to whatever mosque or palace it was that Lonely Planet thought I should see.

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I wish I had known then that Karl Baedeker, the man who first popularized tourist guidebooks, died as the result of

overwork at the age of fifty-eight. The man who systematized tourist trails so efficiently, at the very moment that leisure travel was transforming itself into a middle-class activity of cultural consumption, worked himself to death. When I came across this nugget of information years later, I understood so much about guidebooks and the particular ways in which they regulate the day of the tourist. Karl Baedeker founded the Baedeker publishing house in 1827, the year that also saw the launch of the first passenger-steamboat service on the Rhine. His eponymous “handbuchs” set the standard for travel guidebooks. Many of the conventions followed by the Lonely Planets and Rough Guides of today were either created or popularized by Baedeker, and after his death (of overwork, in case you forgot) his three sons expanded the company into multiple languages and continents.

Baedeker and another popular guidebook series that launched shortly after, Murray, soon became household names among European tourists. The books provided practical information on transportation and accommodation, detailed city maps, tables for steamboat fares, and guidance on foreign customs. All this information was arranged along numbered “routes” that extended from one large town to another. Baedeker also introduced the star system for must-see places. Beginning in 1844, Baedeker started awarding an asterisk to those points of interest that a cultured traveler must not miss at any cost. He would also inform his readers about what to safely ignore: “The Harbor [at Cannes] is unimportant”; “The view from the summit [at Mont Blanc] is unsatisfactory.” In effect, he was creating a

kind of Euro-tourism canon while also fashioning tourism into the act of seeing specific sights.

To understand guidebooks, we have to understand Baedeker's worldview. As Edward Mendelson put it, "Baedeker's science was first of all classical and Baconian." Francis Bacon's seventeenth-century articulation of man as the interpreter of nature and inductive reasoning as the most accurate path to a scientific truth is at the heart of the European Enlightenment ideal of knowledge, including the particular ways in which knowledge was captured by Baedeker's guidebooks. In the Enlightenment worldview, science and travel were deeply bound together. *Novum Organum*, the book Bacon published in 1620, depicts on its title page a ship sailing through the Pillars of Hercules, the legendary promontories, one on the European side and the other on the North African side, that flank the entrance of the Strait of Gibraltar. By choosing this image as the metaphor for his new scientific method, Bacon is signaling that he, too, is an explorer, like Columbus and Magellan, who went past the limits of the known world and navigated into the unknown represented by the Atlantic Ocean.

What the Baconian method does not take into account is the observer's subjectivity. Instead, it concerns itself with the phenomenon under investigation and takes the observer's objectivity for granted. Underlying this assumption is the notion that the observer is superior to the observed. Mendelson writes that Baedeker was scarcely alone in assuming that the observing Northern European was the most superior form of humanity. Famously in his note on "Intercourse

with Orientals,” Baedeker wrote: “Many are mere children, whose waywardness should excite compassion rather than anger, and who often display a touching simplicity and kindness of disposition.” While such extreme prejudices have mostly been weeded out of guidebooks, the Baconian understanding of the world as a subject to be observed by an objective European male observer for the benefit of other European males has continued well past the nineteenth century. Even today, guidebooks such as Lonely Planet and Rough Guides tend to assume a young Western backpacker as their Platonic-ideal reader.

I have a Baedeker. It’s a 1904 edition of *Italy, from the Alps to Naples*. It used to belong to my mother-in-law, who inherited it from her grandfather. It’s compact and fits neatly into my hand the way contemporary guidebooks don’t, because the print is tiny. Bound in four sections that can be detached for the traveler’s convenience, it is designed for “the use of those travellers who are obliged to compress their tour into a space of four or five weeks.” It suggests that the traveler take rooms facing south in order to avoid drafts when possible. It also cautions against the growing rapacity and insolence of the lower classes of Naples.

And yet, it’s oddly moving. While it universalizes the male European point of view, the Baedeker also democratizes travel information. Starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, as more middle-class and then working-class Europeans started traveling, they needed the Baedekers to tell them where to go and what to see. My 1904 Baedeker has a glossary that goes from *Affricano* (a dark

variegated marble . . . from Greece) to *Villa*. There is something egalitarian about its pronunciation guide to Italian. The Baedeker knows that the person browsing its pages and testing out the Italian words is not on a Grand Tour.

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The Grand Tour, a journey undertaken by young British nobles between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, marked the end of childhood and a transition into the social and cultural life of aristocracy. Traveling with an entourage of tutors and domestic servants for as long as two or three years, a duke or baron would begin the tour in England and go on to France and Italy. Rome, as the high-water mark of European civilization, was the ultimate destination. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Grand Tour had become entrenched as a rite of passage for young European elites. But with the sudden increase in disposable income brought about by the Industrial Revolution, as more commoners and women joined the ranks of travelers, the very nature of travel changed. Guidebooks enabled people who did not have access to cultural capital through breeding and education to enjoy the ruins of Rome. The Baedekers and Murrays came out of this moment of cultural ferment. Recreational travel was no longer the exclusive entitlement of gentlemen with personal Latin tutors. This also meant that Baedekers were looked down upon by more cultured travelers.

“Tut, tut! Miss Lucy! I hope we shall soon emancipate you from Baedeker. He does but touch the surface of things.

As to the true Italy—he does not even dream of it,” Lucy Honeychurch is told by a fellow tourist, the adventurous Miss Lavish, on her first morning in Italy.

Lucy, the protagonist of E. M. Forster’s 1908 novel, *A Room with a View*, is traveling in Florence with her chaperone and her Baedeker when we first meet her. Lucy is a terrific protagonist, a bit of a snob by nurture but kind by nature, perfect material for Forster’s delicate irony. Her internal contradictions make great material for a novel that explores the moonwalking between class and gender, especially in the initial part of the novel, which takes place in the ambiguous foreign spaces offered by tourism.

Every time I pick up a guidebook, Lucy Honeychurch and Miss Lavish fight for my soul. Luckily we now have disembodied digital guidebooks and audio walking guides, which conceal themselves adroitly while murmuring information into our ears, like a politician’s assistant at a fund-raising dinner. The human desire to not be caught with a guidebook while also miraculously enjoying all the information in a guidebook is approximately two centuries old. And the gentle art of shaming your traveling companion for looking at a guidebook is also just as old. After mocking Lucy for carrying a Baedeker, Miss Lavish takes her on a rambling walk through Florence, only to abandon her in the piazza outside Santa Croce.

It is true that guidebooks circumscribed the history and architecture and the arts and engineering of a place into a few pages, but this circumscribing was also an opening. Guidebooks offered their wisdom freely to those who had

no opportunities to study or money to hire guides and tutors for lengthy travels abroad. Unfortunately, Lucy finds herself alone inside the basilica, without a Baedeker and too embarrassed to ask for help. It is then that she runs into a couple of fellow tourists from her pension, the Emersons, father and son. The son will offer, "If you've no Baedeker, you'd better join us." The story ends of course with Lucy marrying him.

It's not that Lucy needs her Baedeker to tell her how to feel. My favorite moment in the book takes place after she loses Miss Lavish and before she is found by the Emersons, when "the pernicious charm of Italy worked on her, and, instead of acquiring information, she began to be happy." Lucy is certainly capable of feeling the mystique of Santa Croce without her Baedeker, but how will she find her way back? How will she, a young woman abroad for the first time, learn to trust herself as a traveler? She is constantly surrounded by reproaches and cautions. She is told not to loiter, and she is expected to be ladylike.

Guidebooks such as the Baedekers may only touch the surface, but the surface is a good starting point for those who have only just been allowed to surface in the history of travel. Granted, guidebooks peddle in the banal. And yet who are we if we are not banal? Consider that the word *banal* itself has its etymological roots in medieval mills and ovens that were available for serfs to use and hence were commonplace, trite, ignoble. At the end of the book, when Lucy, instead of running away to Greece as she was planning, decides to marry George Emerson, I wondered how

Lucy's life would have turned out if she had her Baedeker that morning in Santa Croce. What if she could have enjoyed the solitary wandering opportunity that had unexpectedly visited her? The room with a view did not lead to a room of her own.

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Guidebooks and the ways in which they classified cultural geography became handy for an unexpected audience in the twentieth century. In 1942, the German air force used *Baedeker's Great Britain* to target and bomb the historically famous cities of Exeter, Bath, Norwich, and York in retaliation for the Royal Air Force's blitzing of Lübeck. This kind of curious intimacy between guidebook knowledge and military information comes up again and again in guidebook history. Arthur Frommer, an army-intelligence lawyer posted to Berlin in 1955 during the Korean War, wrote *The G.I.'s Guide to Traveling in Europe* to share all the deals he found during his travels around the continent. In 2003, Jay Garner, the first U.S. administrator of occupied Iraq, used a Lonely Planet guide to draw up a list of historical sites that should be secured—while dropping 29,199 bombs on the country.

Today Lonely Planet, established by Tony Wheeler and his wife, Maureen, in 1973 after they backpacked across Asia and wrote up their tips as a book, is the Baedeker of our own times. Roughly one in four guidebooks sold today is a Lonely Planet. Originally intended as a countercultural

travel companion, the Lonely Planets of the 1970s and '80s were intended to help shoestring backpackers to make their way through the Third World.* The first Lonely Planet was *Across Asia on the Cheap*, soon to be followed by “on the cheap” guides to Southeast Asia, Africa, and India.

In his *New Yorker* profile of Lonely Planet founder Tony Wheeler, Tad Friend wrote about these early iterations of the guidebook: “They advocated what might be called a playground model of behavior: here’s the score on Lebanese grass and Balinese mushrooms, here’s where to buy carpets in Iran before child-labor laws drive up the price, here’s how to sell blood in Kuwait to pay for the rugs.” The timely collapse of the Soviet Union (*Eastern Europe on a Shoestring*) and the deregulation of the airline industry helped Lonely Planet grow rapidly. But after 9/11 and the recession in the tourism industry, the company started deliberately broadening its audience, toning down the rebellious editorial voice to cater to a wider demographic, from global nomads to mature adventurers. Today it is a multinational behemoth with a massive online presence and a variety of allied businesses, from children’s books to language guides. “Like Apple and Starbucks and Ben & Jerry’s, all of which began as plucky alternatives, Lonely Planet has become a mainstream brand,” Friend wrote.

Lonely Planet institutionalized the backpacker trail as we know it today, but this trail didn’t come out of nowhere.

* See page 263.

On that first fateful trip across Asia on the cheap, Tony and Maureen Wheeler were following the Hippie Trail, which, in turn, was based on the “overland route” between Europe and Southeast Asia that had been used by colonial travelers as they toured around the colonies. In the postcolonial era, as different countries began managing their own railways, the overland route gave way to the Hippie Trail, which was best symbolized by the “magic buses” that picked up hippie travelers around Europe and sputtered and shuddered their way to Istanbul. There, the magic buses picked up a fair share of Americans as well as Australians and New Zealanders. Many of the travelers on the Hippie Trail were in search of Eastern mysticism, which they saw as an antidote to Western materialism. From Istanbul, the Hippie Trail found its way to South India or Southeast Asia, passing through Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India, and then north to Nepal or south toward Goa and Kerala.

The trail connected a series of places that were remote and cheap—but remote for whom, and cheaper than where? Though the geopolitical tensions of the seventies changed the tenor of these travels, by the nineties, the backpacker trail was a well-beaten path in whose comfortable grooves young and adventurous white people met other young and adventurous white people. Backpacker hostels mushroomed along the trail, and banana pancakes started appearing on the menus of guesthouses in the Third World, from Chiang Mai to Goa.

Other parts of the world also developed their own trails. After the backpacker Yossi Ghinsberg got lost in the Amazon

and was rescued, he wrote a book about his experience. Soon enough, a backpacker trail developed along the very places where he got lost. Pegi Vail's documentary *Gringo Trails* shows how many of the Indigenous men who helped rescue Ghinsberg now work as porters and local guides in this specific ecosystem. A Hummus Trail has developed in India over the last thirty years as Israeli backpackers started traveling to the beaches of Goa and the mountains of Kasauli to blow off steam after their compulsory military service. The increasing bilateral friendship between the right-wing Modi government and the Israeli government, built on a mutually beneficent arms trade, has certainly helped pave the bricks on that trail in recent years.

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The next stop on my own not-so-grand tour and not-so-gringo trail was Konya. After a few more days of sleepwalking through Istanbul, I stirred myself enough to take a bus to this town in southeastern Turkey, where Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi lived and died in the thirteenth century. Situated in the middle of the vast Anatolian heartland of Turkey, Konya was the eleventh-century capital of the Sultanate of Rum. By the time a young Sharia scholar called Jalaluddin, someone we would now call an Afghan refugee, settled there with his family in 1228, Konya was a cosmopolitan center of Islamic learning whose madrassas were filled with the smartest philosophers and theologians. Jalaluddin would become the most renowned of them all, earning

the title of master-teacher—Mevlana. It was Mevlana's encounter with Shams of Tabrizi, a wandering mystic, that inspired him to write the humanistic religious poetry that would come to be known around the world. The sacred wit-tiness of medieval Sufi poetry was a subterranean force in the Muslim spiritual and literary imagination long before it became popular among wellness gurus and neoliberals invested in "good Muslims." I first read about Al Hallaj and Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi and Hafez in my mother tongue, Malayalam, when I stole my mother's copy of Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's essays.

A friend at my New York mosque had told me about a Sufi lodge near Mevlana's tomb, and as soon as I got to Konya, I went and knocked on their door. It was winter and I was the only lodger. I burrowed into the bed, piling bedspreads on top of me. Where Istanbul had poked me with a cold finger, Konya embraced me with soft sheep-skin blankets. It was off-season and, like me, the town was sleepy. I learned to light the iron soba in the corner of my room without singeing my hair. The brothers who ran the lodge had a store nearby, filled with carpets, lamps, books, clothes, and prayer beads. In the back of the shop, there was always a soba glowing red and orange like a miniature sun. The sagging couch next to the soba was perfect for whiling away the afternoon reading.

Every now and then, the silence would be broken by Enis Abey, an old man from the neighborhood who would stop at the shop to warm his hands at the soba. Enis Abey adopted me. Though we couldn't speak more than two or

three words in each other's languages, he would gather me on his walk through the town to go pluck some grass at the graveyards or to buy burek from the bazaar. Or we would share the sagging couch and Enis Abey would sing ilahis in his tender quavering voice.

I stopped counting the days I was spending in Konya. My days moved to the soft rhythm of an ilahi. I slept in, stopped by the store, and went on walks around Konya. The sun set early and the city was dark by four o'clock. In the afternoons, I returned to my room to write for four or five hours. Despite how little I did, there was so much to write about: The bazaar, with its maze of little shops selling oranges and jewelry and pistachios and steel locks and plastic buckets. The cemetery, where Enis Abey wept each time as he said goodbye, again, to long-gone friends and family and teachers. And the quiet centuries-old silence of Rumi's tomb.

The very next year, UNESCO would confirm the "Mevlevi Sema ceremony" of Turkey to be one of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. When I returned to Konya several years later, the softness of the historic quarter was gone. The bazaar in front of Rumi's tomb where I bought bureks for dinner every day was replaced by a mega parking lot. So many of the tiny stores whose vendors entertained me out of sheer boredom had disappeared. One of those was Mehmet, who ran a carpet store behind the bazaar.

I met Mehmet on my second or third day in Konya. Mehmet had a store full of carpets but very little interest

in selling them. All day he sat on a pile of carpets and conversed with whoever stopped by. We smoked my cigarettes and drank his apple tea, and he told me about the peasant women in Antalya who wove carpets from dawn to dusk and the U.S. soldiers from the nearby NATO base who came to check out his carpets.

It struck me as an incongruous detail back then—the soldiers shopping for souvenirs. The kind of detail whose jagged contours didn't quite fit the story I was trying to find in Konya. But years later, it fell into place, like a missing piece in a jigsaw puzzle, when I came across the word *militourism* in the poet Teresia Teaiwa's essay about how colonial forces were instrumental in constructing the Pacific islands as tourist paradises. Teaiwa describes how U.S. military and paramilitary forces circle the Pacific Ocean, ensuring the smooth running of the tourist industry, which returns the favor by helping to disguise the colonial and neocolonial aspirations of those forces. This symbiosis takes on many different shapes, from soldiers on R and R to tourists visiting war sites. Turkey too has its share of world-war sites, and many of the Australian backpackers I met in the hostel in Istanbul were heading to Gallipoli, the site of a major failed Allied campaign. The Gallipoli campaign marked Australia's entry into the war and is deeply embedded in Australia's national mythology. And, certainly, it helps that Lonely Planet, which is headquartered in Australia, has marked out Gallipoli as a must-see site.

"Where are you from?" Mehmet asked me the first time we met.

“Hindistan,” I said, using the Turkish word for India.

“But you don’t live in Hindistan,” Mehmet guessed.

“How do you know?” I asked.

“Because you are traveling around. Only Americans, British, Australians, and Japanese travel.” He ticked off the nationalities on his fingers.

In my first year in graduate school, I attended a job talk by a travel videographer who wanted to hire a crew for making travel documentaries. At some point his PowerPoint presentation delved into the travel habits of different demographics. “Europeans travel in August,” “cruises are for retired Americans,” “families with children rarely travel for more than a week,” etc. And then he put on the final slide, the punch line: “People from the Third World do not travel; they immigrate.”

Having spent a good many days of my life at various consulates, persuading visa officials that I did not wish to immigrate, merely to travel, I was especially stung by that. But when Mehmet said the same thing, I started laughing. He was not mocking me. Brown people like him and me did not fit the stereotype of the tourist. We were supposed to be the local color, the carpet sellers and flower vendors and guest-house keepers. I thought then of Megan, her energy that confounded me, her easy charm with strangers, her ability to condense entire countries into crisp little sentences. How intrepid you are as a traveler depends, at least partly, on how entitled you feel to travel. On whether there’s an army base nearby with soldiers from your country. On whether guidebooks are written to ease your path through the world.

I did not feel entitled to global travel in the same way that Megan did. The world did not feel mine. And as much as I resented the easy confidence with which Megan and the many white backpackers I had met on travels like these moved through the world, I could not resent them. I mean I could, but it felt false. Here I was traveling by myself, safe and sound and happy in a place I had dreamed about. I felt like fortune's spoiled child to be held in Konya's warm embrace. Besides, I knew that Megan's travels were not as easy as they looked. I knew she too felt the immense loneliness and wariness of women traveling solo, the way dangers seemed to lurk everywhere. It wasn't Megan's fault that I did not feel entitled to the world. And perhaps the word *fault* and the hermeneutics of faulting is the wrong way to approach this inequity. I did not want to feel entitled to the world. I did not want guidebooks to center me and my point of view. What kind of a way is that to get to know the places we go to? I did not want the invisible privileges that put a veil between me and the world.

We are primed to think of lack of privilege as a deficit. And of course it is that, in many big and small ways dictated by structural inequalities. But the more we think of it as a hole, the less whole we become. It is as if there are privilege-shaped holes in our selves—here is the hole where your white privilege should be, here is the hole where your straight privilege should be, here is the hole where your male privilege should be, here is where your able privilege should be, here is where your class privilege should be, here, here, here, and so on until some of us are mostly made of

holes. But what if, instead of being a hole in the self, lack of privilege is more of a crack through which the light gets in? A third eye that reveals the magic-mushroom hybridity of the world we live in?

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There's an Agatha Christie novel, published in 1944, about a woman called Joan Scudamore who has to spend a miserable week by herself waiting for a train at the Iraq border. Joan is a smug, middle-aged English woman whose world has revolved around her comfortable and respectable life with her lawyer husband and three children. After visiting her daughter and son-in-law in Baghdad, where the couple are part of the British colonial machinery, on her way back, Joan gets stuck in a rest house just outside the Turkish border because of bad weather. She is all alone and, while waiting for the next train, she reluctantly takes long walks in the desert every day. Little gestures and overheard conversations come back to her. Slowly, it dawns on her that she has bulldozed everyone in her life into living on her terms. Using all the marvelous skills that helped her create tight mystery plots, Christie creates a fascinating psychological novel with an unreliable narrator who becomes more reliable as she sits in the desert thinking about her life: the husband who she forced into a job he hated; her daughter who chose a husband in Baghdad because she wanted to get away from Joan's meddling; various friends that Joan considers condescendingly but then realizes they pity her loneliness.