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QUEERING HETEROSEXUAL (INTERSECTARIAN) LOVE IN LEBANON

Abstract
This article draws on a year of ethnography conducted among cis heterosexual couples in contemporary urban Lebanon in order to argue that, in the absence of a serious project of national reconciliation, intersectarian love, despite its short lifespan, constitutes restorative instances in post–civil war Lebanon. Intersectarian hetero desire emerges as a counter-discourse that threatens the masculinist foundations of the Lebanese state. By tracing the timeline of love in the life of Lebanese citizens, this article places personal narratives of "impossible" intersectarian love stories in conversation with queer temporality scholarship in order to recognize the political, albeit limited, potential of romantic love. Here, societal expectations of married life are replaced by an ephemeral unity that operates *in contra* to hegemonic interpretations of "man and wife."

Keywords: affect theory; Lebanon; Middle East; queer theory; romantic love; sect

I met Aline[1] a week to the day since her *khutūba*[2] to Waʿil. Before Waʿil, an Orthodox Christian like her, Aline had dated Diya, a Shiʿi Muslim, for six years during her university studies towards a degree in architecture. According to Aline, she and Diya "clicked on every level."[3] Not only was Diya from a "good family"; unlike the majority of Shiʿi male youth in Lebanon, he "was not invested in Hizbullah[4] and their politics."[5] When Diya suggested it was time to disclose their relationship to their immediate family, Aline, unlike Diya, felt particularly anxious:

> I simply couldn't introduce him to my mother. Or my father. Or anyone, for that matter. I spoke to my uncle [paternal] about him at first. My uncle never married. He is well-traveled and has life experience. He always struck me as open-minded. My parents are not *mitʿaṣbīn* [fundamentalist], but they are very traditional people.[6]

Aline and Diya's inconclusive union, to which I return shortly, is illustrative of the "impossibility" of intersectarian love, which I examine in detail in this work. I argue that intersectarian love is best understood as a queer utopia given its potential to destabilize normative affective attachments in post-civil war Lebanon. In this article, I use love and romantic love interchangeably.

In a 2013 article, Maya Mikdashi calls for "queering" Middle East studies, and for embracing queer theory as methodology, or "a way of interrogating normative practices of and assumptions about race, class, the state, and the body."[7] Mikdashi develops her

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argument from the critique of the myth of the "universal unmarked citizen."[8] According to Mikdashi, this myth reproduces the space between state and citizens as equal, "ungendered," and "unclassed."[9] Mikdashi instead captures the rather uneven relationship between the Lebanese state and its citizens through an ethnographic examination of "strategic [sect] conversions," a largely gendered, sexed, classed, and religious (read sect) practice that uses the eighteen personal status laws available to Lebanese women and men.[10] In a minute analysis of prior legal cases, Mikdashi shows that if and when the Lebanese state intervenes in decisions made by personal status courts, it is strictly to "protect the rights of the citizen" from "procedural (or administrative) abuses."[11] As a result, Mikdashi correctly concludes that the Lebanese state "is already" a secular space. Theoretically speaking, Mikdashi distinguishes between the *madhhab,* the state's legal form of recognition or one's personal status, and "sect," the socio-politically perceived form of belonging. This distinction is crucial because it challenges mainstream portrayals of Lebanon as "stuck" in a sectarian deadlock. Mikdashi supports her argument through several examples of "strategic sectarian conversion"—a surprisingly straightforward and uncomplicated procedure when juxtaposed with Lebanon's "sectarian mess." As Mikdashi contends, "neither sect nor personal status necessarily reflects one's religious beliefs and practices."[12] Moreover, if a citizen chooses not to identify with their sect or with their gender vis-à-vis the wider society, they will still be socially and legally recognized by the state per their personal status and sex, the two very "technologies of recognition that the Lebanese census and the state follow."[13]

Despite the legal facilitations that ensue from strategic sectarian conversion, my data suggest a complex lived reality whereby the readily available legal venues do not necessarily result in their swift application. In what follows, I draw on some of this data in order to show the unevenness of and messy links between love as a feeling and sect in Lebanon.

NOTES ON QUEERING AND ROMANTIC LOVE

Mikdashi's "queer" reading of Lebanese citizenship is undoubtedly at odds with Western liberal conceptions of citizenship: the entanglement of personal status laws with further practices related to citizenship in the context of state-backed strategic conversions allow Lebanese citizens to (almost) personalize their relationship with both state and society, an unfathomable paradigm in the realm of the "universal citizen" where the personal is deliberately downgraded for the sake of the linear state. In many ways, Mikdashi's metatheory of queering citizenship is one example of a "theory from the South."[14] It is an alternative model of thinking that privileges intersectional analysis in thinking through citizenship and exploring the space between citizen and state, in addition to widening our understanding of what constitutes democratic citizenship and participation in the first place. Mikdashi is not the first to critique the "reification of the global south as raw data" to be queried.[15] Numerous scholars have analyzed the space between the Metropole and its colonies through a queer lens for purposes ranging from undermining the authenticity of the dominant order[16] to reclaiming local onto-epistemologies.[17]

Romantic heterosexual love[18] shapes global economies,[19] regulates publics,[20] and dictates our present towards a reproductive type of futurity.[21] Still, there exists a "lack of public discussion"[22] about it. This lack is not entirely surprising given the "hetero"[23] and "chrono" normative[24] orders that organize our daily lives. Our bodies are timed and

relentlessly geared towards fulfilling specific societal expectations in particular times and places: from graduating from school or university to finding a job, getting married, and having children. When a particular order is hypernormalized in both time and space, it is taken as given; it becomes the signifier against which derivative and divergent ways of doing, being, seeing, and feeling are measured. That is, this order is reproduced following a logic of sameness: what comes next must originate from *and* reproduce sameness. What happens, then, when an imperative is breached? What happens to those involved? What traces remain, if any? And how do we deploy them towards an inclusive future where the inclusion of some is not predicated upon the exclusion of others?[25]

The particular normative order I focus on in this article is intrasectarian marriage, a deeply ingrained institution in contemporary Lebanon. Conversely, I identify intersectarian love, exemplified by Aline, whose experience I described earlier, as its antithesis. The idea of marriage and love as seemingly diverging poles emerged from my empirical investigation of cis heterosexual romantic love in Lebanon in 2014 and 2015. Over a period of one year and in intervals of two months, I conducted in-depth and life interviews with a total of twenty-eight cis heterosexual couples, both jointly and separately, as a way for me to chart and track their love trajectories.

My interlocutors' age range was twenty-three to thirty-four. Most had pursued further education and were working or actively working for work at the time of my research. Although most could be said to come from a middle-class background, I emphasize the importance of thinking their class status along a spectrum of precarity, especially in light of Lebanon's overall frail economy.

My broader research was concerned with the political economy of courtship in Lebanon, including financial, affective, and parental negotiations. The findings I relate here are the synthesis of the *reminiscent* fashion in which intersectarian love stories were unanimously narrated to me by my interlocutors, for whom sect generally constitutes a "border," in the Gloria Anzaldúa sense, that separates "the safe from the unsafe"[26] and the same from the *else*. Conversely, I am interested in the space in between love and marriage.

Intersectarian love remains an affect against which both society and the legal realm discriminate. In this work, I argue for viewing intersectarian love stories as reconciliatory instances in post–civil war Lebanon's discursively taught (dis)affectivities, where romantic attachments to specific others is taught and conditioned from an early age along intrasectarian and heteronormative lines. Seeing its potential to destabalize normative intrasectarian connectivity and its projection towards "impossible"[27] others, this article recognizes the reconciliatory potential of intersectarian heterosexual romantic love in post–civil war Lebanon, and thus views it as a "queer" affect, or a "futurity" that is yet to be:[28] "Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a *here* and *now* and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world."[29]

In carrying out this analysis, I proceed as follows. First, I critically examine the existing literature on love in the Middle East and elsewhere on the empirical and theoretical levels in order to stress the "spatial, relational, and political"[30] dimensions of love. That is, I understand love as a union of the material and the imagined, the real and the virtual, the collective and the individual. My either/and understanding of love is crucial for an optimum engagement with my interlocutors' narratives and the larger political landscape in Lebanon. Next, drawing on empirical data, I identify the timeline of love in Lebanon in

order to distinguish it from marriage. Far from defining each, I focus on what they do: whereas marriage territorializes, love is capable of containing the surplus that exceeds societal equation of marriage with reason, maturity, and communal fostering. My analysis thus prioritizes the social category of sect in order to understand how differential affectivities are (re)produced in Lebanon. Finally, I draw on queer temporality scholarship in order to argue that in the absence of a serious project of national reconciliation in post–civil war Lebanon, the love relationships I study constitute reconciliatory instances. Ultimately, my article attempts to answer the call of Maya Mikdashi to "queer" Middle East studies.[31] In addition, it contributes to a growing literature that examines the Middle East through an affective lens.[32]

LOVE AND THE EXISTING LITERATURE

The absence of a canonical definition for love has caused academic "anxiety"[33] and "discomfort."[34] The notion of love as a "master trope" that is "as pervasive as it is variable"[35] is a highly productive tool for social analysis, especially of gender relations, because it reveals some of the basic ways that human societies organize social life, including marriage, as well as how individuals enact, resist, or transform social discourses of love. What's more, the question of "when, whom, and how one marries all have implications for gender relations within society."[36]

Three broad strands characterize the existing literature on love.[37] The first strand includes anthropological works invested in assessing the universality of romantic love, notably its existence outside the west.[38] Unsurprisingly, western hegemonic patterns of love are taken as a referent framework against which further cultures and contexts are measured, sometimes in "inferior" terms.[39] Equally, in a recent special section in the *Arab Studies Journal* on romantic love in the Middle East, the editors relate Euro-American anxieties about Muslims' fertility in order to critique the view that true love is an "exclusively Euro-American discourse."[40] The flaky boundaries between love as a feeling and the reproductive outcome of marriage compel us to embrace sexuality as a domain of "restriction," "repression," and "agency,"[41] and an "actively contested political and social terrain in which groups struggle to alter sexual arrangements and ideologies."[42]

The second strand uses a "political economy" framework. This strand recognizes love's entanglement with global market forces and thus theorizes love as a commodity.[43] We learn from this literature that the "modernity" of romantic love in nonwestern settings, illustrated in the insistence on choosing one's life partner, is the result of increasingly individual selves who emerge in conjunction with an increasingly borderless and globalized world. The question of choice and agency, as opposed to arranged marriages and kin pressure, has come to characterize love interpretations in contemporary nonwestern settings, including India, Korea, China, Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco.[44] In the Middle East, a "political economy" approach has informed the work of Homa Hoodfar and Diane Singerman in Egypt, and of Frances Hasso in the UAE.[45] Such works uncover the enmeshment of romantic love with power structures, notably gender, class, parental approval, religion (in the moral sense, oftentimes by, for instance, contrasting traditional practices of courtship with modern ones), and social standing. It is important to note, however, that the boundaries between the couple and their kin, tradition and modernity,

old and new, are not binaries, and their formation is highly dependent on the context in question and the power dynamics involved.

The third strand of the literature examines the racialized dimension of love by paying attention to power dynamics within it. Such works acknowledge the intersection of love and the nation, or the processes by which exclusionary/inclusionary attachments are produced. In the Lebanese context, for instance, Lebanese women who marry foreign men have no right to pass on their Lebanese citizenship to their children; the same does not apply to men who marry non-Lebanese women. In addition to showcasing the gendered (read, unequal) outcome of Lebanese citizenship, this state of affairs reveals how Lebanese men and women are taught to attach negative (or positive) affects to specific bodies. In the same vein, we learn from Charu Gupta that the Hindu right in India capitalizes on what has become known as "Love Jihad" in its anti-Muslim deployment.[46] Similar anxieties related to fertility rates can be observed in the context of Lebanon. The myth of Lebanon's delicate Muslim/Christian balance, which can be traced back to the 1932 census under the French Mandate,[47] or the fear of a high fertility rate among Hizbullah's partisans, are common topics of conversation in Lebanese society, in addition to impacting the biopolitical rhetoric of local sectarian authorities.[48]

Elsewhere in the Middle East, the notion of love is often examined in tandem with processes related to modernity and nation-building. This literature emphasizes the political, cultural, and historical specificity of emotions. I argue that this literature predates what has become known as the "affective turn"[49] in mainstream cultural studies, a point I will return to shortly, in addition to unveiling contemporary non-western debates related to the study of emotions and affects. Afsaneh Najmabadi, for instance, shows how love was relocated from a homo- to a hetero-setting in order to redeploy it as an ideal between husband and wife in a step towards reinforcing the model of the modern nuclear family during the era of nation-building in Iran.[50] During the late 20th century, orientalist depictions of love practices in Egypt abounded in travelogues and in the writings of western missionaries and native Egyptian modernists. Leila Ahmed notes how western missionaries in Egypt portrayed marriage in Islam as "based on sensuality and not love" and regarded Muslim wives as "prisoner and slave rather than . . . companion and helpmeet."[51] Conversely, Ahmed understands modern and universalist understandings of love as "rooted in the colonialist critique of Muslim societies."[52] In a similar vein, Lila Abu-Lughod critiques modernists' depictions of arranged marriages as lacking "affection and companionability."[53] Through a minute analysis of the work of Qasim Amin, Egypt's quintessential modernist thinker, who argued that Egyptian women were "incapable of truly loving their men," and that Islamic scholars have "reduced marriage to a contract by which a man has the right to sleep with a woman," Abu-Lughod demonstrates how modernists' idealization of "companionate marriage" or love-based marriage became a suitable vehicle for the instrumentalization of gender during the period of nation-building in Egypt.[54] More recently, Beth Baron, writing about Egypt of the 1990s, discusses love as a bourgeois ideal that bases itself on marriage,[55] whereas Viola Shafik, Abu-Lughod, and Rebecca Joubin[56] drew respectively on Egyptian cinema, Egyptian television productions, and Syrian ones, to show how discourses related to love and sex are mediated through carefully developed scripts that simultaneously uphold and contest larger societal paradigms related to gender, sexuality, and the nation.

LOVE AND AFFECT

Affectivities, including love, are evoked because they are capable of responding to "relations of power" that "operate through bodies in ways that are both more direct than theories of discourse, ideology, and deliberative reason," in addition to being "more elusive from the perspective of conventional analytic and critical strategies."[57] My findings compel me to surrender to love's elusiveness. This surrendering, though, is not akin to a "lost game." On the contrary, it is telling of the spaces and knowledges that are yet to be. As discourse, love is inevitably taught, a point that is evident in the views of my interlocutors. Throughout my fieldwork, love was repeatedly reiterated not only in relation to materiality but also in conjunction with the Unknown. This view concords with Deborah Thien's argument that "love enacted as a politics of (im)possibility blurs mental and visceral experience, moving us beyond the everyday metaphysics of mind versus body to a more complex and intersubjective reading."[58]

One the one hand, the Unknown reiterates my interlocutors' geopolitical anxieties about the region's future, and the feeling that "war is coming."[59] The failing strategies of Lebanon's ruling class, typified by my interlocutors' preoccupation with the intensification of the institutionalization of sectarianism, and the view that migration is inevitable, greatly informed my interlocutors' views and experience of intersectarian love. On the other hand, and materiality aside, the Unknown is invoked as destiny (*qadar*). Destiny was the culprit in the making and dissolution of love stories. That one's destiny has *already* been written is a direct reiteration of the elsewhere, and of an existence where both the invisible and the visible collide and contribute to the production of subjectivities. The Unknown is a resignation-acceptance of the limits of knowing; in addition to acting upon the self, it allows the forging of "lines of flight." The interplay between destiny, piety, and individual and collective reflexive practices that permeate my findings echoes the recent "ethical turn" within anthropology. In addition to drawing our attention to "the fundamental roles of human passions and transcendental powers in shaping people's . . . existential journeys," anthropology's "ethical turn" forces us to reflect on "modalities of agency and (inter)subjectivity" that "rational understanding" falls short of capturing fully.[60] Accordingly, love coincides with Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg's understanding of affects as "those visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion."[61]

Love comes in a myriad of forms, many of which are "impossible," and it is precisely these momentary stations that I am interested in. In the particular context of post–civil war Lebanon, where national reconciliation has yet to be established seriously, intersectarian love, despite its short life, exhumes a particular agency for those men and women involved—one "against all odds," which attempts, but fails, to reverse the status quo. Conversely, I stress the "spatial, relational, and political" dimensions of love, as conceived by Carey-Ann Morrison, Lynda Johnston, and Robyn Longhurt. I add temporality to their conceptualization in order to emphasize the shifting meaning of affects and their nondisassociation from power structures.

In her critique of Eurocentric interpretations of emotions, Divya Tolia-Kelly reminds us that "affective economies are defined and circulate through and within historical notions of the political, social and cultural capacities of various bodies as signified rather than those specifically encountered, felt, loved, loathed and sensed."[62] Conversely, I opt

for a grounded analysis of romantic love as opposed to abstract theorizing,[63] unlike intrasectarian marriage, which territorializes Lebanon's sectarian institutional fabric, the volatility of intersectarian love deterritorializes it, given how it disrupts Lebanon's deeply rooted connective patriarchy. My data suggest that religion, sect, class, and nationality are the essential categories that impact the intensities of love. The literature increasingly recognizes the transformative potential of affects. In her analysis of love as a political concept, Lauren Berlant states that "a properly transformational political concept would provide the courage to take the leap into a project of better relationality that would give us patience with the 'without guarantees' part of love's various temporalities."[64] This absence of guarantee is not limited to political demands per se. Ruba Salih took the risky task of relating Palestinian women's experiences of and engagement with "love" in refugee camps in order to "displace nationalist affects by opening up other types of affects nested in the concreteness of ordinary relations, attachments and responsibilities."[65] Salih's work speaks directly to my own, particularly where I call for the recognition of the reconciliatory—albeit temporary—potential of intersectarian love in contemporary post–civil war Lebanon.

LOVE, MARRIAGE, AND SECT

The intersection of sect with gender in Lebanon, notably in personal status laws, has been examined by scholars largely to show how the relocation of matters considered "private"—e.g., marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance—to the religious realm reproduces unequal patterns of citizenship, depending on one's sect and gender.[66] Conversely, the literature on personal status laws in Lebanon offers a nuanced interpretation of the taken-as-given notion of patriarchy, because it captures unequal citizenships between and among women and men. Lebanon has three religious groups (Muslim, Christian, and Druze), comprising eighteen recognized sects. In other words, there are eighteen different ways of addressing the matters with which personal status laws are concerned (e.g., marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody). If, like Mikdashi,[67] we add the category of sex or differentiate between *madhab* and sect, we are left with an ever-growing number of equations. The relocation of personal laws to the private sphere reinforces the legal and religious architecture of Lebanon's distinct communities, to the extent that they acquire an Andersonian meaning:

> While it is important to look at the historical specificity of the construction of collectivities, there is no inherent difference between them, whether they are constructed as ethnic, national racial co-religious (although sometimes there is a difference in scale): they are both Andersonian "imagined communities."[68]

In addition, this relocation absolves the state from its civic duties. As a result, extended kin have come to act as the "primary location for protection against the state," as Suad Joseph rightly argues.[69] For those individuals who, for an array of reasons, decide to operate outside of the parameters of personal status laws, they risk being doubly jeopardized. This was the case for those activists who sought to register their (heterosexual) marriage directly with the state; we learn from Mikdashi that they soon "found themselves unable to inherit, run for public office, or register their marriage certificate or their new-born children in the government registries."[70]

Whereas civil marriage activists are partly driven by ideals to reformulate civil participation vis-à-vis the state on the whole, they coincide with my interlocutors' feelings of loss. In Lebanon love as a feeling that is pure and elective is constructed as unattainable. This is evident in the gap between the lived reality of my interlocutors on the one hand, and the success of "impossible love stories" in the love registers upon which Lebanese citizens draw, including locally produced TV series, movies, love songs or novels, on the other hand. Although my work is concerned with intersectarian love, which overlaps with but does not equate civil marriage, both share the same element of queerness as political hope.

Love, as I pointed out earlier, is relational, political, and social, but also highly unpredictable and ambivalent, a point that most of the literature on the topic emphasizes. For this reason, I find it more useful to analyze what love does rather than what love is. Where sect is concerned, courtship periods reveal minute processes of negotiating politico-sectarian allegiance, including in the context of intrasectarian couples. This is because marriage, unlike love, territorializes and reproduces Lebanon's religious/political nexus.

For the most part, intersectarian love was remembered and relegated to the past by my interlocutors. In addition to constituting a "headache," it emerged as a losing game. For many, intersectarian love is akin to a space where one simultaneously "feels alienated from one's original culture and yet alien in the dominant culture."[71] My data shows that love is sought and experienced outside of, and in juxtaposition to marriage. This is not to say that the marital unions I encountered are devoid of love. On the contrary, my interlocutors described their relationships as based on "love" and "personal choice." In addition, they pointed out the importance of *insijām*, a particular affect that has been examined at length by Fida Adely in the context of Jordan.[72] *Insijām*, which I translate as "synchronicity," is defined by Adely as "a level or type of compatibility that would ensure marital stability, prevent discord among families, and potentially foster love between husband and wife."[73] In Adely's work, *insijām* is constructed as the responsible and ideal type of love, because it is capable of encompassing both the couple's compatibility with each other *and* the approval of the couple's kin. Similarly, most of my interlocutors considered intrasectarian love, or love that is geared towards marriage as the "right" kind of love. Lubna, for instance, was one of the few interlocutors who vehemently opposed intersectarian liaisons. According to her, it is "very important to be careful whom one dates these days because times are difficult." Following Lubna, "respect is more important, and if you have your family's and your husband's support, then you needn't worry about anything."[74]

Lubna's views are pragmatic and resonate highly with the words of ʿIzza, who, referring to the scope and influence of kin and communal ties, observes that "to marry a man is to marry his entire family." ʿIzza informed me that she would get married to "anyone, as long as he is Shiʿi like her." When I enquired why she distinguishes between the Sunni and Shiʿi branches of Islam, she asked: "could you imagine a supporter of Hizbullah [a Shiʿi political party] living side by side with a Hariri [a Sunni political party] supporter?" When I said "yes," she scolded me and demanded that I "get real" and "not act smart," before adding that "it might taste like honey in the beginning, but everything will turn sour soon."[75]

My findings suggest that whereas premarriage adulthood abounds with intersectarian love affairs, at the time of marriage people revert to strictly intrasectarian connectivity.

It is the temporality of intersectarian love that rouses my curiosity. Before starting university, for instance, Nur's parents insisted that she wear the veil. Although Nur ignored her parents' request at first, she eventually started veiling once they threatened to stop paying her university fees. Nur's parents, like many, view university as a space where students interact closely with people from other sects in the absence of direct parental gaze. By insisting that Nur wear the veil, her parents are hoping that she does not "drift" and that the veil, as a signifier, will help constrict her friendships to equally "pious" and "God-fearing students," a reality that Nur relates in a highly sarcastic tone.[76]

It is important to nuance the views of Nur, Lubna, and ʿIzza. To the untrained eye, each could be mistaken for a puritan who purposefully draws binaries between her community and *any* other; a righteous community member who excludes *specific* "others;" or a fundamentalist who is strictly motivated by politico-sectarian beliefs. However, the reality is more complex, and I identify two important factors. On the one hand, the enmeshment of relationality with politico-sectarian allegiance in Lebanon reproduces strict patterns of sociability that trump individual desire and privilege communal ties. On the other hand, a nuanced understanding of sectarian belonging calls for an intersectional analysis that accounts for the tight links between sect, class, and economic precarity.

Suad Joseph conceptualizes the enmeshment of kin relations with the apparatus of the state, including political affiliation as in the case of ʿIzza, through what she terms "care/control paradigm," whereby men care (love) *and* control (power) women.[77] In Lebanon the intersection of relationality with a patriarchal order results in an affective paradox: love becomes entangled with power. According to Suad Joseph, the Lebanese self emerges from and reproduces what she terms "patriarchal connectivity." This self recognizes itself in relation to and as an "extension" of "significant others."[78] At the same time, this connectivity is informed by politico-sectarian bonds and deeply rooted patriarchal underpinnings—e.g., the privileging of males and elders over women and youth. Where seemingly puritan sectarian reinforcement is concerned, I draw directly on Nadine M. who reminds us that:

> In the particular case of Lebanon, religion becomes fundamentalist when several factors take their toll on a community, such as poverty, a negligent or corrupt state, sectarian feuds and wars, and a general socio-economic inability to adjust to this post-modern, globalized world. Religion thus intervenes and becomes more political, speaking out against what it perceives as the threat of secularism and providing services for impoverished communities that the state has long neglected. And so, fundamentalism rises and takes on a sectarian face.[79]

Lubna, for instance, comes from a "good family"—and a wealthy one, too. A good family is not necessarily measured in terms of wealth; rather, it is indicative of a family that upkeeps good morals and values (*akhlāq*), in addition to evoking the importance of having ancestry that can be traced.[80] In such cases, convenience marriages, politics of respectability, and the social and political influence of one's family all intervene towards the production of particular affective pedagogies. Economic and social capital aside, emotional capital plays an important role in the affective pedagogies of my interlocutors. Emotional capital is not necessarily measurable. For many of my interlocutors, the surplus of passion is constantly contrasted with their families' expectations. Several interlocutors insisted that though their parents did not hold fundamentalist religious views, it would "break their heart" if they married outside of their sect.

The conflictive affectivities that define my interlocutors' narratives are telling of the spatial, relational, and political dimensions of romantic love in Lebanon: intersectarian love is an impossible affect that can only be experienced outside the socio-political boundaries of one's community. In addition, it is rarely lived in the present; it is repudiated in the present, remembered in past terms, *and* longed for. As Jana notes, "it [the materialization of material unions based on intersectarian love] is too late for my generation, but who knows what the future holds?"[81]

THE TEMPORALITY (AND SPATIALITY) OF LOVE

Jana, like many of my interlocutors, shared with me details of her past love affairs, including two intersectarian liaisons. Jana's testimonies were highly sensorial. Like many of the men and women to whom I spoke, she enthusiastically related excursions to "novel" geographical locations, foods she "had not tried before," "new music genres," and "embarrassing moments." When Jana met Ahmad during her second BT year, it was "love at first sight." Jana, an Orthodox Christian from Beirut, had "little in common" with Ahmad, a Sunni Muslim from the region of Akkar, but "*something* kept drawing us to each other." Following Jana, Akkar was an "off limit" region. Like many, including myself, Jana belongs to a generation of overly cautious parents who navigate present Lebanon alongside memories of trauma, death, and doubt. Lebanon's distinct sectarian communities inhabit more or less fixed geographical locations, except for larger cities.[82] For its post–civil war youth, including my interlocutors, they are more likely to travel abroad than visit new locations in Lebanon.[83] Jana remarked that, "when Ahmad took me to Akkar, I was speechless! I had no idea! My idea of Akkar is that it is underdeveloped . . . Yes, I could see a high level of poverty, but the landscape was phenomenal! No one tells you about it!"[84]

For several of my interlocutors, space constituted an important element. Oftentimes, the specific locations they relate acquire a "liminal" meaning, a "threshold" between two worlds, so to speak.[85] For Jana, her visits to Akkar constitute a threshold in her post–civil war Lebanon existence. At the same time, Akkar embodies a past that is both "painful" and "worth it." It is painful because "it brings forth memories of her love for Ahmed," and worth it because "it opened up her eyes to the diversity of Lebanon." At the time of my fieldwork, Jana was preparing to wed Dany, an Orthodox Christian like her. When I interviewed her alone on our third meeting, she told me that she asked Dany to visit Akkar the coming Sunday for their weekly excursion: "He could not comprehend my insistence on visiting Akkar, but I genuinely miss it." I asked Jana, "Are you in love with Ahmad still?" She replied with an assertive "No. Of course not! I am about to get married. I have no time for romance now."[86] Jana's statement relegates her sentiments for Ahmad to the past, in addition to distancing them from the affective meaning she ascribes to marriage. Conversely, it helps that we view the institution of marriage in Lebanon as a strictly "chrono-normative" practice that "uses time and organizes individual human bodies toward maximum productivity," in addition to making people "feel coherently collective, through particular orchestrations of time."[87]

For many of my interlocutors, marriage is binding in the relational sense. Lara distinguishes it from romance by highlighting the latter's "selfishness." Following Lara, "it's

easy to romanticize things and to go against the current when you're younger, until you realize how high the stakes are."[88] Indeed, the stakes are high for those who insist on pursuing a particular love in spite of kin disapproval. Throughout my fieldwork, the reaction of kin to nonapproved unions ranged from disownment and disinheritance to complete rupture. Still, it would be erroneous to blame kin for interfering to dissolve intersectarian love in all instances. Most of my interlocutors decided to "uncouple" from their partners themselves, and many jokingly qualified intersectarian love as a "headache." When I met Jomana, a Sunni Muslim, towards the end of 2014, she was becoming increasingly disillusioned with her love for Eli, a Christian Maronite. On one particular afternoon, she remarked:

> I don't know where this is going. After the evening prayer yesterday, I broke down and cried for hours. I was thinking to myself. What am I doing? How could I think that my relationship with Eli could go anywhere? It will never happen. It will break my mother's heart.[89]

Like many of my interlocutors, Jomana found herself torn between her feelings for Eli and her parents' reaction. Similar feelings of guilt were raised by Mireille, who grew considerably angry with her friends following her break up with Gowda: "I hated everyone back then, especially my friends. How could they not have stopped me?"[90] By blaming her friends, Mireille was projecting her agency onto them. To some extent, she exhibits a connective type of agency whereby one's agency is channeled through others. By willingly submitting herself to her friends' dictations, she finds a moral reference in them. In the context of Lebanon, one's agency, like most notions, practices, and institutions, whether formal or informal, operates through Suad Joseph's concept of "patriarchal connectivity."

Still, and despite the dilemmas that riddle their everyday, one must not make assumptions about Mireille and Jomana's love life. For her part, Mireille was adamant that she would never date someone from a different sect again because she "couldn't possibly cope with the magnitude of the headache" she had previously experienced. Equally, when I contacted Jomana in 2015 to follow up with her about her relationship with Eli, she told me they both decided to "uncouple." Her mother had introduced her to a distant relative whom she agreed to marry. When I asked Jomana what memories she keeps from her relationship with Eli, she fondly recalled Eli's mother's food dishes, particularly her *kibbeh nayyih*,[91] before stating the inevitable "*waja' ra's*" (headache).[92]

Not all the intersectarian love stories I encountered aroused hostile kin reactions. On the contrary, my fieldwork compels me to push for an either/and understanding of kin relations in the context of romantic love in Lebanon, because many of my interlocutors relied on the emotional labor of friends and kin members for the legitimation of their love in the eyes of their immediate family.[93] Such instances are best viewed as interruptions in Lebanon's normative timeline. This is because personal freedom emerges alongside disillusionment with Lebanon's politico-sectarian governance. Whereas my interlocutors use the expression "headache" figuratively, I draw on their malaise to formulate "Lebanese-ness," a two-fold imagined condition of ill-living where the present is lived "on hold" given the "inevitability of migrating sooner or later," and where protests and demands converge. Aline, whose feelings for Diya were reignited during our conversation, told me that she was "beyond fed up with everything in this country," and that she was eagerly awaiting her student visa to pursue a Master's degree in France.[94]

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Lebanese-ness is attuned to agency, subjectivity, and the everyday, in addition to escaping the notions of nationalism, sovereignty, patriotism, and the like. It operates in and between the individual, the communal, and the plural, and thus encompasses the intimate, the private, the public, the real, and the virtual. Lebanese-ness is the convergence of protests and demands in a single locus in contemporary Lebanon, an "undetermined context," so to speak. What one desires (Lebanon) is the very object that contributes to one's ill-living (Lebanon). Lebanese-ness brings forth the concept of the "elsewhere," as posited by Donna Haraway:

> "We," in these discursive worlds, have routes to connection other than through the radical dismembering and dis-placing of our names and our bodies. We have no choice but to move through a harrowed and harrowing artifactualism to elsewhere.[95]

Put simply, the "elsewhere" is never entirely knowable. It is an imaginary leap of faith that we take, and that propels us into a world of novel possibilities. The "elsewhere" was highly visible during my fieldwork, especially in my interlocutors consistent contrasting of the myriad of failure(s) that inform their everyday with *barrah* (abroad), understood as "anywhere but here." When I asked Khalid whether the fact that the "love of his life" had recently been naturalized in Australia made "falling in love" with her "easier," he calmly replied that "I was not mistaken," and that "everyone else is doing it."[96] The geographies of love equally figure in Clara's remarks:

> Some people convert for the sake of getting married. This is wrong! We should all refrain from getting married until civil marriage is permitted in Lebanon. Not everyone can afford the trip to Cyprus, you know? Also, some of us are more sensitive than others. It is absolutely out of the question for me to convert to something else, even if it was simply in ink form. It would break my mother's heart![97]

There exist today Lebanese and Cypriot businesses that specialize in arranging travel to Cyprus for Lebanese nationals who wish to marry civilly. Although the Lebanese state does not itself conduct civil marriages, it does recognize those obtained elsewhere. Here, the element of class is crucial, as Clara points out. At the same time, her narrative reflects the limits of class, given the affective concerns she raises vis-à-vis conversion.

ROMANTIC LOVE AS POLITICAL HOPE

Feminist scholars working on the Middle East prioritize empirical analysis in their research. In addition, their scholarly work coincides with an increasingly militarized climate. This reality means that few works engage with the Middle East from affective perspectives. The intensification of violence and militarization in the region, largely initiated and sanctioned by neoauthoritarian states, mean that a new generation of activists and scholars is forging new spaces to make themselves heard. Among these spaces I cite pleasure, leisure, music, and love. Such spaces are not simply characterized by consumption. They are products of the highly personal and emotive labor of a new generation of men and women eager to express and reclaim their right to a place to call home, their right to love, and their right to exist. Their affective lives compel us to investigate the contemporary Middle East from an onto-epistemological perspective in which the examination of emotions is central rather than secondary. Also, their understanding of liberation is not a

conventional one. Liberation, in their case, is not a physical state where security, borders, or geopolitics are at stake. If anything, their liberation is a *mental* and *affective* one—a willful exercise of the sort, a reflexive pedagogy through which they rewrite the violent history that has long saturated their everyday.

Recent works have successfully showed the political scope of emotions and its impact on the researcher, her interlocutors, and the field. In their special issue on ethnographic research in the Middle East in *Contemporary Levant*, the authors rightly proceed from an emotive point of departure.[98] In the same vein, Sertaç Sehlikoglu invites us to stop ignoring the "multiplicity of women's (and men's) subjectification, which inevitably embraces realms of aspiration, desire, and enjoyment."[99] Similarly, Ruba Salih critiques the modern moral discourse that "dislodges" the affective potentials of the body from the public sphere. Instead, Salih recognizes the emotional capital that constitutes her interlocutors' "everyday."[100] By doing so, she successfully closes the gap between the erroneous perception of the everyday as apolitical on the one hand, and what counts as properly "political," on the other hand. What counts as "properly political" is not limited to discursive interpretations and lengthy detached analysis. Rather, it is found in passing glimpses, reminiscent narratives, remnant memories, and imaginative landscapes. It helps, then, that we view intersectarian love stories as "ephemeras" that serve as "visible evidence."[101] Drawing on queer livelihoods, the late José Muñoz's configuration of the queer other as vulnerable befits my interlocutors' intersectarian love experience: "Queerness is often transmitted covertly. This has everything to do with the fact that leaving too much of a trace has often mean that the queer subject has left herself open for attack."[102]

I have argued in this article that the shortliveness of intersectarian love is best analyzed through an affective lens. Far from defining love, I focused on what love does. Love is relational, spatial, and political.[103] It is relational because it creates novel affectivities that transcend the boundaries of one's sectarian community. It is spatial because it is embodied. And it is political because it speaks directly to the lived reality of young men and women in post–civil war Lebanon. With the privileging of neoliberal reconstruction projects at the expense of national reconciliation, intersectarian love is a credible arena for understanding the entanglement of agency with the larger apparatus of power in Lebanon, in addition to allowing us to move beyond the "sectarian deadlock" that permeates uncritical works on Lebanon.

Whereas the topic of love seems "trivial" compared to the imminent implications of the Global War on Terror, I recommend that we approach it whilst appreciating its agentic potential. Seeing its potential to destabilize normative intrasectarian connectivity and its projection towards "impossible" others, heterosexual love is best conceived as a queer affect. Queerness, in this case, is invoked as political hope, a "futurity" that is yet to be,[104] and the "better story"[105] to be told:

> Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality.[106]

Muñoz draws on the works of Lee Edelman[107] to complicate his notion of "the future as kid stuff," a metaphor that emphasizes the figure of the child, rather than the queer, as the anticipated guardian of heteronormative and homonormative values. The child, in this

sense, is akin to a floating sign to which all knowledges are referred. In contrast, the queer deviates from the stability offered by the child. They are the anti-thesis of the child.[108] Not only do they destabilize compulsory heterosexuality, they are capable of absorbing the surplus that confuses the child, which leads it to its disavowing, rejection, and marginalization. The "fascism of the baby's face," as Edelman calls it, or the reproduction of the future as iteration of the same, is reflective of an artificial utopia from which dissidence is forcefully removed. Muñoz's configuration of queerness as a utopia that is "yet to be," succinctly captures my interlocutors' affective dilemmas: they are caught between the imperative of intrasectarian marriage and the unattainability of intersectarian love. Conversely, my queering exercise does not "refer" my analysis "back to US queer studies,"[109] and thus answers Mikdashi's call to queer Middle East studies.

Last but not least, in my queering of heterosexual love, it is important to be mindful of what Lila Abu-Lughod calls the "romance of resistance," or reading "all forms of resistance as signs of the ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated."[110] Following Abu-Lughod's work on the Bedouin setting of the Awlad ʿAli tribe in Egypt, love poetry, which some may interpret as a frivolous pastime, becomes the vehicle through which generational conflicts related to tradition and modernity, notably young men's defiant views on forced marriage, are channeled.[111] We learn from Abu-Lughod that the tradition of Bedouin love poetry is concomitant with and dependent on the very agnatic, patriarchal, and patrilineal authorities that deny it in the first place, and that it would be futile to view them as resistance per se. Instead, we are presented with a study that convincingly demonstrates that emotions do not emanate from a free-floating inner self; rather, emotions are shaped by their cultural milieu.[112]

Abu-Lughod's advice is important. After all, it is my analysis, as a researcher, that bestows on intersectarian love the potential to affect social transformation. Such reflections resonate with recent ethnographic work by Laleh Khalili where she examined the "pleasures," notably the activities of promenading and beachgoing, of young Palestinian women from refugee camps in Beirut.[113] Mindful of her researcher position position as researcher, Khalili reads beyond her interlocutors' narratives. She carefully unpacks the power configurations underpinning them and stops short of referring to promenading and beachgoing as resistance. Instead, she recommends that we view such activities as "moments of pleasure," or "caesuras in the massive apparatus of power—welded from strands of wage labor, nationalist certitudes and political exclusion—which constricts these women."[114] Equally, I avoid romanticizing intersectarian love in my work. Whereas I acknowledge the validity of emotions as credible and objective sources of knowledge, I do not pretend to reflect my interlocutors' views necessarily." Such clarification is a willful step that avoids speaking on behalf of the lived experience of my interlocutors whilst recognizing agency as that "capacity for actions that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create."[115] Ultimately, my aim is to rethink the social category of sect past an identitarian analysis and to show the scope of a analysis that engages queer theory beyond sexuality, an exercise made possible by thinking queer theory through the specific context of Lebanon.

NOTES

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[1]The names of all my interlocutors have been changed to guarantee their anonymity. The names I choose are random and do not necessarily reflect one's sect. In addition, some nicknames, chosen by my interlocutors themselves, were used in lieu of common names, per their request.

[2]*Khutūba* is the step that precedes marriage in Lebanon. *Khutūbah* marks the event from which the couple emerges as "official" in the eyes of society. It neither religiously sanctioned nor necessarily an indication that marriage is imminent.

[3]Aline, interview with the author, February 2014, Beirut.

[4]In their examination of leisurely activities among Shiʿi youth in southern Beirut, Lara Deeb and Mona Harb show how their young interlocutors reconcile their religion, their attachments to the political party Hizbullah, and leisurely activities. See Deeb and Harb, *Leisurely Islam: Negotiating Geography and Morality in Shi'ite South Beirut* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[5]Aline, interview with the author, February 2014, Beirut.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Maya Mikdashi, "Queering Citizenship, Queering Middle East Studies," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (2013): 350.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Maya Mikdashi, "Sex and Sectarianism: The Legal Architecture of Lebanese Citizenship," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 34 (2014): 279–93.

[11]Ibid., 281.

[12]Ibid., 283.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff, "Theory from the South: Or How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa," *Anthropological Forum: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Comparative Sociology* 22 (2012): 113–31.

[15]Maya Mikdashi and Jasbir Puar, "Queer Theory and Permanent War," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 22 (2016): 215.

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[17]Sandeep Bakshi, Suhraiya Jivraj, and Silvia Posocco, *Decolonizing Sexualities: Transnational Perspectives, Critical Interventions* (Oxford: Counterpress, 2016).

[18]Similar paradigms are raised in critical investigations of homosexual desire. See Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Lisa Duggan, "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana N. Nelson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 175–94.

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[21]Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).

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[23]Duggan, *The New Homonormativity*, 175–94.

[24]Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010).

[25]Linda Fisher, "Feminist Theory and the Politics of Inclusions," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 2 (1990): 174–83.

[26]Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lutte, 1987), 3.

[27]See Gayathri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asia Public Cultures* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005).

[28]José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

[29]Ibid., 1.

[30]Carey-Ann Morrison, Lynda Johnston, and Robyn Longhurst, "Critical Geographies of Love as Spatial, Relational and Political," *Progress in Human Geography* 37 (2012): 505–21.

[31]Mikdashi, *Queering Citizenship*, 350.

[32]See Ruba Salih, "Bodies That Walk, Bodies That Talk, Bodies That Love," *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 49 (2016): 742–60; Dina Georgis, *The Better Story: Queer Affects from the Middle East* (New York: SUNY Press, 2013); Hanadi Al-Samman and Tarik El-Ariss, "Queer Affects: Introduction," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (2013): 205–9.

[33]Morrison et al, *Critical Geographies,* 507.

[34]Sally Munt, "Sisters in Exile: The Lesbian Nation," in *New Frontiers of Space, Bodies and Gender,* ed. Rosa Ainley (London: Routledge, 1998), 3–19.

[35]Padilla et al, *Love and Globalization,* ix.

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[39]Enguix and Roca, *Rethinking Romanic Love,* 1.

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[61]Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

[62]Cited in Morrison et al, *Critical Geographies*, 515.

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[65]Salih, *Bodies That Walk*, 746.

[66]Hala Maksoud, "The Case of Lebanon," in *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*, ed. Suha Sabbagh, (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1996), 89–93; Suad Joseph, "The Public/Private: The Imagined Boundary in the Imagined Nation/State/Community: The Lebanese Case," *Feminist Review* 57 (1997): 73–92; Lina Khatib, "Gender, Citizenship and Political Agency in Lebanon," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35 (2008): 437–51.

[67]Mikdashi, *Sex and Sectarianism*.

[68]Nira Yuval-Davis, "Nationalism and Racism," *Cahiers de Recherche Sociologique* 20 (1993): 186.

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[70]Mikdashi, *Sex and Sectarianism*, 289.

[71]Anzaldúa, *Borderland/La Frontera*, 42.

[72]Adely, *A Different Kind of Love,* 111.

[73]Ibid, 104.

[74]Lubna, interview with the author, March 2014, Jbeil.

[75]Izza, interview with the author, July 2014, Beirut.

[76]Nur, interview with the author, September 2014, Beirut.

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[81]Jana, interview with author, August 2014, Beirut.

[82]Simon Haddad, "Christian-Muslim Relations and Attitudes towards the Lebanese State," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affair*s 21 (2001): 131–48; Lucia Volk, "Martyrs at the Margins: The Politics of Neglect in Lebanon's Borderlands," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45 263–82. "BT" is the French abbreviation for *brevet de technicien*, often translated as "technician certificate" in English. BT degrees are reflective of the enduring legacy of the French Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon, which lasted from 1923 until 1946.

[83]There are indications in traditional and emergent media that this trend is slowly changing, with an increasing number of projects, notably "ecotourism" ones, being advertised. In addition, in recent years there has been a revival of musical events in the summer, with a great number of cities and towns attracting large audiences.

[84]Jana, interview with author, August 2014, Beirut.

[85]Gloria Anzaldúa, "Preface: (Un)Natural Bridges, (Un)Safe Spaces," in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation,* ed. Gloria Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1–5.

[86]Jana, interview with author, August 2014, Beirut.

[87]Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.

[88]Lara, interview with the author, June 2014, Tripoli.

[89]Jomana, interview with the author, Beirut, May 2014.

[90]Mireille, interview with the author, near Beirut, April 2015.

[91]*Kibbeh nayyih* is a Levantine dish that consists of finely processed raw meat seasoned with a mix of herbs. In the vegetarian/vegan version, meat is replaced with potato.

[92]Jomana, Skype interview with the author, March 2016.

[93]Sabiha Allouche, "Love, Lebanese Style: Toward an Either/And Analytic Framework of Kinship." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 15 (2019): 157–178.

[94]Aline, interview with the author, September 2014, Tripoli.

[95]Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics of Inappropriate/d Others," in *The Haraway Reader*, ed. D. Haraway (New York: Routledge, 2004): 63–124.

[96]Khalid, interview with the author, Beirut, August 2014.

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[102]Ibid., 6.

[103]Morrison et al, *Critical Geographies*, 507.

[104]Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

[105]Georgis, *The Better Story.*

[106]Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

[107]Edelman, *No Future.*

[108]I use the pronoun "they" to refer to those individuals who embrace non-normative practices.

[109]Mikdashi and Puar, *Queer Theory and Permanent War,* 217.

[110]Lila, Abu-Lughod. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17 (1990): 42.

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[112]Lila Abu-Lughod, "Shifting Politics in Bedouin Love Poetry," in *Language and the Politics of Emotions*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 24–45.

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