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► **To cite this version:**

Nicolas Puig, Michel Tabet. Lebanese anthropology. Doing Anthropology in a Time of Uncertainty. *Ethnologie française*, 2021, *Anthropologies libanaises. Entre dispersion et lignes de force*, 51 (2), pp.227-238. 10.3917/ethn.212.0227 . hal-03466318

HAL Id: hal-03466318

<https://hal.science/hal-03466318>

Submitted on 5 Dec 2021

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Introduction

Anthropologies in uncertain times

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In **Ethnologie française** Volume 51, Issue 2, April 2021, pages 227 to 238

ISSN 0046-2616

ISBN 9782130827955

This document is the English version of:

Nicolas Puig, Michel Tabet, «», *Ethnologie française* 2021/2 (Vol. 51), p. 227-238

Available online at:

<https://www.cairn-int.info/journal-ethnologie-francaise-2021-2-page-227.htm>

How to cite this article:

Nicolas Puig, Michel Tabet, «», *Ethnologie française* 2021/2 (Vol. 51), p. 227-238

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Doing Anthropology in a Time of Uncertainty¹

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Anthropological studies of Lebanon are as varied as the approaches and career paths of the researchers who conduct them. This diversity mirrors the diasporic tendencies of this small, hemmed-in country (10,452 km², the official, if contested), while also illustrating the density and power of the knowledge to which it contributes. This chorus of anthropological voices, however, is ultimately a reflection of turbulent and uncertain times, and even by contrast with other Arab countries, Lebanon is a complex country in which to do research. Its accessibility and conflictual history offer rich fields in which to develop innovative methods for the study of societies which are undergoing structural political crises.

The goal of this issue of *Ethnologie Française* is to showcase the breadth and depth of anthropology in Lebanon while providing an overview of the many ethnographic landscapes and paradigms used to explore the country by researchers trained, living in, and/or studying there. The fragmentation of Lebanese anthropology parallels the social, economic, and inter-community cleavages inside Lebanese borders that include scholarly publications in three languages (French, English, and to a lesser degree, Arabic, which is considered less academically marketable²). Work that seeks to explain Lebanese realities is conducted by Lebanese and non-Lebanese researchers, some of whom live and work in Lebanon, some who hold international academic positions, and some with dual nationalities. Many of these scholars have studied abroad but are linked to Lebanon through private educational institutions, including the American University of Beirut, *Université Saint-Joseph*, Lebanese American University, or the Lebanese University (a public institution of higher education that enrolls forty percent of the country's university students). Others are university professors in countries such as France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Two pioneers of anthropology in Lebanon, Selim Abou [1972] and Suad Joseph, for example, have twin careers: Abou is a Jesuit and served as rector of the *Université Saint-Joseph* in Beirut from 1995 to 2003, but investigated topics such as migration and acculturation. Joseph, the author of one of the articles featured in this issue, holds a doctorate from Columbia University [1975] and until recently taught at the University of California at Davis. Her ethnographic studies focus on kinship, gender, and citizenship in the region. Foreign research institutes such as the *Institut Français du Proche-Orient* (formerly CERMOC), the *Orient-Institut* of Beirut (German), the *Centre d'étude de l'unité arabe*, and the Institute for

1. This article was translated from the French to the English by John Angell. The authors wish to thank the *Fédération Sciences Sociales Sud* (F3S) for its support for this translation.

2. Sari Hanafi notes that more elite private universities in the Arab Middle East teach in English and French, while the language of instruction in the public university in Lebanon tends to be Arabic [2012: 26]. Private universities are oriented towards the international academic scene, and Hanafi writes that “the *Université Libanaise* speaks to society, whereas the AUB, LAU, and USJ speak to the world. Places where the two meet are rare” [*ibid*: 29]. Diane E. King and Kirsten Scheid confirm that most Arab anthropologists publish in English and French and are based in Western institutions [2006: 40].

Palestinian Studies sponsor research residencies of up to several years for scholars and doctoral and post-doctoral researchers from Arab and European countries (including several anthropologists) while also supporting local researchers. Other high-profile Lebanese researchers study far-away locations, including Ghassan Hage, who published “White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society” in Australia in 2000, where he has been living since the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon.

This range of academic positions and institutions is matched by the diversity of approaches and orientations of research, particularly in anthropology, which in the context of Lebanon is best expressed in the plural: anthropologies. Within this diverse field, however, it is possible to identify a number of distinct thematic strands of research that concurrently explore similar topics and have been published relatively recently.

This introduction begins by describing the contexts of research about Lebanon before discussing the paradigms that underlie anthropological studies of post-war Lebanese society, including those included in this special issue.

■ Academic Landscapes: Multiple Attachments

In the 1970s, anthropological research in Lebanon essentially broke with traditional research topics in the Arab world such as Bedouin identity, rural life, the unilateral function of religious issues, and theories of segmentarity and tribalism, described by Abu-Lughod as “the most prestigious and enduring anthropological theories of the Arab world” [1989: 280].³

More recent trends in anthropology focused on Lebanon explore such topics as domination in relations of violence and hierarchical relations within families, broader communities, and the State. Among the best-known studies to pursue these questions is Michaël Gilsean’s study of power and domination among important landowners in the Akkar region who are closely tied to the commercial and political circles in Beirut. His book was published in 1996, but it covers the years 1971 and 1972 and introduced such topics in the anthropology of Lebanon as different aspects of violence, models of masculinity, and social honor.⁴ Suad Joseph explores questions related to gender, kinship, and citizenship in Lebanon and other Arab countries [see Joseph 2000, 2005, Joseph and Slyomovics, 2001].⁵ These new Lebanese anthropologies were suspended during the 1975–1990 war. Studies by the sociologist Michel Seurat, whose investigations of urban *‘asabiyya* in Tripoli⁶ have had significant impact on political anthropology, exemplify the tenacity demanded of researchers who conducted research in wartime [1985]. Sectarianism, inter-faith conflict, and the disruption of civil society and the State are common research topics. From the immediate post-war period until the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, followed by the withdrawal of Syrian forces in 2005, most studies examined memorial initiatives related to the conflict, mechanisms of reconciliation, and the enduring social question of mistrust, as well as reconstruction, particularly of the center of Beirut.

Several years ago, data from studies conducted under the ESTIME⁷ program (directed by Rigas Arvanitis) provided a reasonably accurate portrait of the state of research in Lebanon. Despite its modest size, Lebanon hosts some of the region’s oldest universities, including the American University of Beirut, founded in 1866, and the *Université Saint-Joseph*, established in 1875. Research in technical and scientific fields is relatively dynamic compared to neighboring countries [Arvanitis, Hanafi, & Gaillard, 2018]. Research in the social and human sciences is somewhat less robust, however, with approximately 130 published articles listed in the SCOPUS database in 2010

3. L. Abu-Lughod also uses segmentarity to distinguish between two other theoretical metonymies (from “theoretical metonym,” borrowed from Appadurai) to refer to the harem and Islam, two prevalent regional topics.

4. Michael Gilsean created the basis for a dialectic approach to the functioning of religious patronage that, without reducing it to a mere domination, focuses on patrons and clients in areas of influence and forms of attachment and rejection (see Isabelle Rivoal’s remarks on his work [2012]).

5. See her contribution to this issue.

6. Seurat focused on the social organization of a Tripoli neighborhood by investigating the Khaldounian notion of *‘asabiyya* (*esprit de corps*).

7. *Evaluation of Scientific and Technological capabilities in Mediterranean countries, 2004 to 2007* [ARVANITIS 2007].

[*ibid.*: 395].⁸ A study by Jacques Kabbanji [2010] illustrates the challenges faced by the human and social sciences in Lebanon, which range from insufficient financial support and infrastructure to university curricula that are too narrow to recruit and retain students (particularly advanced graduate students, who typically choose foreign academic institutions and are either self-funded or obtain scholarships and fellowships), as well as the lack of recognition of local researchers. Local Lebanese researchers therefore tend to personally finance their own fieldwork or to receive support from private and international organizations [Hanafi, 2010b]. Indeed, there has been a significant increase in privately funded research projects that reinforce the increasingly porous boundary between expertise and research. This includes a number of research professors in Lebanon, particularly those working in urban studies [Verdeil, 2019], some of whom work for NGOs and consultancies while also conducting research in a variety of subjects. Despite these diversified scholarly activities, anthropology is not generally an autonomous field in Lebanese research institutions. Even today, despite the presence of several interdisciplinary research centers, including the *Institut des sciences sociales* at the *Université Libanaise*, the *Centre d'études monde arabe moderne* at the *Université Saint-Joseph*, as well as field-specific research institutes (the Institute of Migration Studies at the Lebanese American University), there is no center that explicitly focuses on anthropology or other social and human sciences fields.

Contextual challenges complicate economic and structural difficulties, as well as conflicts and crises that can further slow research. University enrollments plummeted during the 2006 war as numerous prospective students chose to study abroad [King & Scheid, 2006]. The 2019 economic collapse poses even greater challenges, with the devaluation of the Lebanese pound and the decline in purchasing power making higher education inaccessible for much of the population. Further, the social sciences, particularly anthropology—daunted by uncertain career paths and funding—have difficulty competing with more lucrative career paths.

Despite its unfavorable situation, anthropological research in Lebanon is relatively dynamic. Several dissertation studies in Beirut and other areas have recently been completed. In her 2014 dissertation study, Michèle Obeid, a lecturer in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, described post-war social changes in the rural city of Aarsal, on the Syrian border [Obeid, 2014]. Elisabeth Saleh's 2014 dissertation at the University of London reported on a study of the wine industry in the Beqaa Valley that examined the role of the elite in shaping the Lebanese agricultural landscape. Elites were also the focus of Muzna al-Masri's doctoral study at the University of London [2016], seen through the prism of their relations with the "Nejmeh" football club in Beirut.

Saleh and al-Masri both published articles in a recent issue of *Contemporary Levant* that was edited by Samar Kanafani and Zina Sawaf [2017], whose introduction describes the issue as an exploration of the relationship between ethnographers' emotional and sensory experiences and their study settings and knowledge development through an anthropology "at home." They are thus extending, thirty years later, the pioneering reflexive approach of an earlier generation of Arab researchers who circulated between the countries where they did their studies—typically the United States—and their home countries and/or fieldwork settings.⁹ Based on fieldwork in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Palestine, the articles in the 2017 issue of *Contemporary Levant* explore different methods of translating such "states of being" into research strategies.

As Deeb and Winegar observed, "Lebanon is associated with sectarian conflict and war, but academics work on a broad range of subjects that includes war, activism, space, memory, social production, youth, sexuality, and the State" [2012: 539]. This topic has

8. Deeb and Winegar [2012: 539] nevertheless note that in the case of American research, Lebanon—like Egypt and Palestine—has become a favored site for research funding since the State Department lifted a 1996 ban on field studies in Lebanon.

9. Altorki & El-Solh, 1988. Suad Joseph and Lila Abu-Lughod (who wrote the postface of *Contemporary Levant*) each authored a chapter of the book. Lama Kabbanji also shares the perspective of this collection by questioning her position as a both a Lebanese insider and an outsider. This "dual presence" is clear in her political commitment to France, where she currently resides, and her scholarly engagement with her homeland through the participative study of the October 2019 uprising presented here.

prompted a number of discussions that renew the “weak State” argument often applied to Lebanon. Michèle Obeid [2010] disagrees with the contention that the inhabitants of Aarsal are marginalized by the city’s distance from the capital and hence center of power. On the contrary, she portrays Aarsal residents as vigorous participants in the political process who seek to go beyond the local context and who remain connected to the seat of power in the capital. Nikolas Kosmatopoulos deconstructs the idea of a “failed state” that introduces “a vision of history and geography through the frames of failure, deficit, and lack, but also—and more crucially—present contemporary world affairs within an increasingly bellicose atmosphere” [2011: 134].

Although, as Seteney Shami observed in 1989 and King and Sheid reiterated in 2006, the impact of anthropology on academic discourse has always been relatively modest, the field currently appears to be well-established, albeit somewhat disparately. Anthropology now has a presence in public discourse and social media and exerts a noticeable influence on the arts. Anthropologists are developing specific methodologies for analyzing audiovisual and digital materials, including Nizar Hariri and Dima Tannir—an anthropologist and visual artist—in this issue. Research questions emerge along the boundaries between art, historiography, and anthropology, and archives—an ever-present subject in the Middle East [Jungen & Sfeir, 2019]—have inspired a number of studies across a variety of disciplines. The problem of archives is particularly acute in the case of Lebanon, which has no unified narrative about the war and the thousands of disappeared victims, as well as a capital whose center was destroyed, only to be rebuilt by a privatized company (Solidere). The absence of shared collective memory has given rise to intense artistic and militant activities (through associations on behalf of the missing persons) [Elias, 2018]. The Atlas Group created by Walid Raad, for example, blends fiction and reality in hundreds of documents about the civil war, some of which are original and partly created by the artist [Bellan, 2007; Baumann, 2019a & b]. Problems of gender and desire have also been the focus of interdisciplinary collaborations. The “*La Tizi*” (“My ass,” or “I don’t give a damn”) project merges activist feminism with visual arts and anthropology.¹⁰ A Facebook page and YouTube channel administered by Farah Hallaba, a student at the American University of Cairo, present an educational project that promotes an “anthropology in Arabic” and has attracted thousands of followers.¹¹

These initiatives enable anthropology to reach wider, non-academic audiences. Partly as a result, anthropologists’ public profile of is expanding as their intellectual and critical presence gains recognition in urban areas. The itinerary of Muhammad Dakroub, an important public figure in Lebanon in the 1980s and 90s and the author of a substantial body of anthropological work in Arabic (that began with a monograph on the Maronites de Tannourine [1981; 1992]), is an example of a prominent earlier scholar. In the 1990s, Dakroub edited *al-ṭarīq*, a journal featuring political and social debates, and he continues to be well-known as an Arab intellectual. Another notable example is the sociologist and historian Ahmad Beydoun, whose newspaper columns in Arabic during the war in the “Debate” pages of newspapers were later translated and anthologized in scholarly books.¹² More recently, Franck Mermier has observed that “the margin of social and critical expression” has been “particularly narrowed in Lebanon by the closure of several journals and social newspaper supplements.” He adds that digital informational sites such as *Megaphone* have replaced journals and paper periodicals as platforms for information and debate [see the Mermier article in this issue].

The articles assembled here offer dense ethnographic material from different fields, although most focus on Beirut. In addition to well-known researchers, several promising

10. Randa Mirza (in collaboration with Giulia Guadagnoli), *La Tizi: an art intervention*, 2011, video, 14 minutes. Randa Mirza contributed to the *Love and Revenge* project, along with Wael Koudaih (Rayess Bek), Mehdi Haddab, and Julien Perraudeau in 2015. Bek plays a composition based on samples of Asmahan and other period singers accompanied by musicians and against a background of Egyptian films.

11. Farah Hallaba often posts videos online regarding the principal anthropological notions and fields; her most recent post explores visual anthropology (*al-antrūbūlūjīyā al-baṣariyā*).

12. Several chapters of his book, *Le Liban. Itinéraires dans une guerre incivile* [1993], are based on articles that were initially published in Arabic.

doctoral candidates represent a revival of anthropological projects in Lebanon. This collection offers a convenient—if necessarily subjective and incomplete—overview of anthropological subjects and terrains at a time when the inhabitants of Lebanon are facing an unprecedented economic and political crisis that has plunged the country into deep uncertainty and vulnerability.

■ Ethnographies in a Time of Crisis

About Lebanon, people recall the endless “uncivil” war [Beydoun, 1993], which came to an end amid agonizing fratricidal conflict (1975–1990). What is known, however, about the tormented State thirty years after the Taif Agreement (1989) and over ten years after another war, the so-called “July War,” that drenched the summer of 2006 in blood [Mermier & Picard, 2007], at a time of significant demographic tensions following an influx of more than one million Syrians over several years, swelling the country’s refugee population [Kfoury & Puig, 2017; Dahdah & Puig, 2018]?

Religious practices play important roles in people’s everyday lives in Lebanon, as illustrated by the large number of oratories announcing different faiths and regular celebrations in Christian Beirut neighborhoods [Tohme-Tabet, 2004]. Religious events that rally a religious group around a unifying, often modernized ritual [Tabet, 2013] reflect diverse “arrangements” and “horizontal attachments, religious, political and social [...], between the members of different religious communities” [Aubin-Boltanski, 2012: 295,¹³ Kanafani-Zahar, 2015]. These processes are occurring as evangelical churches attract growing numbers of worshipers and conversions, particularly among migrant women for whom new forms of worship offer a sense of social belonging “that affects existence in a discrete but decisive way” [Kaoues, 2017: 48].

The articles in this issue do not focus directly on this sectarian dimension, which has been well-documented elsewhere. Instead, they are situated at the turning point between two milestones—the so-called Cedar Revolution (2005)—that witnessed the departure of the Syrian army and the polarisation of the country between two political alliances, and the revolutionary events of 2019. Lebanon has experienced a series of crises and conflicts since 2006 that are notable for the hegemonic weight of Hezbollah, and by the blossoming of popular Arab uprisings that have degenerated into wars in Syria and Yemen. The Lebanese social and political mass movement that many have called the “revolution” of October 17, 2019 is part of this wider regional context. Some of these articles describe widespread rejection of the political system in place since the early 1990s and the sectarian division of the country’s resources.

The “revolution”¹⁴ arrived on October 17, 2019. Lama Kabbanji created a portrait in an audio-based inquiry that enabled her to collect discourses, slogans, songs, etc. of the event. She noted the significant presence of young people and women and emphasizes the dialectics between access to education, the labor market and forced emigration. This conflict sheds light on “the social transformations that Lebanese society has undergone since the 1990s.” This particular critical moment interfered with political subjectivities liberated by community-based institutions that had maintained “little Lebanons” via “their educational systems, their historical narratives, with their share of heroism and cult of martyrs, and their modes of political socialization” [Mermier & Mervin, 2012: 23].

This “revolution” inspired high hopes and dealt an enormous blow—more powerful than earlier upheavals, particularly in the wake of the waste crisis in 2015¹⁵—to the fragmented, sectarian, and corrupt system dominated by a political elite, leading

13. See Séverine Gabry-Thienpont’s review of Aubin-Boltanski’s book, *Le Corps de la Passion. Expériences religieuses et politiques d’une mystique au Liban*, at the conclusion of the collection.

14. Quotation marks are used when the description of a movement is contested both among participants and religious authorities, as well as the institutions, that they are combatting. Each term—*hirāk* (movement), *tawra* (revolution), as well as *intifada* (uprising)—conveys a range of imaginaries, discourses, and objectives.

15. Mass protests against the accumulation of garbage in the country erupted in response to the closing of the largest public waste site in Lebanon in mid-July 2015. Protesters denounced Lebanese authorities’ management of the crisis with an acerbic slogan: “You stink!” (*tala’at rīthetkūn*).

16. An objective that he ultimately failed to achieve.

to the resignation of the Prime Minister Saad Hariri. Since that time, a series of three successive crises—political, health, and economic—culminated in the devastating explosion in the Beirut port on August 4, 2020. For many Lebanese, the situation appears insoluble, particularly given that, as these lines are written, the very same prime minister who was unseated by the revolution a year ago has returned to try and form a new government.¹⁶ This collection of articles does not confront these questions directly, but offers empirical studies that, taken as a whole, offer a multifaceted ethnographic portrait of a society that, from pigeon fancying to plastic surgery and from arranged marriages to civil unions, intellectual controversies about Beirut urban citizenship, and the social organization of a wholesale market, offer a kaleidoscopic view of a country marked by stark contrasts.

Circulations and recurrent conflicts of varying intensity with neighbors and between communities provoke social and political fragmentation and imperil the political equilibrium of the country, known as the “Lebanese formula” (*al-ṣīgha al-lubnāniya*), in which none of the larger communities can “achieve unity neither with the authorities nor against them” [Beydoun, 1993: 94]. Political territorialization divides spaces, while partisan sectarianism is able to insinuate itself into the heart of the State by adopting different forms. The “*pudeur des communautés*” [sectarian reserve], a group of political practices that the sociologist Ahmad Beydoun contends were left available to the State after the withdrawal of minority communities—and that lost relevance during the war [1993: 82–83]. The remaining question is the future of coexistence between diverse communities—cooperative strategies for “living-together”—that develop from reciprocal sharing of perspectives and shared participation in rituals [Kanafani-Zahar, 2004]?

17. See Tarabey [2013] for an examination of marriage and divorce in the Druze community.

This social fragmentation is an outgrowth of individual status that is in turn primarily determined by religious affiliation: The Lebanese State recognizes as many types of religious marriages as there are communities (a total of 18). Nizar Hariri and Dima Tannir’s article in this issue was based on a study of arranged marriages among members of the Sunni middle class in Beirut.¹⁷ Using an original method involving asking couples to “replay” their wedding ceremonies, they demonstrate the determining role of heritage in arranged marriages, which shapes such specific features of weddings as the exposure of the bride and groom and the objects exchanged by them during weddings. Reconstituting marriages in this way enabled Hariri and Tannir to collect data about couples’ representations of their marital unions and how they have been affected during twenty years of marriage. Civil marriages, however, remain unrecognized under Lebanese law except when they are celebrated abroad. The article by Michela de Giacometti explores how this type of union has remained a point of contention, but also a means of promoting secularization, in opposition to the confessional State that dates from the first Lebanese government. De Giacometti reveals participants’ diverse expectations and representations of civil marriage. The recent increase in civil unions also risks reinforcing Lebanese social hierarchies because they remain the prerogative of an elite with sufficient economic, social, and cultural capital to dominate the public arena in the name of universalism. Ultimately, these secularized marital practices project a market-based vision of marriage and the family as a private, self-determined pact between two individuals.

Despite numerous constraints, Lebanon continued existence is a tribute to social inventiveness and creative energy that counterbalance the vast problems the country faces. It continues to occupy a unique position in the Arab world, largely because there is less censorship than in other countries in the region [Puig & Mermier, 2007]. This relative tolerance allows a large book industry to flourish [Mermier, 2005]—*Idafāt*, the first journal of sociology and anthropology in Arabic, is published in Lebanon by

the *Centre d'étude de l'unité arabe* [Center for the Study of Arab Unity]—as well as cultural activities that instill creativity into the burgeoning Lebanese market economy [Hariri & Kassis, 2017].

Creativity can also be observed in artistic responses to still-underprocessed memories of the Lebanese civil war. Artists have borrowed ideas related to memory, archives, and truthful/fictional narratives in attempting to make sense of the past [Bellan, 2007]. The fact that Lebanese society remains haunted by memories of the war has also inspired a significant wave of scholarly studies that peaked in 2010 [Mermier & Varin, 2010; Haugbølle, 2010; Volk, 2010].¹⁸ To this day, demands that the government investigate the fates of thousands of missing war victims that were addressed to the political leaders—most of whom are still in power—have remained unanswered. A variety of groups with occasionally divergent interests continue to pursue these demands, which arise from the following agreement: “that the struggle against impunity, religious sectarianism, and institutional reform should be at the center of the transitional justice that they seek for their country [Abou Jaoudé, 2020: 219].”

Artists have also addressed the issue of body modifications—including the most common form of cosmetic surgery, rhinoplasties (operations to alter the shape of the nose)—which are particularly prevalent in Lebanon where, like elsewhere in the region, they are often associated with the war. An infatuation with changes in physical appearance has fueled rapid evolution of esthetic norms and intensified interest in reshaping the body. The resulting locally specific culture of beauty appears to be rooted in familial and social relationships and appearance unquestionably plays a more important role in the search for recognition by others in Lebanon than in most countries. Some modifications nevertheless appear to suggest underlying discomfort about Lebanese ethnicity, which is channeled through the discursive registers represented by esthetic practices that reveal ethnicization and naturalism. Nicolas Puig’s article explores the popularity of “making flesh” through plastic surgery, seeking to explain the social significance of these practices by examining the how plastic surgeons and their clients cocreate facial modifications.

The city, and the dynamics of urban citizenship, also entail pressing social issues, particularly in the post-war period. Following the return of peacetime to the country, a significant number of research projects explored the reconstruction and management of ruins in the city [Brines, 2010], including several studies that focused on the reconstruction of Beirut. Urbanists have decried market-oriented, business-friendly urban policies that have displaced urban neighborhoods in the city center and gradually replaced them with privately managed, gated zones [Tabet, 2003; Akl & Beyhum, 2009; Dadour, 2020]. Beirut, whose rich, tragic destiny has inspired legions of stories, is no longer the neglected city described by Mahmoud Darwish as a city that “printed books, distributed newspapers, and organized lectures and conferences dealing with planetary questions without paying any attention to itself” [1994: 57]. Franck Mermier’s article immerses us in the controversies and representations that surround Beirut through the high-minded writings of Lebanese authors and journalists. The reactions of Lebanese intellectuals to Adonis’ characterization of Beirut as a scene, not a city offers insight into the diverse ways in which the city is represented, both in terms of urbanism and as a regional hub. Poets, as well as “artists, writers, and film-makers” have joined intellectuals in representing the city in ways that reflect “its social and spatial fractures” [Brones, 2019: 11]. Brones’ article in this issue examines the function of photographers in the ethnographic cityscape of Beirut. Viewing contexts of production and distribution as influenced by technical choices made by photographers, she illustrates how the city can be studied based on its photographic

18. See Candice Raymond’s literature review in this issue.

representations. Considered as a whole, these different approaches direct our gaze so that we see the city from multiple perspectives, while also inviting us “in turn [...] to look at this center-city space in a different way.”

As this group of articles amply demonstrates, Beirut is the cornerstone of current ethnographic research about Lebanon that functions as the capital, but also as the center of social movements, protests, and power as well as exclusion and marginalization. It is a city that hosts migrants from Bangladesh alongside Syrian and Palestinian refugees¹⁹ but also intellectuals, artists, and academics. The image of Lebanon that emerges is of an urbanized country that embraces capitalism while remaining fraught with tensions and multiple, layered strategies of domination. Its capital city is partly a mirage that attracts people in search of opportunities who are of highly diverse origins and backgrounds. It also constantly uses exploitation, discrimination, and control to batter these same groups. The “Dubai phase” represents an advanced form of global capitalism [Davis, 2007], while contemporary Beirut projects an image composed of conflict, fragmentation, and multiple marginalities. In attempting to make sense of the patterns of territorialization among diverse residents seeking “spaces of certainty” in which they can assert their own conceptions of urbanity and urban citizenship, Konstantin Kastrissianakis observes that the capital is “seated amid the uncomfortably tectonic movements of sectarian spaces” [2012: 76]. Shifting boundaries between faiths and ethnicities have inserted themselves into urban services and infrastructure that are partially managed by sectarian and religious organizations and are grafted onto municipal, national, and international institutions (Joanne Randa Nucho, 2016).

Several studies included in this edition of *Ethnologie française* examine configurations of foreign-born populations in Lebanon, particularly Palestinians and Syrians. Within the human and academic landscape of Lebanon and, since 1948,²⁰ Palestinian refugees have occupied a specific space. Indeed, they attract the curiosity of a number of anthropologists who seek to reconstitute the genealogy of exile as well as the social and memorial dynamics, while also exploring the social functioning of the camps and their roles as political and identity matrices. At least ten recent doctoral dissertations have studied different aspects of life in the camps and Palestinian groups in Lebanon, including Gustavo Barbosa’s investigation of masculinities in the Shatila refugee camp [2013] and Hala Abou Zaki’s work on memories and urbanity, also in Shatila, which was completed at the EHESS in 2017.²¹ Abou Zaki’s article in this edition considers Palestinians residents’ perceptions about the camp, whose current residents encompass a range of national groups that her informants characterize as a “cocktail” of minorities bound together by their shared sense of loss. Palestinian discursive production tends to look on the camp as it is today as materially and symbolically different from the long-lost camp of a mythical past, a nostalgic vision that ultimately fuels complaints about the here-and-now.

Leila Drif reports on the role of Syrian apartment-building caretakers in Beirut. Her study centers on their relational and domestic spaces, revealing the ways in which migrants become integrated into the city and contribute to its ongoing construction. This urban “factory” is made possible by connections between various social spheres and individuals enabled by the integration of these building caretakers. Syrian migrants and refugees are also the subject of two studies situated in marginal urban zones in the southern reaches of Beirut. Emma Aubin-Boltanski’s article explores the practices of pigeon fanciers in the Hayy Gharbé shantytown among Syrian refugees, Lebanese Shiites, and Doms (Middle Eastern Roma community members). She views *kashsh* (pigeon husbandry) as a “social semantics” and a game that allows story-telling that allows Syrian men to reestablish their masculinity, which has been undermined

19. See KASSATLY, PUIG, & TABELT [2016] regarding relations between Asian migrants and Arab residents.

20. Most Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are distributed among 12 camps and over 150 groups, with a total between 191,000 and 243,000 persons (according to 2017 estimates by the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee [www.cas.gov.lb/images/PressRoom/census%20findings_2017_en.pdf]). It is worth noting that although 476,033 Palestinians are registered with the UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), some manage to leave the country while their names remain on the list.

21. In addition to these dissertations, several other important published studies about Palestinians in Lebanon deserve mention: Palestinian oral history and history in Lebanon [SAYIGH, 1994; SFEIR, 2008]; urban transplants [DORAÏ & PUIG, 2012]; the socio-politics of the camps [PETEET, 2005; LATIF, 2008; PUIG, 2014]; identities and sociopolitical dynamics [HANAÏ, 2010a; KHALIDI, 2010]; violence [PERDIGON, 2010]; diaspora [DORAÏ, 2006].

by war and exile. Competition between pigeon breeders nevertheless reproduces the hierarchies and systems of domination that reflect “the profoundly divided and hierarchical space” of Lebanese society “in which social positions only change at the cost of great violence.” Syrians are also well represented in the nearby wholesale fruit and vegetable market, which simultaneously serves as a commercial hub, a hub that supplies the city with produce, and a semi-official generator of employment. Thierry Boissière, Layane Hajjar, and Alexandre Hajjar describe how the market generates economic resources for many Syrians while also, by oscillating between official to unofficial and formal and informal operations, as a locus of social and economic violence.

The final article in the issue by Suad Joseph offers a profound reflection on her relationship with her native land that is the driving force behind her research. In a masterful exercise in reflexivity, she reviews fifty years of research, showing how different fields and questions related to the history of Lebanon intersect and converge with her own personal and scholarly trajectory. Joseph questions the role of these convergences in the production of anthropological knowledge, as seen through the prism of increasingly fragile terrains in Lebanon and around the world that are subject to police brutality, racism, inequality and, at present, the pandemic.

■ Uncertainties

Instead of “crisis” as the central concept of these Lebanese anthropologies, the key word should perhaps be “uncertainty,” to borrow Suad Joseph’s expression. For participants, uncertainty means living under the threat of “the (temporary or long-term) crisis” considered as “an always extremely proximate potentiality” [Naepels 2019: 14]. The ethnographies included here describe actors who confront enduring uncertainty as they seek to find their places in the world. They often find themselves in situations of profound vulnerability whose severity varies according to their degree of access to resources and membership in specific sub-groups (i.e., citizens made vulnerable through circumstance, victims of the explosion, women under patriarchal domination, Syrian refugees, migrants laborers, etc.).²² The explosion in the port of Beirut on August 4, 2020 exacerbated the impact of pre-existing economic and migratory crises, marking a shift in the Lebanese relationship with violence and how it is expressed. Some analysts resist the focus on the population’s resilience, arguing instead that large segments of the population are the victims of an intrinsically corrupt political system. Michel Tabet’s work, for example, concentrates on the subjective experience of city residents, demonstrating the ways in which everyday lives and social relationships can vanish in only a few minutes, a precarity that causes fractured individual lives and widespread urban disruption and suffering.

Lebanese anthropologies provide alternative portraits of prevailing social realities in the country and the region, documenting—and contributing to—new debates, new narratives, and new individual trajectories. This growing body of scholarly work reveals the diversity of lived experience, while also offering powerful insights into subjectivations and the connections between religion, politics, and partisan societies. In addition to shedding light on such macroscopic social and political issues, these studies also reveal the extent to which politico-religious elements are enmeshed in individual daily lives. Plastic surgery patients and surgeons, pigeon fanciers, participants in the transactions and exchanges of a wholesale produce market, and Syrian refugees who aspire to become building caretakers nevertheless provide a collective glimpse of the textures and contours of a country whose social dynamics extend far beyond the

22. In fact, vulnerability “must be understood in the variety of its social expression and the multiplicity of its conditions” [NAEPELS 2019: 17].

confines of sectarian communities. Divisions between religious and ethnic communities are deeply rooted in Lebanese society, but they appear to function within a dynamic, processual framework that orients belongings, determines experiences, and heavily influences individuals' lives, despite the fact that they can occasionally free themselves from them. These anthropologies ultimately shed light on the endemic violence and mechanisms of domination in contemporary societies, but also on the tools and resources available to individuals—particularly the most vulnerable—as they continually face these multiple challenges.

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