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Community fashioning

Political ethics and Shi'i clerical training in Lebanon

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Abstract

In the shari'a seminaries (*hawza*) of South Beirut, young Shi'i Muslims articulate a notion of ethics that is realized in and through collective life. Classes on ethics (*akhlaq*) help them reweave the moral fabric of their neighborhoods by addressing volatile public situations, correcting improper conduct, and emulating virtuous figures. The concerns that animate these classes, and the practices of caretaking shaped therein, illuminate the political work that ethical action can achieve. Understanding how future clerics learn to fashion their community (and themselves) requires a theorization of subject formation that moves beyond conventional views of the self and that enables us to approach the public atmosphere as an ethical force. For this, a powerful starting point is offered by the tradition of political ethics as elaborated in the writings of Antonio Gramsci, Simone Weil, and others.

KEYWORDS

collective care, ethics, exemplarity, Islam, Lebanon, moral advice, politics, subject formation

Those who desire to treat politics and morals apart from one another will never understand either.

Rousseau (1963, p. 572)

Of all the courses I completed in Shi'i Islamic seminaries, those on ethics were by far the hardest to follow. Since the 11th century, these seminaries (*hawzat*; sing. *hawza*) have prepared pious and industrious young men to guide the faithful on the divinely ordained path called the shari'a. To this day, enrollees are trained in the classical disciplines of logic, grammar, and rhetoric, as well as in jurisprudence, hermeneutics, and ethics. This time-honored curriculum is designed to equip future clerics with the erudition and sensibility required to communicate the living precepts that make up the shari'a tradition (Litvak, 1998; Mottahedeh, 1985). Seminarians begin by learning to read Islam's scriptures. In advanced classes, they learn to interpret these scriptures in order to address the queries and concerns of fellow Muslims. While all these classes are dense and demanding, the classes on ethics (*akhlaq*) are especially difficult because they hardly seem to be about ethics. These classes deal with an eclectic array of concerns (street fights, sectarian hatred, and public criticism) that shape the students' daily landscape, but that are only obliquely related to what is today understood as ethics in most quarters of the human sciences.

Demand for this kind of moral training has surged among ordinary Shi'i Lebanese in the last three decades. A rarity 50 years ago, about 10 *hawza* seminaries now cohabit in Beirut's southern suburb alone, including two branches for women (Abisaab, 2006; Landry, 2016; Mervin, 2003). Throughout 2012 and 2013, I attended the daily classes offered in the oldest of Lebanon's contemporary Shi'i seminaries, the Islamic Legal Institute (Ma'had al-shar'i al-islami, henceforth Ma'had).[1]

The teachers and students who accepted me in their midst insisted that I approach shari'a training holistically. On their advice, I began research by joining the ranks of the incoming cohort over four months. Thereafter, I advanced to a higher level of instruction every two months.[2] This immersion in Shi'i higher learning also brought me to the students' residences and the surrounding mosques, cafés, and bookstores, where some of my classmates found it easier to articulate the concerns and aspirations that drove their participation in shari'a training. What follows stems from these conversations as well as my participation in daily classes, especially those on ethics.

I focus on the ethics classes because they help reopen the question of what human beings seek to achieve through the kind of work they describe as ethical. Toward what sorts of ends is an ethics oriented? Ethical work is often said to involve the subject's subjectivity (Foucault, 1985; Hadot, 2004), and Shi'i clerical training offers no evidence to the contrary. The aims that *hawza* seminarians pursue through ethics, however, go far

beyond the fashioning of a subjectivity: ethics is the idiom in which they imagine the future of their neighborhoods, problematize shared living conditions, and rethink how they inhabit the world together. Ethics, for them, is realized in and through collective life. Its main target is the *bi'a* (the communal environment), a term to which I will return repeatedly throughout this article. Classes on the topic thus offer an ideal site on which to further develop a point that a few anthropologists have raised (e.g., Deeb, 2009; Hirschkind, 2006; Mahmood, 2005) but that has remained undertheorized: that many ethical practices that involve remaking the self also aim at rebuilding a sound communal life. These practices, which I call practices of *community fashioning*, raise crucial questions about the political work carried out through ethical action—and they provide us with new avenues for understanding the political.

In pursuing these questions, I find it helpful to bring together recent anthropological contributions on ethics and Islam, as well as what several theorists call the tradition of "political ethics." First established by Wolin (2006) and further developed by Vázquez-Arroyo (2016), the notion of *political ethics* weaves together the efforts of Antonio Gramsci, Simone Weil, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Bertolt Brecht (among others) to conceptualize ethics as a collective endeavor (Buey, 2015, esp. chap. 2; Myers, 2013). Anthropologists are not unfamiliar with these important figures of modern thought. Seldom, however, do they mobilize their work to reflect on questions of morality and ethics. This article does not attempt to stabilize this rich and long-standing tradition into a single framework. I draw more explicitly on the writings of Gramsci (1971) and Weil (1952, 1958) because they illuminate my classmates' commitment from a perspective that helps us reframe some of the questions animating the anthropological study of ethics. The article concludes by reconsidering the Foucauldian analytics underpinning much of this literature.

"CASH, BIG CARS, AND PRESTIGE"

On any given weekday, around 6:30 a.m., one can see young men negotiate a maze of narrow streets to reach the modest pink building that houses the Ma'had. Well-groomed, dressed in casual yet professional attire (white shirt, dark pants, black leather shoes), they arrive on foot and often only half awake: classes begin at 7 a.m. Over the next hours, seminarians take lessons on logic, rhetoric, ethics, grammar, or jurisprudence. Some come from a clerical lineage; the vast majority grew up in working-class families and received only secular schooling. Their ages range from 20 to 40 years old, and the Ma'had hosts about 100 of them each year. Alms and donations cover their tuition, board, and living expenses—making shari'a training a rare form of free education in Lebanon. At 11 a.m., when classes end, this all-male student body spills out in various directions. A few leave for the workplace, while some go to fulfill obligations at other learning institutions (e.g., universities, colleges, professional schools). Most stay; they spend their afternoon working out the lessons of the day in the library or under the walnut trees of the front garden.

These young men joined the Ma'had to become jurists (*fuqaha'*) or generalist scholars (*'ulema*). But only a fifth of them complete the entire curriculum, which lasts nine years in theory but in most cases extends over decades. Some promising minds choose to sharpen their skills abroad, most commonly in the prestigious seminaries of Qom, Iran, or Najaf, Iraq. Those staying in Lebanon often get hired to teach classes on religion in elementary and secondary schools. Many find employment in Islamic social institutions, occupying positions that require a familiarity with classic shari'a texts (Clarke, 2018a). A fraction serve as religious judges in state-sponsored Shi'i family courts.[3]

During the time I spent among *hawza* seminarians, however, I came to understand that their daily involvement with the shari'a tradition is driven less by career aspirations than by serious worries about the moral conditions in which their fellow Lebanese live. In the last three decades, Shi'i Lebanon has become a prime location to study contemporary Islamic revivals. Several neighborhoods, such as Beirut's southern suburb, have indeed seen religious symbols, slogans, and social services flourish in their streets since the late 1980s. Many anthropologists got acquainted with South Beirut through the ethnographic work of Deeb (2006), who showed us that these public practices of religiosity have fostered a new sense of piety among Shi'i Lebanese (see also Harb, 2010; Shaery-Eisenlohr, 2008). Banners and posters featuring Islamic iconography remain ubiquitous, and various kinds of religious welfare organizations have continued to develop (Abisaab & Abisaab, 2014; Clarke, 2018b; Deeb & Harb, 2013). None of the seminarians with whom I worked downplay the significance of these recent developments; they all recognize that these "markers of public piety" (Deeb, 2006, p. 31) shaped their own trajectories as well as those of friends and family members.

Many, however, argue that these symbols and slogans also conceal a shared moral misery. I was often taken aback by how harshly my classmates judged their living environment. Their grievances involve complex notions (e.g., consumerism, clientelism, sectarianism), but they broadly assert that the prevailing moral, political, and material conditions of today's Lebanon make it hard to lead a proper Muslim life. Some trace this predicament back to the 15-year civil war (1975–90), which cleaved the country along sectarian lines and sparked internal tensions that threaten to ignite new conflicts. Others argue that the neoliberal reconstruction of the country (1990–present) has exacerbated social inequalities and led many to devote their lives solely to the pursuit of wealth. A few also deplore the way that Shi'i political parties have drifted into patronage politics.

Though varied, the bulk of their concern revolves around what they call the *bi'a*—a concept that anchors their approach to ethics but that they (like most Lebanese) struggle to define. *Hawza* scholars and seminarians often use the word *bi'a* to describe the environment, climate, or atmosphere they share with neighbors, workmates, and others. Rarely, however, do they delimit the *bi'a*. Many associate it with Beirut's southern suburb, but some maintain that it involves the whole country, if not the region. Deeb's (2006, p. 223) Shi'i interlocutors also find themselves unable to circumscribe the *bi'a*, but claim to "inhale [it] from their surroundings." The *bi'a* is not an Islamic concept, however: non-Muslim Lebanese mobilize it too, when justifying their preference for a particular neighborhood over

another, for instance. Those interviewed by Bou Akar (2018, p. 21) also wrestle with the term, but they tend to perceive it as a "natural environment" that suits some Lebanese and not others. They conceive the *bi'a* as an ecological habitat, which, when carefully chosen, contributes to the moral welfare and prosperity of their inhabitants.

While my classmates also understand the *bi'a* as a shared environment, this environment is far from natural in their view: rather, it is made and unmade by human actions. Often associated with the physical space of the street, the *bi'a* is referred to as a moral atmosphere that emerges between individuals. It is shaped by the set of concerns, commitments, and influences that bind them and thus constitutes what Manoukian (2019, p. 212) calls an "impersonal force" that structures the way we inhabit the world. Embedded in my interlocutor's use of the term *bi'a* is what I call a community, namely an unstable complex of collective life sustained by routine activity, public situations, and reciprocal obligations. In Lebanon, such community sometimes overlaps with other frames of belonging, such as the sect (*ta'ifa*) or the nation (*watan*). The communities that *hawza* seminarians articulate through the notion of *bi'a* nonetheless differ from these institutionalized entities in that they do not presuppose religious homogeneity or policed borders.[4] Instead, they emerge out of ordinary encounters, mutual commitments, and a sense of interdependency.

Most of my classmates, however, hold that the *bi'a* is profoundly "corrupted" (*fasid*) today. Underlying their concern for the *bi'a* is the contention, also articulated by Weil (1952, 1958), that human beings draw a large share of their ethical life from the collective wholes of which they form a part. A community, writes Weil (1952, p. 7), "contains food" for the living as well as for those who are about to come into the world (see also p. 40). A great many seminarians regard their community's moral food as junk or spoiled. Such a view cannot be subsumed under Durkheim's (1925) notion that society is the source of all morality. It will soon become clear that the aspiring clerics with whom I worked recognize and emphasize the role of individual agency. But they do insist that shared living conditions shape how one's moral character develops and endures. Like Weil (1952, p. 2), they consider their ethical life fundamentally "rooted" in the current state of their communities. What brings these young men to class day after day, then, is not only career prospects or a thirst for knowledge, but also a desire to facilitate a certain kind of moral flourishing by establishing its appropriate context—or more precisely, its appropriate *bi'a*.

"Unfortunately, for us everything around here is about cash, big cars, and prestige," laments Hassan, a shari'a scholar in his late 50s.[5] "This environment [*bi'a*]," he continues, "is wrong. It is detrimental to seminarians, as it is to all of us." Concerns for the *bi'a* also regularly arose in my long conversations with Hussein, an advanced student and talented soccer player. One day, as we were chatting in the seminary library, he pointed out that the atmosphere of unbridled greed, which in his view permeates Lebanon, often obstructs people's attempts to accord their daily life with the moral teachings of the Islamic tradition.

> The priority [of most people] here is to earn a lot of money. […] So money becomes the way people judge and assess each other. If you have a penny, you're worth a penny. If you have a hundred pennies, you're worth a hundred pennies. If you don't have a penny, you're nothing. Your human qualities, as a result, have no meaning here—especially in a society already torn by sectarianism, wars, and the worship of appearances [*'ibadat al-mazhar*].

Such bleak assessments are not exclusive to shari'a trainees: those familiar with Lebanon have heard them in every corner of the country (Baumann, 2016; Hermez, 2015; Traboulsi, 2014). Unlike most activists and social critics, however, *hawza* seminarians do not confront these patterns of discrimination by calling for a more capacious state (in contrast to actors noted in other accounts of activism, e.g., Karam, 2006; Mikdashi, 2014). My classmates were not instinctively hostile toward state institutions; some actually maintained relationships with political parties in government at the time. Yet the forms of political engagement they develop together do not prioritize the state as a vehicle of change. "Contemporary problems," a seminary's director once told me, "should not be left to politicians only; *hawza* scholars must also provide adequate responses to them." Along similar lines, seminarians also stress that their aim is not to establish an Islamic regime or to Islamize Lebanon's religiously plural society, but more simply to enact a communal climate (a *bi'a*) that helps Lebanese lead a good Muslim life.

What distinguishes seminarians from most critics and activists, therefore, is not only their conceptualization of the *bi'a* but also their attempt to reshape it through shari'a training. Consider, for instance, the remarks of Arif, a fourth-year student who also held a part-time job at a cell phone store:

> No one in this country can justify the socioeconomic plunder, the bribery, the corruption. But in a capitalist system, once you find a way to evade state law [*qanun*], you can keep doing business as usual. There is no such escape in Islam: God keeps you accountable. Today, with a good lawyer, you can escape the judicial system [*qada'*]. This is not possible in Islam. No one can escape God.

From Arif's perspective, the shari'a (as an embodiment of God's will) can cure some of the political ills that plague the *bi'a*. The task of a *hawza* scholar, he adds, is to disclose the will of God and to make it known as widely as possible. I noted above that seminarians learn to extrapolate from Islam's scriptures a framework of rules and precepts (*fiqh*) meant to help Muslims navigate the challenges of contemporary life. Like many of his classmates, Arif conceptualizes this erudite process of ethical and legal elaboration (*ijtihad*) as a means to tackle some of the country's most severe problems. Like the Moroccan imam with whom Pandolfo (2018, p. 263) held a decade-long conversation, seminarians aspire to find in the shari'a tradition solutions to individual worries, as well as a "mode of collective therapeutics whose larger scope is to heal the heart of the community."

These high hopes must give us pause, however. Do these clerics in the making really think that (re)interpreting shari'a

suffices to cure Lebanon of some of its most deeply engrained ills, such as clientelism and sectarianism? More importantly: in a polity composed of religious minorities, in a country a third of whose citizens are non-Muslims, is it not quixotic to anchor one's aspirations in the Shi'i tradition? The enthusiasm of some novice seminarians aside, those who train them know very well that shari'a scholarship carries only limited weight in contemporary Lebanon. They are also aware that only a handful of seminarians can attain the level of proficiency required to derive shari'a rules.

From the teachers' perspective, then, clerics do not forge better communities only through scriptural hermeneutics; they do so more frequently through well-executed practices of pastoral care. *Hawza* seminarians are indeed regularly solicited by family members, friends, and others to resolve moral quandaries or to dispel doubts about the correct performance of the prayer, the ablutions, and the Ramadan fast (Abisaab & Abisaab, 2014, pp. 191–93; Deeb, 2006, pp. 125–27). My classmates were always proud to report that they were emerging as authorities on Islam outside the *hawza*: that they helped their neighbors prepare for the pilgrimage or understand the necessity of almsgiving (*zakat*), or that they answered queries about the permissibility of emerging practices and technologies, ranging from assisted reproduction to the use of nail polish (Clarke, 2009, pp. 125–33; Deeb & Harb, 2013, pp. 76–84).

Aspiring clerics, however, do not only answer queries. The teachers expect them to intervene in situations in which they are not directly solicited, but in which their help is nonetheless needed. Convincing someone to refuse bribes, stop gambling, or quit hashish; encouraging people to share their wealth, forgive a neighbor's offense, or seek knowledge—these tasks, through which clerics attempt to heal the *bi'a*, often demand more than interpretive skills. Clerics do ground their advice in the Islamic tradition, but delivering it rightly and ensuring that it is correctly received also requires well-honed interpersonal aptitudes. Students develop some of these aptitudes through the one-on-one relationship they cultivate with their teachers. Shi'i seminaries also encompass several pedagogical spaces (designed or impromptu) meant to teach the nuts and bolts of pastoral care: a classroom discussion about how to reprimand a parent or correct a friend, for instance, may interrupt a grammar lesson. But such questions are most often taken up in ethics classes.

POLITICAL OBJECTS OF ETHICAL CARE

Classes on ethics (*akhlaq*) meet once a week, in relatively large and austere classrooms. As in courses on grammar, logic, and jurisprudence, teachers address the next generation of clerics as "brothers" from behind a wide Formica desk, often standing in front of a whiteboard riveted to the building's concrete wall. Classrooms accommodate 25 to 30 pupils, all seated behind twin wooden desks arranged in rows. Students come to class equipped with the required textbook, *Mirror for the Integrity of Conduct* (*Mir'at al-rashad*), and often with prayer beads they fidget with throughout the 45-minute lessons. Ethics classes are complemented by weekly courses on Judaism and Christianity, which also touch on questions of morality and pastoral care.

While courses on Judaism and Christianity are relatively new and exclusive to Lebanese seminaries, those on ethics have been a staple of *hawza* instruction since the mid-19th century and probably earlier (Taromi-Rad, 2012). And yet many incoming students are skeptical at the prospect of studying ethics in a classroom. "You can study [ethics] very hard, memorize the entire textbook, but would this really make you a better person?" says Ibrahim, a first-year student. "One becomes patient, just, or courageous," he adds, "not by studying theories but by carrying out specific deeds in specific circumstances." *Hawza* teachers would not contest his view. Those lecturing on logic, rhetoric, grammar, or jurisprudence confront the challenge disclosed by Ibrahim's question by making good use of moral quandaries arising within the seminary itself. It is common to see a lesson on logic, rhetoric, or jurisprudence interrupted by discussions about a seminarian's complacent attitude or the moral implications of cigarette smoking. In this sense, ethics lessons regularly exceed the limits of their topic.

Those teaching the weekly ethics classes tackle the challenge by building their lessons around concrete public situations to which clerics are vocationally compelled to respond. In this way, their approach differs from the pedagogy privileged in other classes: teachers of logic, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), grammar, or hermeneutics occasionally refer to real-life situations, but these courses most often revolve around elaborate treatises and their most authoritative commentaries. In ethics lessons, by contrast, teachers rarely even mention the short and rather elementary textbook that seminarians nonetheless keep close at hand. References to the vast Islamic literature on morality are also rare.[6] Seminarians get to study this literature in advanced classes on moral philosophy (*falsafat al-akhlaq*), which also cover the writings of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill. In classes on ethics, teachers invite their students to revisit familiar scenes, which, upon examination, raise uneasy questions: What should be done when a conflict erupts in the street? What is the best response to a sectarian provocation? How should one admonish a person whom one has never met before? To the few seminarians who lost touch with the streets of South Beirut after becoming absorbed by the complex Shi'i shari'a literature, these lessons are wake-up calls. Consider, for instance, the complex scene that Sheikh Ja'far, a teacher, reconstructed in class:

> I went to Hay el-Sellom [a densely populated area of South Beirut] yesterday. It was terrible, complete chaos [*fawda*]. It seems that we do not know how to behave with one another in the street. The only thing we are capable of is yelling at each other. And I am not talking about the problem of traffic here. I am talking about street ethics. We must learn how to inhabit the street. We must learn to share the space. But where do we start? How do we respond to this chaos? As *hawza* students, you are responsible for sharing the true Islam [*al-Islam al-sahih*]. […] You know Hay el-Sellom, you know how chaotic that neighborhood can be. How do you intervene in such a place?

Attending *hawza* classes on ethics, I was often struck by how little consideration teachers give to personal dilemmas, moral breakdowns, and other subjective experiences. These questions are not entirely left out, but the teacher likes to draw the students' attention away from themselves. Lessons typically focus on situations that corrode the *bi'a* of the neighborhoods that seminarians reside in or pass through. In the above excerpt, Sheikh Ja'far is concerned with an observed inability to share common spaces. He remarks that this inability gives rise to selfish and aggressive conduct (e.g., yelling, fighting) and generates a moral condition (chaos) that is fundamentally incompatible with the teachings of Islam. The scene weaves together several dimensions of urban life in post–civil war Beirut (e.g., insecurity, unequal mobility, and the privatization of space), dimensions that owe a great deal to the lack of public investment in Lebanon's popular quarters (Davidson & Das, 2011; Monroe, 2016).

Yet, without excusing the state's inaction, Sheikh Ja'far pushes the conversation in a different direction. He invites seminarians to conceptualize street life not only as a force that shapes one's behavior but also as an object of ethical care in its own right. "Our responsibility," the sheikh observes, "is to make our community more ethical [*akhlaqiyya*]. This is how we serve people." Displaying exemplary conduct is one of the ways clerics carry out this responsibility, but in the teachers' view, this tactic is often insufficient. In class, teachers often stress that repairing and strengthening the moral fabric of their community also requires that seminarians intervene in the community; they must learn to address (and hopefully redress) corrosive situations such as those discussed in class. In the excerpt quoted above, Sheikh Ja'far closed his remarks by asking students how they would interrupt in the chaotic scene he depicted: "How do you intervene in such a place?" Sheikh Ayoub, another teacher of ethics, more explicitly encourages seminarians to open up conversations with those displaying (or praising) harmful conduct. "You must talk to people," he explains to the 24 students attending his class. "When you see bad behaviors, you should go see those who are responsible for these behaviors and talk to them."

These remarks may give the impression that Shi'i seminarians are trained to patrol the streets and interpellate wrongdoers. Several forms of ethical engagement that teachers call for are indeed prompted by the morally damaging scenes they described in class. It would be a mistake, however, to think that future clerics simply learn to police prejudicial behaviors. In this last excerpt, Sheikh Ayoub urges his students to counsel those who insult neighbors, abuse alcohol, or sell drugs, for instance. But to durably transform the moral atmosphere (*bi'a*), he adds, these direct engagements should accomplish more than only rectifying a deleterious public situation. They should ideally compel (and prepare) lay members of the community to tackle these situations by themselves. What *hawza* seminarians learn to develop, in other words, is not so much the legitimacy to discipline individual conduct, but rather the ability to make wrongful behaviors a matter of collective care.

But not all seminarians, I must say, are enthused by the forms of engagement that their teachers call for. Most agree that the scenes reconstructed in class are morally damaging and unfortunately all too familiar. But the way they grapple with the teachers' questions often betrays a deep discomfort with meddling in other people's lives and conflicts. While they all take pride in answering their coreligionists' questions about the practice of Islam, many of them dislike the prospect of interposing themselves between strangers. Some rightly note that this type of involvement cuts across the public-private distinction that structures countless aspects of their lives (Joseph, 1997). Others suggest that leading by example or acting as role model is a smoother way to redress disruptive and injurious public situations. Teachers, meanwhile, do not underestimate the impact of these strategies, but they nonetheless maintain that clerics must also engage in direct, sometimes corrective, interactions.

In classrooms, corrective interactions are often discussed as *nasiha* (advice). In Islamic terminology, the word *nasiha* (pl. *nasa'ih*) describes an attempt to rectify the conduct of fellow Muslims and invite them to cultivate virtues internal to the shari'a tradition (Asad, 1993, 2015; Belal, 2012; Laroui, 1977). Sheikh Ja'far and other teachers of ethics remark that these forms of advice, when adequately dispensed, can help keep people from behaving in ways that erode their communities' moral foundations. Undertaking *nasiha* is in this sense a practice of ethical care. But unlike many other ethical practices studied by anthropologists in recent years (e.g., praying, deliberating, accounting for oneself), its object is not a self, nor even a group of selves. What seminarians ultimately aim at is the *bi'a*: rectifying individual conduct is, for them, a way to repair and strengthen the moral atmosphere that shapes how they and others inhabit the community.

In the Islamic tradition, however, clerics are not the only ones tasked with the duty of offering *nasiha*. As Asad (2015, p. 177) notes, the practice of *nasiha* follows from the more comprehensive responsibility of commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong (*al-amr bi'l-ma'ruf wa'l-nahy 'an al-munkar*), which has traditionally been "diffused among all Muslims in relation to one another" (see also Abisaab & Abisaab, 2014, p. 169; Agrama, 2012, pp. 45–64; Cook, 2004, pp. 77–79; Mahmood, 2005, pp. 57–72). But if *nasiha* is everyone's responsibility, then why are *hawza* teachers insisting on making it a component of clerical training? Are Shi'i clerics trying to bring this practice of moral criticism under their control?

Not quite. While *hawza* teachers do like to lecture on the moral role of clerics, I never heard them describe *nasiha* as their exclusive domain. They often repeat, however, that it is a highly delicate endeavor to address someone else's gambling problem, profit-seeking tendencies, or marital affairs, an endeavor whose apt performance hinges on particular virtues. Asad (1993, p. 218) himself notes that the ability to offer rightful and impactful moral criticism largely depends on one's "mode of engagement." Friendship is for Asad (2015, p. 178) the cardinal virtue that ought to orient one's engagement with wrongful behaviors: undertaking *nasiha*, he writes, involves "speaking to those whose behavior one wants to change in the way one would speak to a friend."

Hawza scholars would agree, but they would stress that the capacity to treat erring strangers as friends is not widely held in Lebanon today. "The only thing we are capable of is yelling at

each other," Sheikh Ja'far told his class. Providing constructive moral criticism (*naqd banaa'*) is, in his view, a skill that must be learned, and urgently so. Training future clerics to offer shari'a-based advice with tact and kindness is, for him and other *hawza* teachers, a way to transfer to other community members the skills and sensibilities required to address detrimental behaviors and thereby help improve the *bi'a*.

Together, these vignettes from ethics class illustrate the kinds of communities that future clerics envision and the role that the *bi'a* plays in them. Individual virtues and forms of human excellence (MacIntyre, 1984) are, as we will soon see, central to the "street ethics" that *hawza* scholars call for. But what these young clerics learn to cultivate is more than a sum of virtuous subjects. A good community, in their view, is bounded not only by an ideal of moral perfection but also by a shared set of concerns and aspirations. In her ethnographic study, Deeb (2006, pp. 7–9) uses the term *piety* to describe new concerns and aspirations emerging among Shi'i Lebanese (see also Mahmood, 2005, pp. 122–31).

The communities my classmates are trying to forge are, in this sense, pious communities. Yet they approach piety (*taqwa*) as a relationship to God as well as a relationship to the world. A community, for them, becomes pious not only through worship but also by developing a shared sense of responsibility (*maousoulia*) over the everyday actions, attitudes, and situations that shape the *bi'a*. Since the *bi'a* nourishes the moral life of a community, it is also what a good community must be concerned about.

In this way, *hawza* classes bring a fresh ethnographic perspective to anthropological debates on morality and ethics. A line of criticism emerging both from within and outside this literature claims that current anthropological approaches show little or no consideration for politics (Geuss, 2005; Kapferer & Gold, 2018; Myers, 2013). Part of this criticism is overstated. If politics is not one of the main categories around which anthropological work on ethics and morality revolves today, key contributions to the field have nonetheless examined situations in which ethics help justify political and violent action (Fassin, 2013; Ticktin, 2006). The role that moral imperatives play in fostering political activism has also received significant ethnographic attention in recent years (Kelly, 2018; Wright, 2016, 2018; Zigon, 2014, 2018).[7] We should also remember Hirschkind's (2006) influential analysis, which, more than a decade ago, showed that the ethical discipline underlying the production and audition of Islamic sermons fosters a politics of public deliberation in contemporary Egypt. Finally, Mahmood's (2005, p. 35) *Politics of Piety* argued that the political efficacy of Islamic movements is "a function of the work they perform in the ethical realm" (see also Landry, 2020).

Several concepts and practices that constitute *hawza* training deepen the perspective opened by these contributions and help forge a new approach to the political significance of ethical action. The very concept of *bi'a* (which underpins the training of Shi'i seminarians) implies that the project of healing a community necessitates joint efforts of ethical care. And as I argued above, this shared human environment seminarians call the *bi'a* is the primary object of this work of care—they lead ethical lives by trying to improve the *bi'a*.

The thinkers who developed the tradition of political ethics are helpful here: their work enables us to appreciate how my interlocutors' understanding of ethics resonates far beyond Shi'i Lebanon. Gramsci (1971, p. 360), for instance, writes that "ethical improvement" always occurs through "an activity directed outward, modifying external relations [with] other men, in the various social circles in which one lives." And Weil (1952, p. 40) describes ethical action as a shared obligation directed at the "moral atmosphere" of the community. The writings of Gramsci and Weil respond to different concerns, challenges, and situations. They do not mention consumerism or clientelism. Still, in theorizing the ethical as a collective undertaking, they invite us to navigate the ethnographic intersections of ethics and politics in ways left unexplored by Aristotelianism, poststructuralism, and other frameworks so far used by anthropologists.

Navigating in these ways requires us to ask what kinds of aspirations a given ethical practice or project seeks to achieve. The young men enrolled at the Ma'had are subjecting themselves to the rigors of shari'a training to rebuild their community apart from the atmosphere of greed and indifference that, in their view, pervades Lebanon. Yet *hawza* classes do not teach them to mobilize laws, state policies, or other nation-building measures. Instead, they help them develop practices of ethical care meant to anchor communal life on mutual concerns, reciprocal obligations, and a shared sense of the common good.

None of these practices of care can be described as political in any institutional sense. And yet the purpose they seek to achieve seems to be that of the political itself: to establish the conditions under which human collectivities can best flourish qua collectivities.[8] Ethics, for these *hawza* seminarians, does not only orient, shape, or interrupt politics. It is politics pursued by other means. Ethics is the toolbox with which they confront chronic political ills (sectarianism, growing wealth disparities, and ensuing social tensions), a task that, according to the seminary's director, should not "be left to politicians only." In articulating the political hopes that animate their efforts, my classmates disclose a dimension of ethics that often remains implicit in anthropological work—namely, the horizon of shared ambitions and expectations that inform many (if not most) ethical practices.

ETHICS AS A VOCATION

Hawza teachers often stress that one develops the capacity to criticize and improve the conduct of others by cultivating a set of virtues (*fada'il*), as in the following lesson excerpt:

> When you want to criticize or correct a person, you must first remain very humble. Some students think that because they study in a *hawza*, they know everything. They become arrogant. But learning, instead, should make you humbler. You should realize that your knowledge is very limited, and often weak. Think about the life of the imams, the Fifth Imam in particular. The Fifth Imam had a lot to teach the people of his time, [but] he never

> treated people with contempt or disrespect. You find in his life a model for how to correct other people's behavior.

Underlying these remarks is the teacher's awareness that the erudition seminarians develop sometimes turns into a vice: arrogance. Future clerics do indeed get drawn into selfish quarrels in trying to correct each other. Throughout my forays into South Beirut with them, I noticed that some of them talk and behave as though they are high-profile Islamic authorities with little to learn. But Sheikh Ayoub attempts not only to fix an in-house problem here but also to gesture at the kind of subject formation presupposed by *hawza* ethics. Notice how Sheikh Ayoub approaches the cultivation of moral virtues (here, humility; in other classes, courage and patience); he does so as both a personal endeavor and as an effort to forge morally engaged communities. "In the [Lebanese] pious Shi'i context," Deeb (2009, p. 251) observes, "personal progress and societal progress are inextricably linked to one another, with the accumulation of good deeds (e.g., personal progress) leading to community welfare and communal progress." The question that Deeb leaves open here is *how* the projects of cultivating a subjectivity and cultivating a community are linked—a question into which the trajectories of *hawza* students provide a rare window.

A productive entry point to the process of subject formation underlying *hawza* training is the distinction teachers draw between two facets of shari'a studies: *ta'lim* and *tarbiya*. The first term (*ta'lim*) designates the process of instruction. Sheikh Hussein, the Ma'had's most senior cleric, described it as the operation by which the human mind acquires knowledge through reason, logic, and arguments. In an Islamic seminary, *ta'lim* indexes the learning of *ijtihad*: the operation of deriving shari'a precepts from scriptural sources. *Hawza* teachers, however, bind this first mode of knowledge to a second one (*tarbiya*), which they characterize as cultivating moral dispositions traveling across generations through the emulation and assimilation of exemplary conducts. Hence, while *ta'lim* denotes the erudition seminarians develop as they advance in the curriculum, *tarbiya* concerns their mode of being, as reflected in the way they engage with others.

I already noted that many seminarians regard their behaviors as leverage to move fellow Lebanese toward commendable forms of conduct. The English phrase *leading by example* captures how they envision this ethical work; yet it conceals the complex process of subject formation involved in repeated practices of exemplarity. Landmark contributions to the anthropology of ethics have rightfully emphasized that moral subjects often take shape by emulating exemplars drawn from a tradition or embodied by present-day figures (Bandak, 2015; Coleman, 2009; Deeb, 2009; Humphrey, 2005). In *hawza* seminaries, the language of exemplarity helps students clarify how the work they perform on themselves enables them to tackle the attitudes and behaviors that undermine the moral climate (*bi'a*) of their communities. How they approach the set of tasks that exemplarity entails helps bring into view the "ethico-political" force that exemplary conduct carries (Gramsci, 1971, p. 167; see also Ferrara, 2008).[9]

Hawza enrollees advance in what teachers call *tarbiya* by studying and memorizing the life stories of exemplary Islamic figures. Classes on Islamic history (*tarikh*) and biographies (*sira*) help them succeed in this endeavor. Classes on ethics fulfill a different purpose. As noted above, they approach these moral characters (e.g., the Fifth Imam) as windows through which to reflect on concrete situations, especially those requiring seminarians to engage with the erring conduct of people whom they do not know personally. Classrooms are not, however, the only venue wherein seminarians learn to emulate exemplary figures. Another is the mentoring relationships that seminarians develop with the scholars and teachers who train them. Take the case of Arif, a fifth-year seminarian who fled the Syrian war and resettled in South Beirut:

> You progress [in *hawza* training] by embodying [*tajassud*] the lessons one by one. But to do so, you need to model yourself on the clerics who teach us. We all have our preferences when it comes to teachers, but all of them are exemplars [*qudwa*]. As students, we need to be inspired by them. We are affected by the conduct of our teachers. We memorize and reflect on what they say and do in order to transmit that to other people in society or around us.

Compared to advanced seminarians like Arif, novices tend to have a more practical understanding of the character-building aspect of what their teachers call *tarbiya*. They are often struck by the imprint that *hawza* studies leave on their own self-conception. One of them is Muhammad, a seminarian living part-time at his parents' farm close to the Syrian border. After class one day, he shared with me a glimpse of his trajectory.

> Not so long ago, I used to crank up loud music in my car and cruise around wearing shorts and tank tops. I wanted to be *cool* [in English], you know. I wanted to become a DJ. Although I learned a lot about Islam here, when I look back, I think it is more my attitude that changed since I joined the *hawza*. I dress differently, for instance. My moral standards are also much higher. Now, in all that I do, I try to behave like a cleric—and not like a DJ. […] I look at the world differently today, and the people [*al-nas*] look at me differently too. They know I'm a seminarian.

On first reading, these stories may come across as conventional accounts of self-fashioning. But there is more to them than that. Note, first, that Arif and Muhammad articulate their efforts to achieve exemplarity with a concern for the collective wholes to which they belong. These collective wholes are also inhabited by many individuals whom seminarians do not know but who nonetheless look to them for guidance. So far, I have approached these entities as communities nourished by what my classmates call a *bi'a* and harmed by the scenarios their teachers often depict in ethics classes. To help their communities address the social ills precipitating these situations, and to

foster new ways of relating to one another, *hawza* seminarians and scholars have developed a political ethics, which, I argued above, often requires them to formulate moral advice or offer corrective criticism (*nasiha*).

Words are not the only channel for moral advice, however. Lessons, as Arif notes, can also be embodied. Like Muhammad and other seminarians, Arif approaches the cultivation of exemplary conduct (*tarbiya*) as another way to move community members toward praiseworthy modes of acting and to instill in them a sense of responsibility toward their collective future. This mode of pastoral care requires that *hawza* seminarians develop a particular form of subjectivity; they must emerge as living vehicles of the Islamic ethical tradition. Arif conveys this notion by describing clerics as "exemplars." By forging themselves into exemplary characters, he suggests, well-trained clerics come to carry practical lessons with their lives, thereby helping transform their communities on ethical grounds.

Anthropologists interested in exemplarity and exemplification have often approached these processes as a medium of self-formation. Humphrey (2005, p. 43), for instance, has described exemplarity as "one of the most fundamental ways of cultivating the self" (see also Coleman, 2009). *Hawza* seminarians would not disagree, but they would also stress that the ethical work of exemplarity rarely ends in the self. No one can be exemplary in isolation. Practices, conducts, and forms of life become exemplary only insofar as they radiate outward and inspire emulation. Leading by example, like offering sound moral advice (*nasiha*), requires one to work on oneself. But the ultimate purpose of these ethical practices (what Foucauldians call their telos) lies beyond one's subjectivity; it encompasses the life of the community as a whole, its challenges and ambitions. An advanced seminarian named Hadi put it best. We learn to work on ourselves, he told me, to provide "practical models of living for those with whom we live." Like Arif, Muhammad, and other seminarians, Hadi ties self-fashioning with another process that concerns his community's ethicopolitical infrastructure, and for this reason might be termed "community fashioning."

Hawza training, we might therefore say, presupposes and produces a particular kind of subject: one for whom cultivating a self is always also a way of cultivating a community—and vice versa. This conceptualization of subject formation echoes a contention shared by Gramsci (1971, pp. 352–53) and Weil (1952, p. 40) that the self is not an inner realm but rather a hub that can be improved only insofar as one transforms the set of relationships that make up the self. The notion is also implicit in my classmates' conceptualization of the *bi'a* as a shared climate shaping one's moral trajectory. It is therefore unsurprising to hear teachers draw on the concept of *bi'a* to articulate this particular understanding of the ethical subject in class. Sheikh Ali, a cleric trained in Iraq, never misses an opportunity to remind his students that each of them is a "son of the environment" (*ibn al-bi'a*).

The reference to the family (son), however, sometimes leads students to interpret the phrase to mean that children resemble their parents. One day, the sheikh corrected a student who had used this phrasing to argue that children of pious families pray more regularly. The teacher nodded, but immediately added that the *bi'a* encompasses much more than the family. That everyone is a "son of the environment" means, he clarified, "that the public atmosphere [*munakh 'am*] orients how self-cultivation [*tarbiya al-nafs*] happens."

With these words, Sheikh Ali drives home a point that this article has emphasized—that one's ethical character might be forged through self-practices, but it never emerges in a vacuum. Teachers and seminarians maintain that it also grows out of the communal ties that bind people together. Ethics classes are entirely structured around this point: their focus on public situations and challenges becomes intelligible only insofar as the ethical is conceptualized as a collective endeavor. But this conceptualization of ethics exceeds the classes devoted to this question. It provides us with a framework to approach shari'a training itself: *hawza* seminarians come to inhabit and achieve the vocation of a cleric by shaping their milieus into better moral homes. Here as elsewhere, the care of the self and the care of the community cannot be easily separated.

AFTER THE SELF

Over the last two decades, subjectivity has taken center stage in the anthropology of ethics. This particular interest in the self and its constitutive practices responds to a widespread disagreement with Durkheim's (1925) assertion that moral life is an unmediated reflection of a society's rules (Laidlaw, 2002; Zigon, 2007). The focus on self-practices was also conceptually informed by the late writings of Foucault, who, in the words of two influential contributors to the field, "dethroned Durkheim as the central voice informing current discussions of morality and ethics" (Mattingly & Throop, 2018, p. 481). Thematizing ethics through the prism of the self enabled anthropologists to raise difficult questions about freedom, agency, and authority (Agrama, 2012; Laidlaw, 2014; Mahmood, 2005). It also sparked important theoretical conversations across different branches of philosophy, linguistics, and psychology (Faubion, 2011; Keane, 2016; Lambek, 2010; Mattingly, 2014; Throop, 2014). Together, these conversations help lay the groundwork for what some have begun to call the new anthropology of ethics (Clarke, 2018a; Robbins, 2016).

In this article, I have sought to push the ethnographic study of ethics in a different direction. By homing in on contemporary shari'a training, I have brought into relief a conception of ethics that transcends the register of the self and finds its ultimate horizon in collective life. I have argued that the practices that seminarians learn in *hawza* classes on ethics (e.g., advice giving, exemplarity) are meant to establish a moral climate that facilitates communal flourishing. This is not to suggest that scholars should ignore questions of subjectivity and subject formation. Rather, we should recognize that practices of self-cultivation are often part of a larger array of ethical endeavors oriented toward simultaneously improving the self and the community. Once we conceptualize ethics as equally concerned with collective life as with the self, then practices of ethical care become a critical entry point to study the political. Developing this approach, however, involves critically revising Foucault's influential conception of ethics.

In the second volume of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1985) draws from the ancients a framework that revolutionized

the study of ethics. Key to this framework is the Aristotelian notion of telos, which he translates as the "goal" (*accomplissement*) toward which every moral action tends (p. 28). My analysis of *hawza* training also puts considerable emphasis on the goals, aims, and aspirations that one seeks to realize through ethical means. The kinds of aspirations driving my interlocutors' moral work, however, can only fall outside the Foucauldian framework—for Foucault reduces the telos of ethical action to a range of goals that are achieved *in* the subject, rather than in the world the subject inhabits. Such goals include a "more complete mastery of the self," a "radical detachment vis-à-vis the world," or a "perfect tranquility of the soul" (Foucault, 1985, pp. 27–28; see also Foucault, 1997). The self emerges from this solipsistic account not only as a site where ethical work is performed but also as the primary (if not the only) object of that very work.

The precedence given to intrasubjective achievements led classical philosopher Pierre Hadot to argue that Foucault's engagement with the ancients systematically excludes the repertoire of practices by which the "self situates itself in the totality and experiences itself as part of this totality" (Davidson 1994, p. 69). Drawing on Hadot's remarks and those of other critics, several scholars have declared that the world is absent from the Foucauldian ethical scene (Myers, 2013; Oksala, 2005). This claim is overstated, however, since it ignores Foucault's (2010, 2011) more recent writings on the interfaces between the care of the self and the government of others. It also overlooks the fact that the ancient practices described by Foucault were not invented by self-determining individuals but cultivated and transmitted through a shared environment, as anthropologist Faubion (2011) aptly noted.

But there is a key nuance here. In keeping with his treatment of the concept of telos, Foucault (1997, p. 287) insists that the care of the self is always "ethically prior" to any other forms of care. The care of the community, for instance, must not "be put before the care of the self," he maintains, for the relationship with oneself is always "prior" to relationships with others (Foucault, 1997). A long, rich tradition of anthropological scholarship has challenged the priority of the human self in its relationship with the whole (Leenhardt, 1979; Mauss, 1985; Strathern, 1990). Indebted to this legacy, but drawing more heavily on the tradition of political ethics, this article has tried to argue that anthropologists ought to pay attention to the political concerns and collective aspirations that drive ethical self-fashioning. Doing so will help open up new avenues for the anthropology of ethics—and for political anthropology as well.

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ENDNOTES

[1] First established on the eastern outskirts of Beirut in 1967, the Islamic Legal Institute relocated to the southern suburb during the civil war (1975–90; Clarke, 2018b; Mervin, 2003). There, it has served as the intellectual heart of an extensive network of social services (schools, orphanages, libraries, hospitals) developed by its founder, Muhammed Hussein Fadlallah (1935–2010).

[2] *Hawza* training comprises three stages. The first, called *al-muqaddimat* (preliminaries), focuses on the disciplines of grammar, logic, and Islamic jurisprudence. *Al-sutuh* (surfaces), the middle stage, leads seminarians to explore the gaps and ambiguities that plague the human understanding of the shari'a. Those who reach the third level, *bahth al-kharij* (externals), embark on an independent study, using the skills acquired during coursework (Abisaab, 2006; Fischer, 1980; Mottahedeh, 1985).

[3] In an article about another Lebanese Shi'i seminary, Abisaab (2006, pp. 233–34, 242–43) notes that *hawza* graduates find employment in the social services run by the Hezbollah movement. Clarke (2018a, pp. 266–72) and Deeb and Harb (2013, p. 78) describe the work that graduates perform in the religious and social institutions established by M. H. Fadlallah. Clarke (2018a, pp. 107–207) and Weiss (2010, pp. 157–85) focus on *hawza* graduates' work in Islam-based family law courts.

[4] While the Islamic tradition provides a frame for seminarians to reflect on their communities, the latter are also populated by Christians, non-Shi'i Muslims, and nonpracticing citizens. *Hawza* teachers often point out that classes on Christianity and Judaism are meant to help seminarians deal with the country's diversity of religious traditions.

[5] All names mentioned in this article are pseudonyms, with the exception of Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah.

[6] Almost all other *hawza* classes revolve around a scholarly treatise or an erudite set of texts. Many classes actually bear the name of the very text they propose to study. One advanced class on jurisprudence, for instance, is entitled "Al-lum'a," a direct reference to the jurisprudential treatise *Al-lum'a al-dimashqiyya*, on which it centers.

[7] Zigon (2018) has enriched our conceptual toolbox by approaching ethics as a motivational force for politics, and politics as a world-building activity. His theorization of the world enacted by anti-drug-war activists (as groundless and always open to the possibility of being otherwise), however, contrasts with the communities that my interlocutors seek to fashion. The ethical practices developed by *hawza* teachers and seminarians are not aimed at maintaining the world as open, but rather at making it a better home for cultivating virtues and forms of collective life grounded in the shari'a tradition.

[8] I am drawing here on an array of political theorists, ranging from Arendt (2005, pp. 93–153) to Wolin (2006, p. 598), who approach the political as the care of commonality (see also Brown, 2005, pp. 75–79; Myers, 2013, chap. 3; Vásquez-Arroyo, 2016).

[9] Wright's (2016, 2018) concept of "ethicopolitics" is reminiscent of Gramsci's notion of the "ethico-political." Wright, however, derives her conceptual framework from an entirely different body of work, namely the writings of Emmanuel Levinas. In accordance with Levinas, she advances an understanding of politics centered on the intersubjective relationship a subject develops with an Other (or a multiplicity of others). While Wright's efforts to

link ethics and politics are innovative and productive, this conceptualization of politics leaves little room to account for the forms of ethics underlying *hawza* training.

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FORUM: PASTORAL CARE IN WAR AND ITS AFTERMATHS: LEBANON

Dwelling as resistance, dwelling as repair

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I

At first glance, it seems like this forum's two articles share the same ethnographic setting, a nation-state, but inhabit different thematic and conceptual worlds. On the one hand, we have Khayyat's resistant ecologies of tobacco farmers and mine-evading goats surviving seasons of war; on the other, Landry's encounters with Shi'i seminarians deeply troubled by the moral misery encircling them. What could bring these together beside their common national setting? After all, one shouldn't mistake the locus of a work with its focus. Or at least that's what Geertz (1973, p. 22) cautioned us about half a century ago: "The locus of study is not the object of study," he proclaimed. "Anthropologists don't study villages (tribes, towns, neighborhoods …); they study *in* villages." So, are there threads that can connect a multispecies ethnography seeking to decolonize war with a work calling for stretching our understanding of ethics to encompass the political ethics of community fashioning? The short answer is yes. Beneath the different bodies of scholarly literatures the pieces draw on, and their distinct modalities of critical intervention (decolonizing for Khayyat and broadening for Landry), lies a pulsating subterranean vein connecting, irrigating, both of them. In a nutshell, both authors are, in their own different ways, preoccupied with the question of dwelling.

II

The southern borderline Lebanese villages have been the target of Israeli military attacks for decades. They were first occupied by Israel in 1978 before their final liberation in the spring of 2000. Khayyat conducted her fieldwork in the wake of liberation and the ravages of the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon. She relates how white phosphorous bombs injure Hussein, a shepherd who was out with his goats at pasture in the first hours of what later became known as the July War (2006). A few weeks later he dies from his wounds. The Israeli army, Khayyat alerts us, ended up dropping around 4.6 million cluster bombs—many of them from an expired stock of US leftovers from the war in Vietnam gifted to Israel—over residential and agricultural landscapes as the war's final cease-fire was being decided. In sowing the land with millions of small death-dealing devices, she notes, the Israeli army created a "rogue infrastructure" of death, which continued the war by other means in the wake of the official cessation of hostilities. Can fields be cultivated again? Can the animals return to their pastures? Can valleys, villages, and orchards remain habitable? Neither a romanticization of resilience nor an extension of trauma's domain, Khayyat's refined ethnographic attunement to life amid devastation discloses without pathos how a multispecies alliance renders war a habitable place.

Moreover, Khayyat pays attention to the question of ordinary dwelling amid brutal warfare, ruined battlegrounds, and landscapes sown with mines, and in doing so, she opens up a conceptual space that de-exceptionalizes war. While she does not understand war exclusively as an episode of extraordinary violence and annihilation, Khayyat is also careful not to fall into the trap of normalizing it. Her work also wrests the notion of resistance away from its usual association with the celebration of masculinist, heroic feats of military confrontation and the cortege of martyrs who fell combating the enemy. This heroic politics of purity is a common thread that connects otherwise ideologically divergent, and at times antagonistic, nationalist, leftist, and Islamist militant parties. Her protagonists do not fight. Their acts are not incorporated into ideological contraptions vying for hegemony in the name of resistance. Instead, they care. They care for their homes, their goats, their olive trees, their fruit orchards. Their unheroic and ordinary, everyday activities of care enable them to survive and at times flourish, even as they risk death by carrying on. Khayyat's ecologies of resistance bring out fully the Greek etymological roots of *ecology*: *oikos* (home, household). They also resonate deeply with Heidegger's meditation in "Building Dwelling Thinking": "The old word bauen [to build]," Heidegger (1993, p. 349) writes, "which says that man is insofar as he dwells, this word bauen, however, also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vein" (emphasis in the original). Through their ordinary acts of care, the southern villagers hold on to their land, rendering their environment habitable and enabling life to flourish. Ordinary dwelling in a landscape of war, a heroism without heroism, itself becomes an act of resistance.

III

If Khayyat discloses for us the assemblages involved in rendering devastated environments habitable again, Landry tracks the reasoning of Shi'i seminarians interested in rebuilding and repairing their corrupt environment (*bi'a*) to render it habitable for the flourishing of a proper Muslim communal life. In Khayyat's article, life, as both biology and biography, is attacked from the outside by Israeli military violence.[1] In Landry's, life, as both biography and community, is seen by seminarians to be threatened from the inside by the deep moral misery imbuing the environment. Central to the seminarians' worry about the corruption of their milieu is their view that an individual's ethical life depends on the communal whole. Life as biography is impossible without its environment qua shared communal life. The environment contains the food that will nourish and shape the individual's character.

The seminarian's ultimate goal, Landry argues, lies beyond correcting an individual's conduct, say, to advise someone to refrain from gambling or to stop using drugs. Piety for them is a matter that transcends the relationship of a subject to the tradition they inhabit. It, of course, includes practices of self-fashioning but branches outward to underscore a responsibility toward what is shared (*bi'a*). As a result, "the political project of building, or healing a community," Landry writes, "necessitates joint efforts of ethical care" (p. 175). Landry, like Khayyat, underscores that practices of care are central to the flourishing of life. The political in Landry's ethnography is the name of the repair work, healing work, building, and rebuilding that seminarians undertake as pastoral care of their communities. It is that work that renders communities fit for life, work that makes dwelling possible and is integral to maintaining it.

IV

The centrality of practices of pastoral care for life's flourishing, underscored in both articles, can be read as concrete, and intimate, responses to the abstract, distant forces that threaten these communities and that they have no control over. Faced with skies that rain white phosphorous projectiles and cluster bombs, the villagers assert their being through caring for their homes, orchards, and flocks. In the face of global neoliberal reforms, burning transnational consumerist desires, complicated political patronage systems, and the ever-looming specters of corruption, the seminarians are exhorted by their teachers to have face-to-face confrontations in their neighborhoods, broaching intimate, sensitive matters that cut across the public-private divide organizing lives. Dwelling both as resistance, and as repair work, is a local retaliation of sorts, albeit a limited (and limiting?) one, against much bigger forces that in their various ways disrupt life as biology, biography, and community.

Khayyat's and Landry's articles also trouble taken-for-granted markers of historical periodization. Whether through showing us how Israeli violence persists after the official cessation of hostilities in the mines-sown landscapes or alerting us to how one possible etiology of the current moral corruption lies in what took place during the Lebanese civil wars (1975–90), both articles complicate our understanding of the often-deployed designation "postwar Lebanon." How do we inhabit an aftermath of the Israeli wars on Lebanon, the articles nudge us to ask, and of the country's own civil wars, if the water from the falling rain carries mines along with it, shifting their locations seasonally, and if the atmosphere is saturated with sectarian tensions?

Last but not least, both articles throw a new light on familiar concepts that are often cornerstones of ideological projects. Khayyat gives us a different understanding of resistance, interrupting momentarily its pervasive understanding as military confrontation with the enemy. And Landry's work fleshes out an understanding of *bi'a* as a moral atmosphere, suspending its usual deployment as one way to circuitously address sectarian identification and the sectarianization of geography.[2] By subtly dislocating the all too familiar, the authors open up ways of glimpsing the political in the anthropology of Lebanon outside its established domains—at the crossroads of dwelling, care, and life.

ENDNOTES

[1] See Fassin's (2018) critical examination of life's many meanings, in particular its dual expression as both biology and biography.

[2] "Through my ethnographic engagement," Bou Akar (n.d.) says as she reflects on her work on urban planning, "I became more attuned to how the talk of sectarianism, sometimes by using words like *bi'a* in Arabic (environment), is critical to understanding the spatial production of Beirut's peripheries."

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FORUM: PASTORAL CARE IN WAR AND ITS AFTERMATHS: LEBANON

Resistant ecologies and the *bi'a* beyond methodological nationalism

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Reading Khayyat and Landry together as part of a forum has allowed me to reflect on how we come to circumscribe and produce knowledge. There is not much that connects goats, tobacco, and Shi'i seminaries other than the bordered space of Lebanon and the shared experience of "living-in" violence (Moghnieh, 2017). It is hard to imagine that seminarians of any faith in Palestine, Syria, or elsewhere in the Arab world would be paired with an article about survival amid the daily experiences of violence in South Lebanon. That would require a different politics, one that sees not only a shared identity but also a shared daily experience, a shared future, and an interconnecting present between people across colonially imposed borders. It would require us to move beyond methodological nationalism in the way we categorize experiences, find connections, and frame ideas.

My own work, which pushes us to see war beyond its usual hegemonic understanding and which attempts to decolonize war (I never thought to use this term in this context before Khayyat), is most similar to Khayyat's, so it is her analysis that first drew me in. Khayyat develops a notion of war as "a living environment, a lifeworld that necessitates a radical reliance on others" (p. 185), and one in which we can be attuned "to the bitterness of a lifeworld that is also lively and resistant" (p. 189). She takes South Lebanon as her field site to show how this is applied, and she observes people's relationship with the land and their environment to argue that these form "resistant ecologies" that give meaning to hardship and are part of how we should conceptualize all that goes on in a war zone. Outside methodological nationalism, one could connect this to Palestinian or Yemeni farming practices in war zones, or even to Qatar's immediate pivot to food security in the early precarious days when a blockade was imposed on it by several Arab countries. The point is that methodological nationalism allows us to connect her work with seminarians in Beirut while foreclosing the possibilities of connecting with sometimes more proximate communities in Palestine or Syria. In doing so, we remain circumscribed within colonial logics. This is, of course, not unique to this journal and not meant as an accusation. But I take it as an opportunity to challenge ourselves to step out of nationalist imaginaries.

Having said this, there are, of course, productive connections between these articles. The one I find most useful builds on Khayyat's resistant ecologies and Landry's *bi'a*, or communal environment, which together open a space to think of communities in crisis.

Khayyat calls on us to be attuned to the multispecies interactions that sustain the bread and butter of life. She may look at it in the South, but one can find all sorts of such interactions undergirding society. For Khayyat, these form what she calls *resistant ecologies* that sustain the lives of people at war. Using this as a starting point, I wonder if Landry's thinking of the *hawza* could benefit from reformulating the *bi'a* as an ecological community. Can we see the streets, not just the people in it, as part of the ethical community? The *bi'a* is both landscape and community. And while this is obvious in the rural lifeworlds of Khayyat's interlocutors, it might be useful to think along these lines to understand the relation between seminarians and their environment. Landry argues that "rectifying individual conduct is, for [the seminarians], a way to repair and strengthen this moral atmosphere that shapes how they and others inhabit the community" (p. 174). The seminarian's aim is the *bi'a*, as Landry puts it. In this ecology, might the *hawza* comprise a type of resistant ecology to the work of capitalism and ongoing effects of war?

I am struck by the similarity between Landry's seminarians who refer to the breakdown in morality in their *bi'a* and my own interlocutors, especially former militia fighters from a number of right-wing Christian armed groups during the 1975–90 war. In my case, former fighters told me they fought for family, for values, and in a sense for an ethical community (as they understood it), but today, all this has been lost in the pursuit of money, and they see the breakdown of the family and the ills that have seeped into their *bi'a*. My interlocutors felt betrayed or, at least, depressed by this phenomenon; it was a marker of a war they lost. On the other hand, Landry's interlocutors seemed to harbor hope that something could be saved in this modern condition, or crisis, of capitalism. Importantly, while I appreciate the way seminarians use the term *bi'a* in a way that does not "presuppose religious homogeneity" (p. 172), I feel the need to stress

the term's sectarian and racist undertones when it is used among others within the current borders of the Lebanese state.

Landry writes that for the seminarian "the political project of building or healing a community necessitates joint efforts of ethical care" (p. 175). We see the healing of a community and its survival in the way Khayyat's interlocutors care for and exist with the flora and fauna around them. For both Landry and Khayyat, then, we are confronted with how to understand our own subjective place within the world. Both authors get at the root of how subjectivity, agency, and, more broadly, the self are intimately connected with and find meaning in their shared life-world. "No one can be exemplary in isolation," Landry writes. He continues, "Practices, conducts, and forms of life become exemplary only inasmuch as they radiate outward and inspire emulation" (p. 177). Landry's seminarians are concerned with behavior that would make the *bi'a*, the communal environment, a more moral and, thus, more livable place. For Khayyat, people's place in the world and how they live provides a commentary on the notion of humanity. She challenges it as a ranking of life by attending to how people dwell in war and to how war is a condition that emerges "from the same social, political, economic, ecological processes that make 'our' peaceful worlds" (p. 185). The telos of ethical action, in Landry's case, or of ecological practices, in Khayyat's case, is connected to something larger and not about solely the self. In both cases, it is about the survival of a community. Perhaps it is more direct in Khayyat's work to see this survival as a survival of war, but it is the same for Landry's subjects, who live in the same field site just a few kilometers down the road and in most cases have homes in the South.

These two articles, together, allow us to see the power and importance of relationality, not simply as subsisting between people but as composing the threads of a total ecosystem, part of a resistant ecology that allows for lives in crisis to be lived securely. I simply hope we can step out of the boundaries of methodological nationalism to see how the lives and experiences of these people in the bounded space of the Lebanese state are intimately connected to goatherds, tobacco farmers, and seminarians across colonial borders and occupied geographies.

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FORUM: PASTORAL CARE IN WAR AND ITS AFTERMATHS: LEBANON

Ethnography, cacophony, and Lebanon as a zone of prestige in the anthropology of the Middle East

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> *Fieldwork on violence needs to take into consideration its knowledge practices and the ways in which violence is contained, produced and made sense of as normalized or traumatic. This I argue is a way to incorporate knowledge production of violence with the experiential that anthropology has privileged as a source of understanding suffering*.
>
> Moghnieh (2017, p. 35)

The work of Munira Khayyat and that of Jean-Michel Landry are brought together in this issue by ethnographic location: Lebanon, a country experiencing a groundswell of anthropological interest. As war, occupation, and authoritarianism have rendered Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Palestine, and Egypt increasingly dangerous, if not impossible, to research, Lebanon became a compelling field site for anthropology graduate students interested in the Middle East. Thus, in the anthropology of the region, Lebanon has perhaps emerged as a new "prestige zone" (Abu Lughod, 1989; Deeb & Winegar 2012). After all, war and violence are not just theoretical or ethnographic subjects; they are often the conditions of possibility, and impossibility, for funding, access, mobility, and academic knowledge production. Thus Lebanon, which for too long has been framed as politically, demographically, socially, and religiously exceptional in the region, came to stand in for it. And yet, as revealed in Khayyat's and Landry's work, "peace" and "stability" do not characterize Lebanon as a field site. As many anthropologists of Lebanon have reminded us (e.g., Al-Masri, 2017; Hage, 2015; Hermez, 2017; Mikdashi, 2022; Moghnieh, 2017; Peteet, 2005), and as the present state of the country teaches us, the temporality of violence is both historical and future oriented. It is as productive as it is destructive.

Both articles are set in areas of Lebanon coded, in Lebanon and outside it, as dominated by Hezbollah. In the 2006 war, Israel targeted both the southern suburbs of Beirut and the country's South, as it did and has done in many wars and skirmishes before and after that year. The targeting aims to inflict terror on a particular group of people, to shake political support, and to manifest the brutal, inevitable result of sectarian and classed residential separation in a divided city and country. Although Landry does not address the 2006 war and its effects on the seminary or seminarians, the lived reality of violence inescapably shapes both the communal environment (*bi'a*) that Landry is interested in and the resistant ecologies that Khayyat attends to. This lived reality exists at multiple scales: the local (crime, fights, exploitation), the national (civil war), the geopolitical (invasion, occupation, and war). Landry explores Shi'i seminaries and the teaching and practice of ethics as sites to reimagine the relationship between political ethics, subjectivity, and communal environments (see also Kassem, 2016, 2018). Khayyat reveals how resistant ecologies invite a reconceptualization of communities in which humans are not the sole actors but rather members of human-tobacco-goat collectives that create and sustain life in landscapes of war and destruction.

Khayyat and I share, with Al-Masri (2017, p. 46) and many others, a felt understanding of how "attention to the cumulative experience of living in war—be it one's own or another context—deepens a researcher's ability to discern war as a condition of living rather than an encountered event." Khayyat compellingly insists that we revisit life, space, and time as shared projects that humans never fully control. For example, the archives of the highest court were burned in a fire started by a mortar barrage during the Lebanese Civil War. Working in this archive, I came to view its lifeworld as an assemblage of people, objects, and infrastructure—all open to the reversals of time. A fire that began more than 40 years ago continues to burn in Lebanese jurisprudence. To understand how past wars continue to press into futures, just as future wars already shape our

present, we must appreciate the skill of Khayyat's goats in evading land mines. We must squint through the weak flashlight built into a lighter because on some days there was no electricity in the archive of the state's highest court. We must smell the burning of tobacco and legal files, and dwell in the multiplying relationships between the sensorial, the relational, and the temporal.

I am especially drawn to Landry's work, since he and I have both conducted research in religious institutions and their attendant court systems, both of which are largely worlds of men. Gender affects researchers' access to Islamic and Christian seminaries, just as it permeates the work and impact of these institutions in Lebanon and elsewhere. The Shi'i personal status courts, for example, staffed by male graduates of seminaries, are the site of women's opposition to and protest against what they consider punitive custody judgments and corruption in the courts' financial, political, and moral registers. Gender and gender relations are a fundamental part of the *bi'a* that seminarians emerge from, live in, and are concerned with, and we all will learn from Landry when he turns his sensitive ethnographic analysis to this fact.

Landry and I also share an interest in ethical practice. Many of my interlocuters, in part seeking to avert future wars, engaged in what I call *evangelical secularism*. That is, they sought to practice and cultivate an ethics, culture, and politics of anti-sectarianism. They wanted to reshape public space in ways that would allow different, secular forms of subjectivity to flourish. Many of them were queer, feminist, and anti-sectarian activists, and they shared several concerns with Landry's seminarians. Some of the seminarians and evangelical secularists live in the same neighborhoods and hail from the same families. And yet would these evangelical secularists and seminarians recognize themselves as allies in a joint struggle? Can the anthropology of religion and of secularism hold space for them as they are, living together and building—sometimes through friction—a communal environment? As I argued in my book (Mikdashi, 2022), secularism and religion are both embodied, communal, proselytizing, and ethical practices; they structurally and affectively contain each other. The seminarians and evangelical secularists share the desire to produce, embody, and model a lifeworld in which religion can be purified of "noise." Yet they differ on their visions of what kind of future and what new subjectivities, collectives, and environments these ethical practices should bring forth. This cacophony of desired futures is one of the soundtracks of Lebanon, and of ethnography in its best registers.

Writing this reflection from Beirut, in this quotidian temporal holding cell of political and economic implosion, I cannot help but wonder what kind of life multispecies networks are making possible—even if it is a bitter life, to paraphrase Khayyat. What are the assemblages that produce life, or perhaps cling to it, like barnacles on a capsized boat, as a regimen of daily survival? What are the codes of being stranded together in this forever temporary? Is steadfastness an ethical project, a communal environment that is cultivated in times of war, peace, *and* paralysis? What new understandings of violence, itself just another word for life, will emerge from this collective, cacophonous experience?

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FORUM: PASTORAL CARE IN WAR AND ITS AFTERMATHS: LEBANON

Beware the bad shepherd

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I write this commentary in and from Beirut, where for 10 years I have been teaching anthropology to Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian students. Lebanon is also where I have conducted research for 20 years, with Palestinian refugees in the camps of Tyre from 2003 to 2009, and more recently on animal-human communication in Bedouin arts of shepherding in the Beqaa Valley and the highlands of Mount Lebanon. Writing this commentary from Lebanon, I am also writing it from a place of rage and grief.

Why the rage, and at what? As with any rage, it is difficult to convey in words. It will emerge, I hope, in the filigree of this commentary. The rage is directed neither at Landry nor Khayyat. Their articles are significant additions and contributions to the anthropology of Lebanon. To readers who do not know much about the country, they will provide grounded, often beautiful ethnographies—different versions, too—of the extraordinary *endurance* of ordinary Lebanese women and men who live, strive to persevere, and even flourish in a place where life, we often hear these days, has become impossible. To readers who practice anthropology in and from Lebanon, readers like my colleagues, our students, and myself, both pieces give space to breathe and ideas to think with. This is a precious gift when there is also a form of despair in the air that can infect and freeze the mind. The juxtaposition of the two pieces in the same issue of *AE* forces us to consider how our anthropological understandings of ecology, politics (including war), and ethics are being reshuffled at the margins in zones of accumulated and protracted crisis. It is an urgent and important question, and one that is relevant to many other current contexts of life beyond Lebanon.

Reflecting already in 1968 on processes driving the world toward global (ecological) catastrophe, Bateson (1972, p. 451) wrote pithily of "man's habit of changing his environment rather than changing himself." Landry's classmates in the *hawza* in the southern suburbs of Beirut want to change their environment rather than change themselves. In this case, it is their *social* environment they want to change. More accurately, they are young puritans who do not *just* want to change themselves and cultivate pious selves, as we might assume or expect from ethnographies of Islamic ethics in about 2005–10. They hold that human beings draw their ethical life from collective life, they hold that their life environment is corrupt, and they aspire to change their environment so that people can change themselves. Landry demonstrates how such a formation of ethics is also inevitably a politics, one that shortcuts the state as the obligatory locus and vehicle of social change.

Is it unfair of me to say that it makes them young "puritans"? I use the word provocatively and sympathetically at once, again after Bateson (1972, p. 482), to speak of an attitude of fierce disappointment and spite toward "the big structures of life that seem to have carried the lunacy." Landry himself tells us that he "was often taken aback by how harshly [his] classmates judged" the environment in which they live in Lebanon, and the pathologies this environment accumulated over time and history. He gives us an ethnography of how such disappointment and spite gets channeled at the *hawza* into a pedagogy of what he calls, after Foucault (2009), "pastoral care." His classmates are trained to be good shepherds of sorts, precisely caring for each individual soul *and* all of them *at once, omnes et singulatim*, in a manner that foregrounds *nasiha*, a gentle practice of the "conduct of the conduct" of others through something akin to a friend's advice.

As I read Landry's piece in my office in Beirut, my foremost concern is the extent to which these young shepherds might not be mistaking their flock for what they call "the environment." Any literal shepherd, including the Bedouin shepherds I work with, would tell you that it is a dangerous mistake to make. The flock surely is a milieu you want and have to shape for the long-term well-being of all the animals in it. But the arts of good shepherding do not stop here. You also have to take into careful consideration the ecosystem in which the flock is embedded and from which it draws its sustenance. Landry observes that his interlocutors at the *hawza* "rarely … delimit where the *bi'a* begins and ends." Many Lebanese people located outside this ethical-political project wonder about just that. They worry that this indeterminacy is, today, a significant barrier to building a larger collective life from which more flourishing ways of living in Lebanon could be drawn for all. Does *al-bi'a* include LGBTIQ+ subjects, for example, and the ever-threatened niches (another ecological metaphor) they strive to maintain for themselves in Lebanon? Would it include the women and men who flooded public squares all

over the country for weeks in fall 2019, at the rallying cry of *kulhen ya'ni kulhen* (all of them means all of them), that is, all of them are corrupt and must go, including Hezbollah and its secretary-general, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah? As far as I can see, such choices and ways of being largely exclude you from the "collective life" authorized in the formation of ethics that Landry documents and analyzes at the current historical juncture. Such and other choices make you lose your place in the flock, put you beyond the scope of pastoral care. Could they ever be recognized, then, and even cared for, as parts of the larger environment from which this formation of ethics *also* draws its sustenance? What would such a recognition, and care, look like, from within this formation of ethics?

Khayyat's piece, by contrast, is about changing oneself rather than changing one's environment. She writes the stories of women and men who have adjusted to living in the landscape of war that took hold over decades in southern Lebanon's border zone. Their environment is contaminated, horrifically, with land mines and cluster bombs that the Israeli military planted and spread over successive brutal invasions—and they trace stubborn lifeways through it, in alliances with *Capra hircus* and *Nicotiana tabacum*. In telling the stories of their lives, Khayyat forcefully argues that *we* (anthropologists) must also change ourselves (our habituated modes of description, analysis, and interpretation) when entering long landscapes of war at the periphery. She writes *against* puritanism: a discrete but entrenched puritanism that has made it hard for anthropologists to observe, theorize, and even celebrate that life in its multifarious forms and assemblages "exists with," and we could add within, "war's lethality." Such a project, of course, entails a high tolerance for, even a cultivation of, what a puritanical attitude loathes and seeks to escape or expel: ambivalence, ambiguity, paradox. And it entails a demanding mode of writing that channels such qualities of life itself rather than ridding the text of them.

Why the rage, then, and the grief that I also mentioned at the onset of this piece? One way to put it is to say that the Lebanon Landry and Khayyat write about does not exist any longer. You do not have to take my word for it. Ask anybody in Lebanon now, and they will tell you that Lebanon circa 2005–15, the period under focus in the two pieces, is a thing of the past. What separates the present from this past is *al-inhiyar* (the Collapse), a word that has become ubiquitous in everyday speech and a self-evident time marker, now, for people to speak of and periodize their individual and collective lives. As an event, the Collapse is both an incorporeal cut in time—an immaterial line that separates and keeps apart a before and an after in lives—and a hardy, fleshy, weighty matter of an awful sort.

One figure of it is the Beirut port explosion on August 4, 2020. This explosion killed hundreds, maimed thousands, left hundreds of thousands homeless, and upset and deranged many minds, mine included, in sticky, insidious ways active to this day. Yet the port explosion, however shocking and devastating, is not to be confused with the Collapse. The Collapse is bigger, larger, and deeper than the explosion, and it predates the explosion as a way of naming the present. The Collapse began in the summer of 2019, when Lebanon plunged into a vertiginous depression that continues to amplify to this day. I cannot retell here in details the making of this economic catastrophe. The World Bank (2022) describes it as resulting from a "public Ponzi scheme," carried out by the banking and financial sectors in collusion with Lebanon's political elite. The reader should know that this elite includes, in a key role, Hezbollah, the strongest party in Lebanon for years, and an active member of every government since 2005. Readers should know, too, that Hezbollah is the same political, military, and pastoral power that controls the areas and social worlds Landry and Khayyat write about, and that authorizes which activities and pursuits—agricultural, ethical, or otherwise—can take place in them, and which cannot.

The Collapse is hardly hyperbole, and it is very concrete. For example, if you had the equivalent of US$10,000 at the bank in September 2019, maybe for your retirement savings or a medical emergency, you now have US$130 at the time of this writing, probably even less as you're reading it. This also kills and maims and deranges the mind. It does so more slowly and silently than an explosion, but on a scale that by now very probably exceeds by orders of magnitude what happened on August 4 at the port. In my once-upscale neighborhood in Beirut, bodies themselves have changed visibly. We can be certain that the Collapse has reached the women and men we read about in Landry's and Khayyat's pieces, and it has transformed their lives in hard, profound, painful ways. The comments I offer are, inevitably, written from the other side of the Collapse and at the same time from within it.

In such a context, Khayyat's stirring ethnography of multispecies dwelling in the wreckage of war at the southern borderland comes for me as a gift at a critical time. As a teacher, I cannot overstate how hard a pursuit anthropology has become for the students who practice it in and from Lebanon. Producing ethnography of the Collapse is a critical task, but the demands and constraints and worries of life amid the Collapse consume everyone's energy, time, and psychic space—yours and that of the people you work with. Your anthropological *illusio* (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 66–67), often a fragile thing in the first place, gets battered every day. More insidiously, it has become very hard to "look very hard at those things which you choose to look at" ethnographically.[1] The Collapse has come fast and hard; transformed most lives in radical, painful ways; and everywhere you look, something will confirm a sense in yourself that in Lebanon, Bateson's "big structures of life" have indeed carried and continue to "carry a lunacy." This is a sense hard to find in yourself every day without flights of despair, denial, or other forms of fancy. They can color how and even what you see and don't see, and I will use Khayyat's piece with my students as a precious template and compass for what it means to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016) in our ethnographies in and of Lebanon in very troubled times. I do wonder how they will react to it and to some of Khayyat's choices of phrasing. The Collapse has made them, and many like them, fussy about how to speak of Lebanon. Last year, for example, a protest arose on social media against continuing to call the Lebanese people "resilient" as a matter of routine. "Resistance" will appeal to many of them, I suspect, because it wrests this label away from Hezbollah who claims to

monopolize it. Will they agree with Khayyat that humans actually "thrive" in this blasted landscape? I, for one, cannot read her piece without being lastingly haunted by the stories of Hussein, Ali, and his father, Abu Nimr, the three shepherds who met horrific deaths in July 2006, November 2005, and July 2017 simply for grazing their goats.

Life in Lebanon, as in many other devastated places at the current historical juncture, entails feeling the embrace, day in, day out, of what Das (2007) calls skepticism; what the Islamic tradition calls *fasaad* (corruption), as well as *fitna* (Pandolfo, 1997, pp. 156–62); what Bateson (1972, 1979) calls variously schismogenesis, double bind, insanity, tears in the pattern that connects; and perhaps even what Freud called the death drive. All these notions, of course, are not equivalent, nor will all of us find them equally satisfying, useful, or analytically acceptable. What they do have in common is an effort to name, at various scales, an elusive, deadly processual element that, through various pathways, lodges itself in, and takes hold of, a system or organization of life. They also all entail theories, implicit or explicit, of how this death-driving processual element may accumulate in the life system in such a way that it spoils and defeats the efforts of those who maintain it—when it does not come to lodge itself *in* these very efforts. The rage I acknowledged at the beginning of this commentary is shared by many in Lebanon, and it no doubt has to do with the helplessness one feels, when one feels caught in a life environment that is itself caught in such a process.

As anthropologists, Landry and Khayyat engage Lebanon in quite different terms, and in terms quite different from those I just outlined. Could it be, though, that their two pieces, and their juxtaposition in *AE*, also speak subterraneanly to the making of the Collapse? A mysterious bridge allows our thoughts to circulate between these two very different pieces, one that has to do with pastoral care and its meaning(s) in contemporary Lebanon. I say bridge, but in this case the bridge is really more like a Möbius strip. In fall 2022, I taught a course called "Religion and Society" for anthropology and Islamic studies students at the American University of Beirut. I had taught this class before, but for the first time I decided to include in our readings the lectures that Foucault (2009, pp. 115–226) devoted specifically to "pastoral power" in the course he gave at the Collège de France in February–March 1978. The title for Foucault's course that year was "Security, Territory, Population," and the lectures on pastoral power took place simultaneously with the beginnings of anti-shah protests, led by the students of Qom seminaries, in Iran. While I did think that the content of these lectures was directly relevant to the work we had to do in our course, including them in our syllabus was partly selfish: I had been doing research with Bedouin shepherds and their flocks in the highlands of Lebanon, I was trying to write about this research, and I felt that I needed to know better what Foucault had written on pastoral power.

Needless to say, we do not learn much from Foucault about actual sheep, goats, and flocks in these lectures: his interest is in the long history of the relation between shepherd and flock as the master metaphor for thinking and organizing the "government of men" in the Christian pastorate, and its slow transformations into modern governmentality. In these lectures, Foucault (2009, pp. 128, 170–71) highlights a central motif in the pastorate, that of the shepherd who is "prepared to die to save his sheep." I wrote earlier that I found myself haunted by Khayyat's stories of Hussein, Ali, and his father, Abu Nimr. This is probably because I imagine Hussein, Ali, and Abu Nimr as having had much in common with the Lebanese shepherds I know—and also because the shepherd dying to save one goat was hitherto for me only a metaphor interesting to Foucault. Perhaps the shepherd must be prepared to die to save his animals, but it has probably long been true that real shepherds hardly ever do—unless, that is, their craft has to go on within a particular, late-modern kind of "wreckage," as for Khayyat's friends in the borderland.

Reading Landry's and Khayyat's pieces alongside each other, both of which attend to "pastoral care," I was unprepared for the uncanny collapse of this metaphor into its referent. Perhaps I should have been. One is reminded here of Haudricourt's (1962) work on domestication and his claim that it is in fact animals and their ways that provided humans with fundamental, concrete schemes to organize and represent to themselves their own selves and social relations (only a civilization of shepherds and flocks, Haudricourt thought, could have come up with the ontology of monotheism and the political theologies it enabled). Is this collapse of the metaphoric into the referent an accident, born out of the juxtaposition of Landry's and Khayyat's ethnographies? Or is it not mere happenstance, and there is a lesson to learn from it?

We cannot know for certain. But for someone reading these articles amid the Collapse, there is an almost uncontrollable impulse to look for *some* clues in Landry's and Khayyat's pieces about how the Collapse could happen, or signals that it had long been underway. For Foucault, there was great significance in the elevation of the motif of the shepherd ready to die for his flock and its reversibility into the sacrifice of the flock; it spoke to a death-driven element lodged firmly in the deep recesses of pastoral power.[2] Actual goats, as a rule, do not require their shepherds to actually die for them. "Pastoral care," by contrast, always got its fundamental orientation from the afterlife as the flock's final destination. Foucault strongly suggested, in his 1978 lectures, that this sacrificial, death-driven element belonged in the genealogy of biopower, and had moved into biopower when the modern state overtook pastoral power in the West sometime in the 18th century. More recently, Asad (2007) made a similar argument, though in a more sustained fashion. The argument has been fundamental for understanding how the politics of life in the Global North translate into protracted landscapes of death in the periphery, including Lebanon. But it can also make anthropologists reluctant to truly grapple with the otherworldly orientation of forms of pastoral care flourishing at the periphery, and with their long-term political effects. Pastoral care can and does veer into its own necropolitics. There is no doubt that the Collapse of Lebanon is the making of postwar neoliberalism, entrenched sectarianism, and other forms of corruption that Landry's classmates at the *hawza* abhor. And the making of the Collapse cannot be understood without reference to the larger regional environment, starting with a settler-colonial state at the southern border and its decades-long, deadly encroachments into Lebanon. But the

making of the Collapse also *has* something to do with the power of a movement that infuses politics with the conduct of souls to the afterlife. In a minefield, beware the bad shepherd.

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ENDNOTES

[1] "Looking very hard at those things which you choose to look at" is a definition Bateson (1972, p. 47) proposed, half in jest, for what "being objective" means, but it captures equally well the spirit of ethnography.

[2] "The second form of the paradox of the shepherd is the problem of the sacrifice of the shepherd for his flock, the sacrifice of himself for the whole of his flock, and the sacrifice of the whole of his flock for each of the sheep" (Foucault, 2009, p. 128).

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FORUM: PASTORAL CARE IN WAR AND ITS AFTERMATHS: LEBANON

Ethics as ecology, ecology as ethics

Lessons from Lebanon for an anthropology of life against the nation-state grain

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To think with Lebanese Shi'i seminarians and farmers—or in the authors' words, with human plus environmental elements—is to highlight opportunities for learning anthropology from this nook of "our shared humanity, our collective vulnerability, our complicity," as Khayyat (p. 185) movingly writes. Moreover, doing so with the emphasis on sharedness—embedded in the very term on which both authors alight, *bi'a*—casts floodlights on the nook's nodality: its relevance for telling us about the many lives and lifeworlds to which it somehow connects. Yet, lest Lebanon mean merely a launching pad for backflipping to more "central," "pressing," or "relevant" nooks, we must clarify whose problems the two pieces address. Both texts partly yet probingly concern themselves with refining disciplinarian issues—What are ethics? How to analyze war? Whose existential quandaries hang in that balance? Landry's pen pointedly gouges Foucauldian ethics but leaves untouched the lessons of holistic study with hawza seminarians. (We never stray far from the classroom or pedagogical training, despite a promise to follow the seminarians widely.) A university professor who teaches introductory anthropology as regularly as advanced fieldwork methodology, I appreciate that the potential gains of these two articles far surpass their theoretical refinement.

Bi'a connects the two articles, describing an "ecological habitat" for Landry (p. 172) and a "resistant ecology of survival" for Khayyat (p. 184). The notion impels grappling with encompassment that has no entrance or exit point, no determining walls. For ethnographies of Lebanon, the dominant divisions and tensions historically invoked strife between the nation-state and religion/sects. To briefly summarize, ethnographic interest rushed to the country with modernization theory (to cite only anglophone scholarship: Ayoub, 1965; Fuller, 1970; Gilsenan, 1996; Gulick, 1955; Joseph, 1975; Khuri, 1990; Peters, 1963). Analyzing the nation-state's successes and failures, anthropologists in this era produced studies of shifting identitarian poles amid urbanization and adaptation.[1] By contrast, the many faceted and illimitable bi'a, a Maussian total social fact, allows the sociocultural theorist to avoid narrowing the focus to "individual agency" and ideal Kantian subjecthood.[2] Such expansion of scope supported Mauss's (1990, p. 78) demand that interwar "French" society recognize its indebtedness to its colonies, one of which (not incidentally) was Lebanon. Indeed, the term bi'a readily helps people from all walks of Lebanese life invoke their embeddedness in agencies that not only shape and surpass them but also remain implicitly vulnerable to them. Both texts, thus, give life to the sense of inescapable implicatedness. Or, inverted, generalized receptivity and reciprocity.

Yet where the description of this ontological, cosmological condition lapses into "no choice" (Khayyat, p. 189), I fear it misses the array of stakes ethnographic interlocutors articulate in their vocation to live and pursue a certain kind of life. What should, or could, we learn from *their* denial of the polarity between life and death, war and peace, humans and animals? It strikes me that so many of Khayyat's sentences commence in "life" only to collapse into "death" (or vice versa). Given this inseparability, textually enacted in such revolving yet riveting prose, why distinguish "life" and "death" at all? Whose terms must we reenact to make an argument? Or is this the unexpected truth of the total social fact? I pause to note ironically that Khayyat's highly affective writing style does not theorize her interlocutors' affective lives, by which I mean their imparting (trans-)bodily wisdom: my heart cannot but throb with Abu Nimr and Ali's repeated rushing toward their imperiled herd. Yet what becomes of their insistence on perceptual, multispecies, cosmological wisdom? Can we fully consider the immense work they put into distinguishing death from life? Or do they propose, as they enact, another ontology?

Likewise, Landry's methodology palpates the negative contours of (Lebanese) citizenship and astutely harkens to seminarians' concerns, aspirations, ambivalences. This ethnographic attention to attention provides methodological appreciation for the interlocutors' comprehensive and antagonistic project to live with and through moral-material demands. Yet Landry takes for granted their sense of bi'a as "the community," and he interprets "the Islamic ethical tradition" monolithically; in doing so, he misses the project of tathqif (a broadly shared notion of cultivation) as a modern vocation and a point of vulnerability for modernity (Landry, p. 177). I find

it strange that Landry, who does cite Mauss (though not The Gift), explicitly eschews documenting the exchanges by which seminarians' lessons are "applied" and learned outside the seminary.[3] We meet his student-scholars, "forging themselves as exemplary characters" (p. 24), only through their intentions and actions. How does the diversly populated bi'a entangle them in its encompassing web of "reciprocal obligations," that is, exchanges? And what all is at stake here? Considering the effort seminarians put into shaping their bi'a behooves noting modernity's demands for rationalization against the ritual "excess" that Khuri (1990, pp. 184, 187–88) early observed to irritate Hezbollah's clerics (cf. Deeb, 2006, p. 33). If Landry's article gives a strong sense of the agonistic diligence that bi'a formation requires, relative to Khayyat's, it does not convey the mutual constitutionality of that effort in action.

I learn from these two articles, and their fortunate encounter on the pages of American Ethnologist, that the stubborn, pious, and wise people collectively constituting Lebanon today can launch their theoretical claims on ethnographers, anthropology, and a wider, inescapably shared world. The expanded scope of the ecologizing lens, on agriculture with war or ethical pedagogy as community-making, can reveal human efforts and ambivalences otherwise invisible. Yet the vision attained must still carefully avoid naturalizing the elements that it subtly backgrounds (such as cosmology or reciprocity). Inarguably, these studies of an ecology as ethics and ethics as an ecology offer lessons to move away from the nation-state lens that has limited our appreciation of Lebanon and its broad world to come.

ENDNOTES

[1] If Lebanon got dropped like a live grenade when its wars gained international headlines, this reminds us that, more damningly, anthropology has largely continued to serve and preserve nation-state boundaries, logistically and theoretically.

[2] Mauss, of course, developed this idea from Durkheim's (1982) articulation of "social facts," which also form from, shape, and elude yet depend on human agency.

[3] Their classroom exercises hypothesize extramural encounters, yet this seems to be the only way they encounter the outside ethically. Even when Landry accompanies Arif, a seminarian, on a walk after training, he listens (only) to Arif's words as if decontextualized from a material, inscribed, and active *bi'a*.

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