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Teaching with the Window Open: Notes on a Pedagogy between the Mundane and the Catastrophic

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Abstract
In this reflexive essay about teaching, I reflect upon the political space anthropology might hold in Lebanon, a country positioned at a continuum between so-called normalcy and catastrophe. What does it mean to teach in a context where there is a jarring disparity between a mundaneness, an almost banality to the everyday, and severe, often life-threatening interruptions? Where do political possibilities go in the process? What is recuperated? What is left to burn? I will use these questions as a starting point from which to reflect on the politics of teaching and learning anthropology during times of catastrophe. The emphasis being on the kinds of meaning ascribed to the learning process at a time when people, in a country such as Lebanon, live almost continuously within and in *the aftermath* of one catastrophe or another. How then is anthropology, as a discipline, as a way of learning and viewing the world, configured into these webs of significance?

Keywords: Aftermath, Anthropology, Ghosts, Lebanon, Methods, Pedagogy, Violence

Introduction

On the 10th of September 2020, I was teaching an undergraduate anthropology methods course. It felt a bit futile to be teaching a course online initially designed for students to be "hands on." It was online because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The internet was a bit wonky, as it tends to be in Beirut. I was sitting at my desk in my apartment in the exact same spot where I sat just over a month earlier. This was when large amounts of ammonium nitrate detonated inside a warehouse at the city's port less than a couple of kilometers away. I returned to sitting at my desk not long after the broken glass was cleared away. At first, some cardboard was patched up across the window frame. Relatively quickly, the landlord, willingly supported us in replacing the glass— a rare sort of act amongst many Beiruti landlords.

I had not given much thought to returning to my desk. Yet on that September day, something peculiar happened. Looking out my open window, I saw the skies turning grey. "Hmm," I thought, "Perhaps an early September rain." My thoughts quickly raced to the many people who had just lost their homes. How were they coping? The shock waves that followed the sonic boom had rippled so far outward from the warehouse that much of Beirut was impacted. I knew a few people who had lost their homes. Some had found refuge with relatives and friends. Others were not so lucky. As I looked out my window at the greying skies, I wondered what would happen if the clouds could no longer handle the pressure and the rains began to fall? Should I not check on friends? I felt a panic return. It was the same one I felt a month earlier.

I tried to put aside the myriad of emotions shooting across my mind. I took in a long breath and sighed. I turned back to my screen where my students awaited. I noticed something odd. Whereas most had their cameras turned on, many had disappeared from the screen. I noticed one student sitting under his desk. Another student whose desk was all I could see shouted out, "The port is on fire." I shrugged exhaustively, "Don't worry, there have been many since the explosion." Then another student called out, "Look out your window, professor!" It slowly dawned on me that the grey skies were smoky ones. The smell was suffocating. I noticed large clumps of ash falling onto my balcony. It was charred rubber and plastic. For the next few minutes, I rushed around the house opening windows in preparation for another explosion. Open windows have less chance of breaking from an explosion than closed ones. Upon smelling the smoke however, I decided to take my chances and closed them again. I joined family members, which included two dogs, to hide in a windowless bathroom.

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For a while, I kept my headphones on trying to reassure students who chose to remain online for the duration of the class. I told them that another explosion was highly unlikely. It felt like an odd thing to say. After all, how many explosions had the city endured in its history? We had just lived through, — survived — one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in the world. (What an achievement.) The reasons behind such an event continue to be shrouded in mystery but that remain, nonetheless, completely absurd. Luckily, I was right. The city did not explode again — or, on that day at least. Within a few hours, things returned to "normal." A family member walked the dogs. I prepared dinner. We watched some TV. I took the dogs out again, noting that the city was covered in black tar and soot. Later, I noticed an email from a student asking what he had missed after signing off early, apparently to open his windows and then close them again. I confirmed he had not missed much, and we would be reviewing the material in our next online class. There was something banal about how the students and I dealt with the distressing disruptions of the day. There was an awkward juxtaposing of a so-called sense of normalcy with the critical event. This was in the way class continued despite most of us running around to close or open windows. I was not teaching *per se,* and the students were no longer discussing the texts assigned for that day.

We had arrived at the brink of a particular threshold between normalcy and critical event. One, that has, for decades, shaped life in Lebanon. This was a space that resembled Beirut in the minutes and, at a stretch, hours, directly after events such as that of the explosion on the 4th of August. Amid a mad rush to refuge and a panicked search for close ones, there is that one person who appears almost out of nowhere acting as if nothing had happened. A neighbor for instance, who stuns everyone into silence by complaining about the broken-down elevator. Somebody else snaps, shouting at said neighbor, "We are still looking for our little boy. What is wrong with you?" The neighbor, perhaps in shock, acting in his usual abrupt manner, shouted back some obscenities before leaving the underground parking where all had taken refuge.

We had not reached that stage of absurdity during class when the port fire began to rain hell in September. But it is a snapshot of the kinds of events that began to re-punctuate classroom life since 2019. During October 2019, the uprisings began and lasted with the same intensity for about three months. Universities and schools remained closed due to roadblocks. Many classes were moved to city and village squares— although there was some attempt at teaching online. Following lockdown in 2020, teaching moved entirely online and remained there until September 2021. All while, the country was descending into one of the worst financial crises in world history, escalating into what is known in Arabic as *inhiyar* (collapse). By the summer of 2023, hyperinflation in the country reached 260%.

What does it mean to teach in this uneven process of collapse where there is a jarring disparity between a mundaneness, an almost banality to everyday and severe, often life-threatening interruptions? Where do political possibilities go in the process? What is recuperated? What is left to burn? I will use these questions as a starting point from which to reflect on the politics of teaching and learning anthropology during times of catastrophe. The emphasis being on the kinds of meaning ascribed to the learning process at a time when people, in a country such as Lebanon, live almost continuously within and in *the aftermath* of one catastrophe or another. How then is anthropology, as a discipline, as a way of learning and viewing the world, configured into these webs of significance?

Recuperating Fragments

On the day when the port caught fire a handful of students and I remained online for our class even though most of us were in fact running to open and close windows. I had ceased teaching any anthropology *per se*. Yet we continued performing class until we hung up and left the virtual classroom. To paraphrase Das, there was a blurring — an involuntary one — between the ordinary and eventful on that day (1995). Critical events, as she argues, are not "wholly" the antithesis of the ordinary, but rather the "failure of grammar" of the ordinary (1995: 8). In the process, life and the reality within which it is lived, becomes ever more fragmented. In a later book, Das goes onto suggest that part of the anthropologist's task is to collect these fragments to render life knowable (2015). Drawing from inspiration from Das, I reflect here on the fragmenting of life and of narrative in the perpetual aftermath of yet another critical event. I try to stitch together a tale of pedagogy and anthropology. It is a disjointed and patchy one. But it is an attempt at recuperation. Recuperation implies a certain intent, one that is situational in its engagement of imagination so to salvage fragments from the past to be preserved for the future. For Guyer, recuperation permits reflection of the kinds of salvaging that takes place "immediately following survival" (2017: 87). Yet what does, or rather, what can recuperation mean in the context of anthropology, a discipline largely influenced by Euro-American anthropological traditions, and which "are predicated on a notion

of stability" informing one's work (Shami 2015: 144). How then to recuperate when the very antithesis of stability informs one's anthropology work?

To piece together this account, I propose three interventions. Throughout all interventions, I draw reflection from undergraduate courses I have taught at the American University of Beirut. The first intervention is concerned with ghosts. Ghosts raise ontological questions. One of the most significant being a methodological one: How to study hauntings through ethnographic method? This is especially when the anthropologist is not always able to see their interlocutors' ghosts. Here, apparitions might be in their quite literal sense, as hauntings associated with spirit exorcism and the like. There are the ghosts of painful and traumatic memories. There are also the colonial ghosts of anthropology's past. The second intervention is concerned with aftermath. To further situate anthropology into the pedagogical terrain of Lebanon, I turn to reflect on the relationship between the aftermath of political catastrophe and intellectual projects in the region. Following the port explosion, it was as if, the political possibilities to have surfaced during the October Uprisings, were blown away. Such sentiments are not new to Beirut, Lebanon, the region at large, or indeed perhaps, in relation to most postcolonial projects worldwide.

The third intervention brings together anthropology and the "pedagogical constituencies" in Lebanon (Sbaiti 2015) Daily life in Lebanon has long lived out on this continuum of juxtaposing an idea of normalcy with yet another critical event. A temporality of violence underpins this continuum, what Mikdashi describes as "both historical and future oriented. It is as productive as it is destructive" (2023). These might be the specters of the civil war (1975 – 1991), what Al-Masri writes of as something "visceral" (2017). In my final intervention, I draw on the help of historians to go further back than the civil war, thinking through the pain of such violence as it shapes pedagogies, including at the university where I work. In the conclusion, I broaden the scope to reflect on the case Jobson makes that anthropology must abandon its liberal suppositions (2020). That there needs to a "recasting" of the "ethnographic method under the terms of patches and feral proliferations" so it reflects the absence of a "liberal consensus" and any "fixed referent of cultural critique" (2020: 5). He argues that it is high time for anthropology to burn. I bring the three interventions together to briefly consider if it is in fact anthropology burning or the university.

Intervention 1: Ghosts

We might have suspended any "real" anthropology discussion during the fire incident at the port, but the discipline was still lurking in the background. A specter perhaps, only to fully resurrect by way of email from the student, worried as to what he had missed when leaving the class to open and shut his windows. There were two other hauntological components more specific to anthropology that surfaced in the weeks to follow. First, there are the ghosts of the colonial past.

If earlier generations of anthropologists sought to reflect critically upon the "colonial situation" of the discipline, later generations were more concerned with issues of decolonization (Stocking 1991). Reading and engaging with this "diachronic plot" is one thing (ibid). I have found that teaching it is another thing all together. Alongside plotting out anthropological encounters and indeed the employment of anthropologists by colonial governments, I have used possibly standard sort of teaching methods that include, for example, juxtaposing ethnographic accounts written about the same place but at different periods. For instance, comparing texts about the Nuer written by Evans-Pritchard (1940) and Sharon Hutchinson (1996). It is interesting that students almost immediately pick up on the specificities in Hutchinson's text, made even more apparent by her frequent use of the past tense. Some students however, declared that Evans-Pritchard's take on the Nuer sounds more factual. Most of those students were not studying for anthropology-sociology major. They were taking an introductory course to anthropology, which also serves as a "service course" for those majoring in subjects such as Business Studies, a discipline that has a much larger student body than anthropology. Nonetheless, some of those non-anthropology-sociology major students seemed to make the connection between that reading exercise and our later discussion of the Human Terrain System and the essentialist representations of the Arab world that were, and that continue to be drawn.

Most undergraduate students I have taught come to anthropology without much, if any, prior knowledge of the discipline. Even so, I have often felt that students were more perceptive about certain topics over others. For instance, a discussion in a methods course about Trouillot's "Silencing the Past: Power and Production of History" (1995) seemed to resonate with many students, as did Eric Wolf's "Europe and a People without History" (1982). Reflection during these kinds of discussions often went onto other texts that we were reading, including those related oral and life histories, including texts by Amahl Bishara (2007) and Rosemary Sayigh

(1998) on Palestinian life histories. During online classes in confinement, students were often eager to experiment doing life histories with family members. Then, when classes finally returned the university classroom, I assigned students fieldwork activities that would engage the city of Beirut at large. Yet a lot of students from these new cohorts, continued to interview family members for their life history exercises. It seemed to me that there was a growing interest amongst the younger generations of their parents' experiences during Lebanon's civil war time.

Discussions that took place in person felt far more intimate than those that took place online. It wasn't as if critical events had come to an end. There are the perpetual "micro" crises of which one is confronted daily when price for food, water, electricity, internet, transport, and so on fluctuate so rapidly. These are not exactly micro – – countless have lost so much due to this financial collapse, including the ability to pay to attend universities like the one I teach. Faculty and staff across all universities and schools have lost much too. I use micro because a week or two into or Spring Semester of 2023, the earthquakes that rocked and devasted Turkey and Syria, with the first being during the early but still dark hours of the morning, reverberated across the fault lines to Beirut. Buildings shook once more. People took flight, once more in terror. This happened in complete darkness because of extensive electricity blackouts lasting for more than a year.

During such events, there are personal ghosts which might also come to haunt when one is trying to teach the discipline. In the weeks to follow the port fire, the topic of fire cropped up during class conversation. At that stage of aftermath, it was difficult for me, and it seemed hard for students as well, to find words to describe the catastrophes we had witnessed. Then, on one occasion, a student, came up with an explanation. During a one-to-one meeting, he said that the exhaustion he was feeling had parallels with the witchcraft-substance of which Evans-Pritchard wrote about on the Azande in Colonial Sudan. This was because the shocks he experienced had coagulated into an essence which, much like that of the Azande's witchcraft substance, had a say in how he engaged in the world. He went onto say that it was probably hereditary too, given what his parents went through during the civil war (1975 – 1991). The student concluded by explaining that everyone in Lebanon probably has this substance, some acting upon it in good ways and others negatively.

As he spoke, I racked my haggard and exhausted brain trying to recall some details of the book. I was also surprised that he had read Evans-Pritchard's book. I had not assigned the book for our method's class, nor to the best of my knowledge had my anthropology colleagues in their courses. I learnt that the student decided to read the book after attending an introductory anthropology course I convened years earlier. During a class on witchcraft, I had pointed to Evans-Pritchard as one of the earlier anthropologists who had studied the subject. Apparently, the student and others from their cohort had picked up the book on their volution. After our meeting, I re-read sections of the book, trying to understand how the student had come up with such an analogy. I wondered about *benge,* the poisonous oracle that permits one to learn if a witch is present. From there, I wondered about Das' discussion on the politics of witnessing. The way traumatic memories are inscribed onto bodies, becoming "poisonous knowledge" when "one's way of being-with-others was brutally damaged" (2015:76). I began to consider what it meant to bear witness as an anthropologist to these kinds of critical events. When does our knowledge become poisonous?

Intervention 2: Catastrophic Aftermaths

I found it interesting how this brilliant student put together different fragments to find the speech, — the words — to bear witness to what we had just gone through. They did it in a zigzagging sort of way, one that seems a bit haphazard but comes from emotion and affect. It is a process, whereby, in the space of aftermath, we are no longer entirely concerned with the "patterned" or harmonized structural progression (Guyer 2017). In the aftermath, we are working with disjointed thinking. There is a certain understanding of time implicit to aftermath, which Scott has described in terms "of a more acute *awareness* of time, a more arresting *attunement* to the uneven *topos* of temporality (2014: 2). Despite this baring of temporality's teeth, when concordance is gone, there is an obligation, or perhaps, it is a compulsion, to live "*on* in the wake of past political time, amid the ruins" (ibid). Aftermath is thus a temporality in and of itself. It speaks to a process that comes after bearing witness to a catastrophic event; of coming to be aware of that loss, what it means to have lost it, and to live in its absence.

The aftermaths that Scott writes of follow on the heels of a political catastrophe. Namely, those that emerge in the "post-socialist and postcolonial futures past" (ibid). Aftermath here, speaks also to a particular intellectual project, one that is not so easily disentangled from the loss of, or prospect of revolution. In an earlier work, Scott has unpacked, through a reading amongst of other similar texts, CLR James' Black Jacobins, this sense of past

future revolutions (2004). The tragedy of colonial enlightenment as it were, is in its mythic qualities, forged and reproduced in the (re)making of doomed heroes such as Toussaint Louverture. But there are also other kinds of tragic protagonists conscripted into the remaking of modernity's enlightenment: the anti-colonial public intellectuals. These are enlightened figures who themselves have gained heroic status and their writings becoming the handbooks for future liberation struggles (2004).

Political theorist, Samer Frangie has shown that in the history of Leftist Arab Intellectualism there are strong parallels to be found to the Caribbean context of which Scott writes about (2012, 2016). Noting an "interplay between a present in crisis and a histography of crisis," Frangie argues that in the continuous aftermath of one defeat after the next of the 1960s, Arab Marxist thought increasingly normalized a "thought-in-crisis" (2016: 146). This was in effect, a binary between a "sense of powerlessness and injunction to act" (2016: 146). Literary scholar, Zeina Halabi, argues that this dialectical relationship reached an important historical juncture during the 1990s (2018). This a period that marked the so-called ending of Lebanon's civil war and the Cold War. For Halabi, there was, at the time, "collective skepticism over the viability of Marxism" and which ultimately altered the representation amongst writers and artists of the archetypal Arab Intellectual (2018: 1). The figure, no longer endowed with prophetic powers, came to be depicted in film and literature as a speechless figure existing in different modalities both in exile and in return.

It is interesting that anthropology seems to be largely absent from discussions of this intellectual tradition. It is almost as if anthropology does not belong to this intellectual trajectory. To put it in anthropological terms: who then, are the anthropological ancestors of Lebanon, and the region at large? It is not just a tough question to ask. It is a dangerous one too. For one, most anthropological roads lead to universities and research centers outside of the region (Abu-Lughod, 1986, Deeb & Winegar 2016, Altorki and El-Solh 1986, Kanafani & Sawaf 2017). But there is something else much deeper, epistemologically speaking, that is going on here. In a reflection on the Arab Council for Social Sciences (ACSS), its director and anthropologist, Seteney Shami argues that concepts such as "agents," or "structures" elucidate a "momentum" ultimately juxtaposed against notions of "stability and continuity," even if one is studying "revolutions or social movements" (2015: 144). "When you are living in a situation that is so fluid as this moment—specifically in the Arab region," such concepts and methods are not able to "capture" this reality in a "meaningful way" (ibid).

In revealing what Shami describes as "the hidden geographies" of concepts, important questions come to the fore as to how anthropology in and of the region must "turn the way we talk about reality into social sciences concepts" (ibid: 146). However, as Shami also points out, provincializing anthropology is a complicated and often a dangerous process, not least because it entails deep reflection on the complex histories of travelling concepts. The ACSS annual reports on social science texts written in Arabic shed light on such complexities. In their second report, the intellectual genealogies of anthropological scholarship that include the works of Ahmad Abou Zeid in Egypt and Ali Al Wardi in Iraq, are all noted to have been influenced to some degree by Evans-Pritchard and Radcliffe Brown, both through their writings and engagements with local scholars in the region (Hammoudi 2018). One would imagine too that Evans-Pritchard was influenced by scholars from the region too.

How to rethink anthropology so that concepts are not always mediated through Euro-American contexts? What kinds of analogies might the student had made, were *benge*, not channeled via Evans-Pritchard, via the United Kingdom, but rather, by someone else, somewhere else? The point is not to give precedence to positionality, or of one way of knowing the world over the other. It is an attempt to reflect on how concepts circulate, and the routes that they take. The politics of translation is but one sore point. As literary scholar, Rana Issa has argued, translation is a dialogic process, but a disparate one nonetheless (2022). There might not be reams and reams of anthropological texts translated from English or French into Arabic, in comparison to literature (Hammoudi 2018). But there is even less so translated from Arabic into English or French.

Intervention 3: Painful Pedagogies

Instruction is in English at the university where I work. Apparently, this was not always the case. The American University of Beirut was founded by American Protestant Missionaries who, I am told, initially taught in Arab. However, there remained a certain kind of epistemological relativism in mind. Historian, Marwa Elshakry has argued that there was restructuring of categories of knowledge in education institutions, part of a broader global narrative (2013). In contrast to disciplines such as "Arab science" or "Chinese science," no specific or precise history was ascribed or made implicit in disciplines that emerged out of European academies (ibid). This universalization of knowledge through the disciplines ultimately reproduced what historian Nadya Sbaiti argues

as a "hierarchy of knowledge" and a "hierarchy of value" (2016). Access to education was important, but access to Europeanized education was even more so.

During another-in person method's undergraduate course I taught, a student wrote in one their observation exercises about interactions they had with security personnel working around some of the city's public spaces. These sorts of spaces are not exactly public *per se.* Guards can be quite selective about who is permitted to enter. The guards, however, were encouraging of the student sitting and writing in their notebook. Apparently, they saw in the young learning student, the future of the country. It was not the first-time a student reported back such an encounter in the city. Students have frequently written about supportive interlocutors who, during the student's observational exercises, have stopped to ask about it. Students have mentioned to me a feeling of obligation, sometimes a sense of burden to do well for the sake of those who supported them, to help them in the future. Such sentiments were not necessarily nationalistic. Not all students who expressed these views were Lebanese. Some students were Palestinian, Others from Syria. There was a disjointed and fragmented shared imagination perhaps because of an array of aftermaths from which to choose.

Sbaiti has also shown that during the French Mandate (1923 – 1946), it was both "French and Lebanese authorities," using the domain of education, examinations, and access to employment opportunities to further their own cultural and political reach" (2016: 325). She writes that on the one hand, a "tension lay between a "moral obligation" to instill colonial subjects with the necessary, and self-evidently desirable, aspects of French culture, learning, and thought, and the fear that these subjects would exceed their station in life" (ibid). While on the other, the emerging Lebanese bourgeoisie elite, particularly in Beirut, sought to compete with French hegemony. Early policies of the mandate ensured that French would be the main language taught at school, with students taking the French Baccalaureate exam. But the hierarchy of knowledge was to undergo changes when, the Lebanese "bacc" was designed by local nationalist elites, with a nationalist education in mind. Along the way, the broader domain of education in the country shifted from denoting "a mark of intellectual distinction," to taking on "a more utilitarian purpose" (2016: 325). By 1940, students wrote a letter to the French High Commission, demanding that the "more difficult and arduous" parts of the baccalaureate exam. If it was not dropped, then the French and the Lebanese government would be committing a "massacre." Sbaiti writes that the students viewed "the baccalaureate exam" as "an empty promise" and the ""massacre" was that of the liberal education which the French administration had dangled so enticingly yet made impossible to acquire" (ibid).

The scaffolding of the education system put into place during the 1920 and 1930s, continues to permeate a cruel and painful sort of optimism. Upon asking one undergraduate cohort what they wanted to do in the future, very few students thought about becoming anthropologists. This was even though nearly all student in that group were majoring in sociology and anthropology. Several students mentioned the possibility of working in the humanitarian sector. Those who did show an interest in pursuing anthropology, spoke of their intention to eventually apply to an anthropological doctorate program abroad. This is because there are no doctoral programs for anthropology in Lebanon. According to Sawaf, the American University of Beirut is the only institution in the country, and most of the MENA region, offering a master's degree in anthropology (2020).

Not all students who attended my classes come from elite backgrounds. Some were the first generation of their family to attend university. Those who spoke of taking more practical and vocational routes, were not necessarily first-generation university-goers. Several students relied on financial aid from the university. But these programs do not always cover complete tuitions fees or expenses. Some students are therefore unsure if they will be able to procure enough funds to cover the remaining amounts. Some students expressed a worry about fitting into the academic milieu. One student drew comparisons with intellectual elites in Lebanon, who she observed during conferences. She remained quiet and shy, unsure that if she spoke, her weak Arabic grammar would give away her secondary education at a public school, and then a tertiary one at a private but by no means elite school. When she spoke, it was hard for me not think of my father who lives 30 minutes away from the university I work. He has never visited it. He grew up between the 1940s and 1950s and has few fond memories about his Francophone school run by priests. He loathes speaking in French. For a while, he trained as an electrician but gave it up when he found work somewhere else in the global south. Life histories as such as his, involving contradictory and fragmented encounters with education and language, are not unique in Lebanon. If education is seen as a possibility for upward mobility, there are still the ghosts of colonial past that continue to haunt. The only one public university known as the Lebanese University, established during the 1950s has its origins in student protests. Students from private universities, such as the Jesuit founded, Université Saint Joseph and the American University of Beirut (founded by American Protestants), took strike action in protest for more just access to higher education. By 2022, amidst the financial collapse, Lebanese University professors took strike

action, their salaries devalued by more than 90% on account of the country's hyperinflation. Like many times before Lebanese University, remained closed.

Fire

It seems that we have travelled far from the recuperation I wrote about at the beginning of this piece. Painful pedagogies raise the question if we really should recuperate anything at all. The legacies of education in Lebanon today are themselves entanglements of dissonance and friction. This is a system of learning built upon colonial policies and colonial intellectualism steeped with visions M Elshkary describes by quoting Maghraoui, as "liberalism without democracy" (2013: 20). Can we really disinherit all these visions that have long shaped the region? They have become part and parcel of intellectual projects that sought to carve out distinct trajectories of Arab thought. Perhaps abandoning them is not really the point but rather to unsettle them further and to unmake them. Evocative here are Halabi's observations that, "the literary unmaking of the intellectual" ultimately redefined and recoded the political (2013: 33).

What would the unmaking of an anthropological ancestor entail? This question is not about provincializing the discipline. Granted, there must be more reckoning to consider how concepts travel and shape how we in anthropology view, research, and teach about the world. There is violence to this, because in the process of employing, engaging, and giving precedence to one concept, we may well be doing away with another. I felt this discord when the student drew the comparison between trauma and witchcraft. Anthropology is of course a discipline inherently comparative, and in ways often misleading because of the supposition of a universal struggle with "the same givens of nature" (Strathern 1988: 343). Yet it was not the comparison itself that the student made but the route that comparison took. I was thrilled the student, and others, were reading Evans-Pritchard. I was very much inspired by their abilities to make such connections. However, I could not get rid of the nagging feeling as to why Evans-Pritchard?

Doing away with ancestors does not mean that we should stop teaching Evans-Pritchard. Yet we need to think carefully about the "star system" that has longed informed how we teach, read, cite and so (Jobson 2020). During that introductory lecture on witchcraft and anthropology, I brought up Evans-Pritchard as an anthropologist who influenced how the topic is studied. Perhaps I should have presented the chronology in a way that did not imply an origin of thought, or perhaps to pause longer on the fact that Evans-Pritchard was working for the Government of Anglo-Egypt- Sudan. That is, to further reflect on the debates about the political space anthropology held at the time. According to Ahmed, Evans-Pritchard believed that anthropology only had an indirect influence on colonial policy (1973). In any case, it is interesting that when considering "Zande philosophy," of which he argued witchcraft belonged, Evans-Pritchard did not, to the best my knowledge, fully consider the broader turbulent political context. If he had done so, he might have called the special substances inside different people's bodies something else rather than witchcraft.

It was thinking about the traumas of living through events like port explosions that the student in my class arrived at the witchcraft analogy. Like witchcraft, trauma can be hereditary. It is also made up of matter but somehow, we are never able to fully touch it and thus, it is quite visceral. The witchcraft of the Azande somehow gives meaning to the aftermaths of all the unfortunate events through which the traumatized have lived. The student's analogy is perhaps but one of the "patchy" "feral proliferations" coming out "from beyond the perceived canon and curated venues of anthropological knowledge production (Jobson 2020: 5, Tsing et al, 2019). But only just. The student came up with this comparison at an American liberal arts college in Beirut. Nevertheless, he thought of this metaphor not just in the aftermath of *a* political catastrophe, but in the perpetual aftermaths of many political catastrophes and the disintegration of political projects in the region. Viewed from the vantage point of the Arab-speaking majority region, anthropology was perhaps always a bit patchy.

Does all this mean we should let anthropology burn as Jobson suggests? If I have learnt anything from fires, it is that not everything gets burnt away. In the inevitable salvaging process that ensues, recuperation will always be a highly political act. What we try to keep alive is what we hope to bring to the future. In the many "feral proliferations" of anthropologies in Lebanon, there are those that take up anthropology's ethnographic method outside of the university to salvage life histories of migrants, seemingly hidden feminist geographies, and ecologies of cities of cement. There are collectives that organize talks, publications, and training sessions to gather women's' stories and forge out feminist spaces of engagement. In doing so, they operate outside the framings of higher institutions. There is a clear objective to do so and to salvage, with a window wide open to

the messiness and collective labors involved in ethnographic encounters. It remains a patchy, imperfect, fraught political projects. But such kinds of collectives seem to suggest that anthropology flourishes in patchy and piecemeal ways elsewhere other than in the university where we cling onto liberal ideals in a world burning down.

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