Mashriq & Mahjar 12, no. 2 (2025), 1–27
ISSN 2169-4435

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THE UNDERCOMMONS OF BEIRUT[1]

Abstract
This article explores the urban worlds of African and Asian migrant domestic workers living in Beirut, Lebanon. Over the last two decades, many women who first arrived in the country as domestic workers have fled domestic confinement and entered Lebanon's informal labor market, where after 2011 they were also joined by hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees fleeing war across the country's eastern border. Together with their male counterparts as well as diverse Lebanese citizens, migrant domestic workers have created a thriving underground layer to the city that includes religious and commercial establishments, mechanisms of informal service provision, and spaces of leisure, desire, and politics. Through an ethnographic analysis of intimate relations within these spaces, I designate this the "undercommons" of Beirut, drawing the term from Moten and Harney's theorization of fugitivity and Black life. Forged in flight of the oppressive *kafala* system that regulates temporary migrant labor in much of the Middle East, the layered interdependences of this world constitute an undercommons of globalization itself.

خلاصة
يستكشف هذا المقال العوالم الحضرية لعاملات المنازل المهاجرات الأفريقيات والآسيويات اللواتي يعشن في بيروت، لبنان. على مدى العقدين الماضيين، هربت العديد من النساء اللواتي، وصلن إلى البلاد كعاملات منازل من الحبس المنزلي ودخلن سوق العمل غير الرسمي في لبنان حيث انضم إليهن بعد عام ٢٠١١ مئات الآلاف من اللاجئين السوريين الفارين من الحرب عبر الحدود الشرقية للبلاد. إلى جانب نظرائهم من الرجال، وبالإضافة إلى مواطنين لبنانيين متنوعين، خلقت عاملات المنازل المهاجرات طبقةً سفليةً مزدهرةً في المدينة، تشمل مؤسسات دينيةً وتجاريةً، وآليات لتقديم الخدمات غير الرسمية، ومساحات للترفيه والرغبة والسياسة. من خلال تحليل إثنوغرافي للعلاقات الحميمة داخل هذه المساحات، أُطلق على هذا العالم لقب "العالم السفلي" في بيروت، مستمدًة المصطلح من نظرية موتن وهارني حول الفرار وحياة السود. تشكل الترابطات الطبقية لهذا العالم، التي تشكلت في ظل نظام الكفالة القمعي الذي يُنظم العمالة المهاجرة المؤقتة في معظم أنحاء الشرق الأوسط، طبقةً سفليةً للعولمة نفسها.

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The café has no name. There is no sign and no street address, only the colors of the Ethiopian flag painted on rickety steps as the identifying trait: red, yellow, green. Unlike the fluorescent white that floods every other Ethiopian establishment in the neighborhood, it is always dark inside. It has been decorated to resemble a cave, brown paper wrinkled and stapled all over walls and ceiling, roughly painted in dark tones with impressive effect, edges slightly beginning to fray. The tables are plastic, as are the chairs, and all are a cheap, diluted neon assortment of red, yellow, and green. A plastic green ashtray adorns each table and is diligently emptied so that the space is always full of smoke yet never smells of stale ash. Multicolored Christmas lights are strung along the right-hand wall, while a disco ball on the back wall rotates constantly, giving the daytime atmosphere a strange feeling of a permanent nightclub. Framed images of scenes of women vaguely referencing Africa hang on one wall, and glossy posters of Ethiopian landmarks, an Ethiopian woman in traditional dress pouring coffee, and Ethiopian women's elaborately braided hairstyles hang on the others. There is nargileh, coffee, and two kinds of beer on offer when the fridge is full: the local Almaza and the imported Heineken, both for the cheap price of a shared taxi ride (at the time, 2,000 LBP/1.33 USD).

Nolawit, who is Ethiopian and separated from her Lebanese husband but has citizenship, runs the café. She usually arrives to unlock the metal shutters sometime around 11:00 a.m., except on Sundays, when she takes the morning off and opens for the afternoon crowds returning from church. Nolawit doesn't talk much but smokes nargileh endlessly, standing only to begrudgingly bring customers their orders. She sticks around until whatever point she decides it is time to go home and sleep, usually around 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. Most evenings, the same group of five to ten people can be found chatting, drinking beer, smoking, or silently scrolling through Facebook feeds on their smartphones until closing: a few Ethiopian women, almost all undocumented former domestic workers, favoring bejeweled jeans and red hair extensions, and a few Syrian Kurdish men, almost all undocumented laborers and refugees, tattooed and scarred, a few carrying knives plus reputations for using them. Most are under thirty years old, many are coupled, and two, Rida and Gigi, are recently married. Both lack legal residency permits but fortunately landlords want cash and not papers, so they moved in together around the corner. They bicker passionately, as if with competitive pride, and Rida loves to play me a pounding Arabic song that everyone agrees is all the rage at the Ethiopian nightclubs. At one point the MC responsible for the remix shouts out, "Ethiopian women are the most beautiful women

in the world / But all they do is make problems / Watch out or you'll end up married!"

Prior to its uprising and economic crisis of 2019, Lebanon was home to over 300,000 Asian and African migrant workers concentrated in the capital city of Beirut. At the time, an estimated one quarter of Lebanese households employed a live-in female migrant domestic worker on a full-time basis.[2] Over the last two decades, these migrant workers have built a dense underground infrastructure of services, entertainment, support, and security that has radically transformed the city and the lives of the workers who keep it functioning. This world exists as a separate layer of urban life, one that incorporates commercial and residential spaces, interpersonal networks, and practices of communication and consumption. It is publicly visible to an extent, but its internal operations rely on learned codes and guarded entry. It is multilingual, multinational, and multiethnic, and it is surely one of the most diverse corners of the entire Levant. Its spatial center is the adjacent neighborhoods of Bourj Hammoud, Dora, and Nabaa, and its temporal climax is Sunday, but it is a network spread throughout the city and beyond. It includes small side streets in one neighborhood, a church and the alleys that spill out from it in another, private schools and wedding halls that transform into flag-filled celebrations for different nations and religions, outdoor stadiums that host international pop stars for migrant audiences, catering services for home-cooked cuisine, sports teams and fashion competitions, niche social clubs and the intermittent interventions of embassies and consulates, as well as ways to smuggle cell phones, sewing needles, and hair extensions into prison. It is a vibrant world, but it is subject to constant harassment and the threat of forced closure at the hands of both state and society.

Like comparable neighborhoods the world over, the spaces of this Beirut enable the coming together of a motley crew of social outcasts—refugees, migrant workers, sex workers, daily wage laborers (*muyāwamīn*); the unemployed, the homeless, the convicts, the addicts, the poor; the undocumented, the unmoored, the bored, the abandoned, the disturbed. But its sites are overwhelmingly full of two communities: African and Asian women, all former or current domestic workers, and Lebanese and Syrian men, particularly recent Syrian refugees. Over eighteen months of conducting fieldwork in Beirut from 2014 through 2016, including six months living in Dora in 2015, I learned of an intimate exchange that has occurred amongst these communities. Many have fallen in love, coupled off, or formed alliances that circulate desire, resources, and obligations. New songs

are being written, new sensibilities are being formed, and new modes of collectivity and organization are becoming possible. Numerous Arab and Kurdish men are fluent in Amharic or can at least flirt in Tagalog. Everyone already speaks Arabic, but now some of the Ethiopian women speak Kurdish too. Tattoos in beloveds' scripts are common. Mixed children are being born and raised, fluent in the speech patterns of the Lebanese dialect while still at risk of deportation. Lebanese DJs are on top of all the latest Nigerian or Ethiopian hits, and my interlocutors would laugh at how these men received word of the latest sensations back home weeks before the songs or videos began to circulate through their own social media networks. As Ayman, one of the Syrian regulars at Nolawit's café, once shrugged to me, "We're all living here in exile (*al-ghurba*)—aren't you?"

In this article I consider the consequences of this exile on everyday social relations in Beirut. I argue that the dense exchanges between migrant workers, citizens, and refugees have produced a new layer of the city that serves as its "undercommons." Drawing the term from the popular work of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney,[3] for whom the term points to fugitive elsewheres filled with those who dwell beyond (or beneath) the spaces of the commons, I demonstrate that decades of African and Asian labor migration to Lebanon has not only created sites of resistance to racism and exploitation (as has been widely documented)[4] but has radically transformed the very infrastructure of urban life in Beirut. To do so, I begin by situating my own arrival at this undercommons, one that mirrors the global peregrinations and friendships of the undercommons itself. I then briefly trace the history of how this undercommons came to be, demonstrating its significance in the sociocultural landscape of the Lebanese capital. The bulk of the article consists of three ethnographic accounts of life in the undercommons: one of a Syrian refugee, one of a Cameroonian former domestic worker, and one of an elder Lebanese citizen. Offered as alternatives to a life lived through the categories of the state, these stories reveal a city propelled by ties of love, friendship, and care, while simultaneously steeped with violence. I conclude by gesturing to an earlier moment of radical possibility in Beirut, one marked by its centrality in circuits of anticolonial solidarity. The complex intimacies that have arisen in the margins of Lebanon remind us that transnational labor migration has not only produced forms of exclusion and precarity but also created modes of urban belonging with internationalist resonances. Today, Beirut is home to displaced subjects from across the global South who have forged spaces of refuge not in resistance to slavery and colonial modernity, but against the ongoing ravages of postcolonial globalization. And while Asian and

African migrant workers have long been recognized as essential to the political economy of a Middle East reshaped by oil and empire, the undercommons compels us to acknowledge that its cities are also *theirs*.

ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE URBAN UNDERCOMMONS

In 2014, I moved to Beirut to conduct dissertation research about the discourse and iconography of martyrdom in the context of Hizbullah's ongoing involvement in the war in Syria. It had been an unintentional arrival, as I had spent the previous four years developing a project on the interface between the sacred dead and modern war in the shrine cities of southern Iraq, but being a young female anthropologist in Najaf had proven to be beyond me. I ended up in Lebanon thanks to friends, but on shakier ground than even most anthropology PhD students. Unsurprisingly, the project faltered, as I struggled to navigate the strict Public Relations apparatus of Hizbullah, while so enamored of the city of Beirut that I could not find the will to move elsewhere for fieldwork. In the interim, I began working in the kitchen of a restaurant in Beirut's Hamra neighborhood, arriving early to bake desserts before the oven was turned up to roast vegetables for the day. The restaurant/café/bar was a dreamy inheritor to the city's iconic café culture, full of wooden tables and perfect lighting, Fairuz and Sabah Fakhry, and revolutionary sentiments connecting us across Cairo and Damascus and Palestine. But in the mornings, before it opened to customers, a few Ethiopian women and Syrian men arrived to sweep up the night's cigarette butts and prepare for the long day ahead. In the kitchen, the women cooked Ethiopian breakfasts and played the songs of Aster Aweke, teasing the Syrian men about how annoying they found Fairuz, and filling the space with a rapid Amharic-Arabic banter of gossip and grocery lists that was so affectionate and unthinking that it took me by surprise. It was my first glimpse of Beirut's undercommons.

Although polite, the women were skeptical towards me; I had arrived at the kitchen through a spontaneous invitation from one of the restaurant's owners and clearly, I was not a low-wage migrant worker in the country. Lacking their chef's instincts, I insisted on measuring ingredients in plastic orange cups that they found strange and amateur, but admittedly, they did enjoy the cakes. It was when I told them I was not Lebanese but "Indian"—an easier explanation than my multiply diasporic history, descending from Gujarati Muslim traders and clerics who had settled in Kenya and Tanzania for over a century before ending up in Canada—that their eyes lit up. *India!* Everyone had a story, a film, a song, a garment, an association. Suddenly, a shared

space opened between us. It was one in which my imperfect Arabic mediated exchange but not nativity, in which culture/nationality became grounds for mutuality rather than exclusion, and in which femininity offered a connection rather than a power relation—even as no one was oblivious to class difference. We became friends.

One Sunday, the women from the kitchen invited me to accompany them to Dora, the thriving area east of Beirut's historic Armenian neighbourhood that was now the center of migrant worker life in the city. Thrilled that I was familiar with Ethiopian food from my time living in the cosmopolitan urban centers of North America, they took me out for an Ethiopian meal in Beirut. It was greasier, spicier, and heavier than the versions I had tried before, but half the restaurant seemed to be observing me eat with my hands until we cleaned off the *injera*-covered tray, and it appeared I had passed the test. In the weeks that followed, I learned of an alternate geography to the neighborhoods I walked daily—tucked away in one corner, an African hair salon; in another, a call center where everyone gathered; on Sunday, the options for Orthodox or Protestant church services; and, prized above all others, the Saturday night dance spots known as discos. By the time I worked up the courage to ask the women if I could write about them (they already knew I was an advanced university student, even as they laughed at this immersion in "so much school"), they grinned. "Well, we're not going to write about ourselves—so someone should!"

Over the next year and a half, I did my best to catch up to a world I knew little about. As with every reader of international news, I was of course aware of the *kafala* system that governs temporary labor migration in much of the region, particularly its notoriously abusive practices in the Gulf. I had also spent years as an activist in Canada organizing around migrant rights and was equipped with a strong political awareness of transnational labor regimes of exploitation, including its feminized avatar in the domestic service sector. Like many visitors to the city, I had been quickly disturbed by the sight of pastel-uniformed Black and Brown women accompanying Lebanese families in silence, holding children at restaurants, walking dogs in parking lots, or endlessly wiping down balconies of the city's garish apartment towers. Through a friend teaching at the American University of Beirut, I had also begun volunteering to teach English at the Migrant Community Centre, an incredible space set up years prior by an anti-racist and activist NGO. Yet I had no idea that the kitchens of a Beirut café where regional dissidents gathered to drink arak and sing revolutionary songs in the evenings were full of Ethiopian women who spoke a fluent and melodious Arabic, many of whom had been in

Lebanon for up to a decade or more, and all of whom inhabited the city with a dense geography of belonging, even as they were at constant risk of deportation. It was this realization, mediated through the gift of the women's trust, that led me to my current research.

I spent the next few months developing relationships with the many NGOs that worked with migrant workers in Lebanon, accompanying service providers, conducting prison visits, interviewing officials, going to churches, nightclubs, salons, and every other migrant space I could find an invitation to enter, and deepening relationships with the African and Asian men and women that I met. I later moved to Dora, where I immersed myself in a very different café culture as described above; one angrier, poorer, and shot through with threat and masculinity. By the time my fieldwork concluded, I had realized that despite the voluminous amount of NGO reports and newspaper articles on the abuse of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, we knew little about how these women inhabited life in its capital. The informality, corruption, and precarity that structured Beirut's labor market meant that not only were there large numbers of undocumented former and current domestic workers that worked a range of low-wage jobs in the city, but that African and Asian life itself could not be collapsed under the official terminology of "migrant labor." Instead, these migrants inhabited life largely outside Lebanon's categories of political, national, or cultural recognition, but entirely *inside* the city. It is here that I began to understand their world as Beirut's undercommons.

The concept of the undercommons comes from the work of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, intersecting the radical traditions of Black studies and Italian Autonomist Marxism to theorize the fugitive possibilities embedded in the holds of our many reigning institutions.[5] It extends and then surpasses the longtime notion of the commons, that leitmotif of a common-ist/communist allocation of resources, to think the *under*commons as the domain of those who have long been denied participatory inclusion in both ownership and usage. Although the disaster capitalism of postwar Lebanon has left little of a public commons in Beirut, African and Asian women arrive to the country under the mandate of domestic servitude, confining them to what we might think of as the privatized commons of Lebanese life: the home. As researchers have long shown, domestic labor has transformed the middle-class Lebanese family, as gendered and racialized hierarchies have sedimented themselves into the household.[6] It is against this carceral threat—what Amnesty International aptly titles, "Their House is My Prison"[7]—that many migrant women have fled and sought

refuge in the city. Like the maroons, the escaped slaves in antebellum southern United States whom Moten and Harney point to, the undercommons of Beirut is hence made possible by flight. It is a precarious underground that cuts through neoliberal configurations of contractualized exchange in order to offer fugitive solidarities, rife with antagonism, yet generative of an entirely new Beirut. The inhabitants of Beirut's undercommons hence live neither subsumed under frameworks of national identity or (non)citizenship, nor under humanitarian categories of displaced refugee or temporary migrant. Instead, an urban sociality has emerged where those cast out of the Lebanese commons, in all its racialized, institutionalized, and imaginative forms, encounter each other anew.

WHOSE CITY?

When you conjure an image of life in Beirut, whose faces do you see? Unlike in the Gulf—where extensive histories of Indian Ocean migration as well as enslavement have led to both phenotypical diversity among the "local" population as well as lively communities of South Asian noncitizens that cross class hierarchies[8]—large-scale transnational migration remains relatively new to the Mediterranean Levant. In Lebanon, a country infamous for its scale of out-migration, it is the *kafala* system that has attracted migrants to the country since the 1970s, with foreign workers today hailing from over thirty different countries across the African and Asian continents.[9] The fact that this has occurred primarily through *domestic* labor, thereby diversifying the country's demographics while simultaneously sequestering foreignness within the private sphere, has meant that public life in Lebanon has been slow to register the change. It is only in recent decades that migrant life has found ways to flourish in the country's capital, creating the conditions of possibility for the undercommons. A brief attempt at telling this history makes it clear that even for those differently positioned within its hierarchies, there is no denying that what it means to be an African or Asian woman in Lebanon has long surpassed the privatized domain of cooking and cleaning.

One Sunday I drove through Dora in search of a Sikh temple that was hidden on the fourth floor of a run-down apartment building situated across from a huge automotive factory. The streets were resplendent with Sunday color. "Dora, you know, it's everything," commented Rahel, an Ethiopian organizer whom I was accompanying. "It's Addis for the Ethiopians, Colombo for the Sri Lankans, Dhaka for the Bangladeshis . . . you have it all here." Rahel points us to her Beirut, a city chameleon-like in its openness to those inhabitants who first

enter it in exclusion. Today, foreigners have so wholly re-signified Beirut that a single neighborhood can be simultaneously described as three major global cities, even as Ethiopians, Sri Lankans, and Bangladeshis themselves do not always gather outside their shared national groups. Some months later, Abdo, a young Sudanese man out partying at an Ethiopian disco in Raouche, abruptly turned to me and said with a grin, "Here at this club, you can really feel like you're in Ethiopia or Sudan." Abdo had not only never been to Ethiopia, but he also came from a rural part of western Sudan that he often laughingly described as living among farm animals. His comparison was made in the tenor of a dream-image. He was twenty-four and already sick of his job, working long hours in a factory for meager pay and sharing a room with his brother, both having been in Lebanon for around four years. And yet like Rahel, Abdo had transformed a Beirut dance floor into a familiar space that indexed entire nations.

Beirut has not always been this way. The eastern districts that are now the center of Asian and African life were initially populated by Armenian refugees arriving in Lebanon in the first half of the twentieth century.[10] Many of those I asked during my fieldwork traced the area's growing visibility as a public center of migrant worker activity to the last fifteen to twenty years, with some pointing to the 2006 war as marking the shift.[11] Mala, a Sri Lankan community leader who lived in Lebanon for over forty years prior to her departure in the aftermath of the 2019 economic crisis, attributed the change to infrastructural and socioeconomic developments. Mala started the country's first makeshift Sunday school for children of Sri Lankan women to study the Sinhalese language and Buddhist religious tradition over thirty years ago. Back then, she explained to me, there were no buses, and the families wealthy enough to hire a domestic worker often lived in large villas in the mountains. Women were isolated from any possibility of an urban existence and used to gather secretly in parking lots or at church services—this is how, Mala mentioned with visible disappointment, many Buddhists converted to Christianity. Gradually, as wealth increased in the postwar Lebanese capital—a consequence of large-scale investment in postwar reconstruction as well as remittances flowing in from the Gulf[12]—more migrants were brought directly to Beirut. The workforce itself also diversified, from exclusively domestic workers to a range of low-wage job sectors around the city. As documented by Assaf Dahdah, for example, the commercial presence of migrants in Dora used to be limited to Sri Lankan and Indian shops hidden in small alleyways but has now given way to highly visible businesses catering to diverse nationalities, including freight companies, financial transfer agencies, international call centers,

restaurants, grocery stores, salons, and jewelry shops primarily selling gold.[13] Similarly, other parts of Beirut have come to be associated with specific African or Asian communities who live, work, or congregate around them, continually reshaping the cultural geography of the city.[14]

Much of the functioning of this migrant worker underground depends upon intimacies between female migrant workers and male Lebanese figures of authority. Charly is one such man. Charly is in his early fifties, and when I met him, he had been working with the Ethiopian community in Lebanon for seventeen years. Married to an Ethiopian woman, her access opened him to a niche market and, to quote an Ethiopian interlocutor, he has been "getting rich off our backs (*min warāna*)" ever since. Charly imports goods, organizes religious trips to Christian pilgrimage sites as well as massive celebrations for Ethiopian festivals, brings the country's pop stars to perform in Lebanon, and is generally the well-connected person to go to in order to get things done. He is rumored to have high-level connections with the state agency known as General Security that not only allow him to acquire temporary visas for Ethiopian celebrities, but also to have prospective competitors from within the Ethiopian community threatened in order to sustain his monopoly. In an interview held in 2016, after a short discussion of employer abuse, Lebanese racism, and the precarious living conditions of domestic worker escapees—namely, after establishing himself as an empathetic figure both to myself in direct address and to the multiple Ethiopian women within earshot—Charly told me a story about the Ethiopian women of Beirut.

Once upon a time, the story began, Ethiopian women used to come to Lebanon as domestic workers and work very hard. They suffered, certainly, but they remained diligent, and they saved money that they sent back home, and houses were built, families were cared for, and children were raised in absentia. This was before 2011. Then the war started in Syria, and Syrian males flooded the capital of Beirut in the thousands. The dutiful Ethiopians suddenly found themselves exposed to the corrupting influence of young men with nothing to do. The women were seduced. They started pairing off as girlfriend and boyfriend, a few at first and then more. The men offered some combination of love distraction and protection while desiring money, and the women began to spend their disposable income on the new men in their lives rather than keeping it aside for remittances. Soon the women stopped working altogether. They found the pressures of domestic work excessive, and they yearned for the freedom of male company. Laziness and unemployment spread through the city. Some

of the women began to enter the sex trade for quick cash, and others devised clever schemes that did not depend on twelve-hour days of household labor in order to survive. Things began to fall apart. Moral and financial ruin lay in close wait, and *that*—here Charly gestured to the three young Ethiopian women who sat in chairs waiting their turn to plead their cases to him—is how we got to where we are today.

What is most interesting about Charly's tale is that it takes a position (according blame to Syrian men) in relation to a narrative he presumes to be available (first the presence of a significant amount of female Ethiopian independent workers who can choose sexual partners, and then their coupling with Syrian men). Ethiopian women started traveling to Lebanon in 1989 and by 2002, Lebanon was described as the most popular destination for Ethiopian women traveling to work in the Middle East.[15] In 2005, there were estimated to be 30,000 Ethiopians working in Lebanon.[16] Soon after, the Ethiopian government implemented a ban on its nationals traveling to Lebanon on a work visa due to widespread reports of abuse, a move that in practice primarily increases smuggling and trafficking.[17] The ban, however, has never been properly enforced and was effectively reversed in 2016 with the resumption of direct flights between Ethiopia and Lebanon. By 2015, the Lebanese Ministry of Labor recorded the official number of Ethiopian migrant domestic workers in Lebanon to be 73,098,[18] but in June 2017 Beirut's Anti-Racism Movement estimated that out of approximately 500,000 migrant domestic workers in the country (both documented and undocumented), a full 47 percent (235,000) were Ethiopian.[19] For Charly, these growing numbers of Ethiopian women are not understood as isolated workers but rather act in the city as an agentive group. They are imagined as a unified yet changing community about whom generalizations can be made and upon whom social ills can be attributed or displaced.

My first time attending a massive Ethiopian concert in Beirut was for a show featuring Ethiopian pop stars Jacky Gosse and Abinet Agonafer, organized by Charly and widely advertised in WhatsApp messages and posters across the city. Only ten minutes from downtown Beirut, I was surrounded by shoutouts to Addis and approximately 3,000 attendees, almost all of whom were Africans. It was not my usual experience of the city. I recognized some Syrian and Kurdish men I knew from around Dora, but even they were visible outsiders as they awkwardly shuffled around the premises, pacing back and forth along the perimeter while the astroturf-covered floor filled with the energy of practiced dance moves. Although such events rely upon partnerships with Lebanese citizens such as Charly, this is a

world that migrants have made possible. Across Beirut, their lives are characterized by a density of alliances, partnerships, and intimacies that refuse the segregation of the city along lines of sect, citizenship, or ethnicity.

A LOVE STORY

Before it shut down, Sami's café was a small, unmarked Ethiopian spot down a narrow alleyway in one of Dora's winding inside streets. The easiest way to get there was to look for the set of overflowing green garbage bins right before the entrance to Dora's central roundabout and have your *servees* driver let you out on the rotting curb. The heavy sliding door to the café looked like a billboard for an African hair salon that can be found all over Dora and Harlem (yellow and green; floating heads of intricate black braids), but once you pulled it aside you suddenly found a small, harshly lit room filled with the smoke of nargileh and cigarettes. There were eight small tables on the ground floor and two more up a steep and unstable metal staircase, tables and chairs all made of the same cheap plastic green as the rest of the Dora's cafés, the kind that is easy to knock over if you're not careful. Sami's, as it was referred to, used to serve the prized St. George Beer, a crisp Ethiopian lager that was later said to be banned from Lebanon and is now nearly impossible to find around the city. Sami's wife would cook a few dishes a day, never any vegetables but always the raw ground beef dish known as *kitfo* (the dish constantly placed before me as a test to see whether I could indeed hold my own with my Ethiopian interlocutors). Sami himself was a dominating presence, strutting around in tailored outfits made from the gold-accented gauzy white fabric known in Amharic as the *shamma*. He was the equivalent of Charly among the Ethiopian men, and his hands stretched deep into the network of goods, cash, and people that flew regularly between Lebanon and Ethiopia. The women through whom I met Sami used to describe his newly built villa back home, where another wife and their children resided, with a mixture of awe and anger. It was said that he had profited handsomely off his time in Lebanon, and that his café was only the most unassuming of his many local business ventures.

The first time I was taken for a meal at Sami's it was a Sunday afternoon and we had just returned from an Orthodox church service up in the mountains. The crowd consisted of groups of Ethiopian women dressed elaborately for their weekly holiday and one Ethiopian man who was selling DVDs of the latest soap opera serials. Later in the evening a young seemingly Arab man walked in, tall and muscular, with spiked hair and tattooed arms, the left one covered in white

bandages. He wore white headphones that he did not remove and sat down with familiar ease, proceeding to chain smoke cigarettes in silence. Every so often he stepped out to answer a phone call, only to return and resume his position without a word. He was the only visibly non-Ethiopian presence in the room apart from myself, and I wondered. Without asking, my companion turned to me and explained. The man, who I later learned was also named Sami, was a young Syrian who had fallen deeply in love with an Ethiopian woman. They had decided to be together, and she had returned to her home village to first obtain the approval of her family. While in Ethiopia, she was killed in a car accident. "He went mad (*jann*)," I was told. "He hasn't been right ever since—he lost himself." On his arms he had her name tattooed in Amharic, as well as the phrase "Daughter of Ethiopia" (*bint el-habash*, it was read to me in Arabic). Under the bandages were the scars where he had slit his wrists. "Every week he comes to the café, sits like that, does not talk to anyone. It has been some months of this—not too many, but far too many."

Over the next months I would see him every time I went to Sami's, and we began to acknowledge each other from afar, the obvious foreigners, the ones who spoke only Arabic. The two Sami's—Ethiopian café owner, Syrian café tragedy—were friendly and the younger would often help adjust the music (a steady stream of Ethiopian hits) or make minor shop repairs. When a fire broke out from an overheated air conditioner, it was the Syrian Sami who stood guard at the door watching for police or suspect passersby. But most of the time he sat in silence in the exact same chair, directly facing the door and no one else, headphones in his ears despite the fact that the café's music was too loud to hear anything else, face tightly clenched yet somehow breaking. To stare at him was to be impossibly aware of a private pain, to feel something tear inside of you at the rawness of his defeat. Yet he kept returning. If the bandages on his arms were the signs of failed attempts at suicide, it seemed that this small Ethiopian café was literally keeping Sami alive.

"What kind of world does one see when one experiences it from the point of view of two and not one?" asks Alain Badiou.[20] Badiou theorizes love as a manner of experiencing the world through difference and not identity; not as the experience *of* the other but an encounter with, gesturing to his theory of the event as that contingent occurrence that erupts into a social field but does not necessarily reorder it. It is for this reason that Badiou puts forth love as a necessarily risky "existential project: to construct a world from a decentered point of view other than that of my mere impulse to survive

or re-affirm my own identity."[21] The declaration of this love, he continues, marks "that transition from a random encounter to a construction that is resilient, as if it had been necessary."[22] In the figure of Sami as lover and beloved, we see the encounter that this Beirut makes possible, a dense social world opening up porous spaces of refuge and desire. This is a love conditioned by the subject positions that the migrant worker and refugee occupy in Lebanon: both foreigners excluded from citizenship but with differing social statuses in the country as female non-Arab versus male Arab, as well as different ties to a homeland. What is at stake in their encounter is thus a reorientation to the city that has brought them together. But rather than providing a happy ending, Sami also reminds us of the risks of this exchange.

Sami's is not only *his* story. In its absent pair, it is the story of a young woman who lived in Beirut as a permanent foreigner and traveled back home to affirm a familiar cultural order: of gender, of kinship, of authority. And yet in having left Ethiopia to work in the home of a Lebanese family, this was an order that she had already exceeded. Her unnamed invocation by my companion references some of the tensions at the core of this phenomenon of mixed coupling. Why, where in another instance I was told by the very same Ethiopian interlocutor that the reasons one gave to return were all false excuses because everyone simply wanted to go home, did she describe here Sami's beloved as going home *in order to seek approval*? To name the act of her travel as one of seeking approval was to locate this marriage within the domain of that which was simultaneously most proximate and most distant: Ethiopia and not Lebanon. It was to insist that, no matter how much had been transformed by migration, there was still a gendered order to rites of passage such as marriage; an order that could and should be followed. Even amidst the displacements of exile, she represented the possibility that change can be embraced and incorporated into the social. And yet, Badiou reminds us, the encounter cannot be subsumed by that which surrounds it, nor can it guarantee what it will leave in its wake. In seeking the legitimation of a bond, this young woman left behind its complete break.

Sami poses to us the task of anthropology in a difficult form: one without his direct speech. I never spoke to Sami, nor he to me. It is only in sharing space, staring, overhearing, and asking others that I attempted to piece together what I am offering as his story. The resulting question is not of its accuracy but what it gives us to think. I want to insist that we think Sami not only through the death that scarred his arms but also the life that sat before us, offering the gestures

of reciprocal exchange: a glance, a slight nod, a rare, at times even curious, smile. A desire for music. He was always dressed similarly but never the same, and he took the time to style his hair, which could never stand so severely on his head without effort. In the set of explanations for mixed coupling found in accounts like Charly's—sexual desire, utilitarian alliance, manipulative exchange—there is little room for such a character. If Sami is to be thought as a figure of *this* Beirut, and an alternate to the figure of the Syrian man that Charly provides, he is not a figure of self-interested masculinity. He may be Syrian, but he belongs to this space. He may be broken, but he lives in relations that cannot be collapsed into contractual exchange. He is a young man who sits alone, headphones protecting him from the demands of communication, while seeking out precisely the abundance of noise and the bustling sociality of weekend leisure to be found in the undercommons. Alive before us, Sami testifies to what Levinas has called "the surplus of sociality over every solitude."[23]

AN AFFECTIVE COMMUNITY

When I met her in 2015, Evelyn was twenty-five years old, with flawless skin, a bored temperament, and carefully braided black hair reaching down her lower back and styled differently every week. She spoke with the cadence of a proselytizer, and her favorite activity was to sing at the highest pitch her voice allowed, stepping side to side and shaking her body in praise of the Lord. Although she did not come from a Pentecostal tradition in her home country of Cameroon, she discovered the movement in Beirut, and every Sunday she would lead the Dora congregation of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in collective song while a diverse mix of mostly African attendees slipped back and forth into forms of glossolalia under the roar of a Nigerian pastor. She had been in Lebanon for three years.

Evelyn came to Lebanon because a fellow Cameroonian whom she referred to in the pattern of her church as "my sister" had been working in the country and had invited her to come work as a hairdresser for another Cameroonian woman that ran a hair salon in Beirut. Evelyn was very skilled at intricate braiding and based on her sister's advice she packed a suitcase entirely full of hairdressing equipment, a few cooking ingredients, and nothing else. Upon arrival, much to her surprise, she found a Lebanese man waiting for her at the airport with a copy of her passport. She was taken directly to an employment agency who sent her to a large villa owned by a wealthy Lebanese family in the mountains, where her task would be to clean and provide childcare. She insisted there had been a mistake and that

she had not come to join the domestic service industry, so the family agreed to allow her to return to the Beirut agency from which she had been acquired and pursue the matter (after all, if she left within the first three months they were entitled to a free replacement). It was there that the woman who ran the employment agency swore at Evelyn loudly in a language she did not understand, slapped her hard on her right cheek, and then forcefully kicked her stomach with the sharp heel of her angular shoes. At this point, Evelyn realized it was safer to return to the house in the mountains. Early the next morning, under the cover of sleep, she fled the house with her small suitcase of hair equipment.

An Egyptian taxi driver soon noticed the young, tall black woman dragging a small suitcase down a winding mountain road. "Where are you going?" he asked. "Cameroon," came her reply. He laughed. She had no money, she narrated to us years later, only determination. He offered to take her partway to the airport until his route diverged, and after a long drive he dropped her at the side of the road and wished her well. She sat, waiting. Eventually she lay her head down on her suitcase and went to sleep. After a few hours she awoke to find herself surrounded by onlookers, among whom another kind taxi driver offered to take her to Dora. By the time they arrived, it was after dark, and all the shops were closed. Once again stranded on the street, Evelyn next met a Nigerian woman accompanied by two children, to whom she repeated her story. Dora had been the right decision. The woman recognized the reference and took Evelyn to a nearby salon that was indeed run by a Cameroonian woman, and made Evelyn wait outside while she conferred with the owner. It turned out Evelyn's plans had been thwarted without her knowledge: the salon owner had become worried about the responsibility of another employee and sold her papers to a domestic worker employment agency. She would have nothing to do with Evelyn. Even after the Nigerian woman's chastising and appeals to national sisterhood, there was no changing her mind. The Nigerian woman apologized to Evelyn, but it was getting late, and she could not take Evelyn home with the kids, for she would get into trouble. She had tried her best.

Evelyn dragged her small bag back to the side of Dora's main commercial strip, known as Armenia Street, and went back to waiting. It was getting late, but the tales of the faithful retain a remarkable capacity for the miraculous. At around 4:00 a.m. a Ghanaian woman walking by noticed her, stopped to listen to her story, apologized for being unable to help more, and gave Evelyn 20,000 LBP (13 USD at the time). The woman had just departed when a Syrian man passed Evelyn in a car and offered to take Evelyn home. At this the Ghanaian woman

rushed back and began to fight with the man, imploring Evelyn not to get in the car, but Evelyn calmly reassured her that it was fine and she could take care of herself. The woman gave Evelyn a phone number to call if she needed anything, and Evelyn sat herself and her suitcase in the stranger's car. He drove her to his home outside the city, where she faced the anger of his (Syrian) wife. The man insisted he had simply taken pity on Evelyn and it was no girlfriend of his, but after a few days, Evelyn was kicked out of the home by the woman. With the help of the gifted phone number, she made it back to Dora, all the while suffering from physical pain due to her abuse at the hands of the employment agency. Eventually, the wife of the pastor of an African church took her in and gave her refuge, took her to a doctor, paid her medical bills, and found her a new job cooking and cleaning. All of this happened within her first three weeks in Lebanon.

Evelyn's tale—narrated in English to a group of feminist NGO workers that I was accompanying at the time—speaks to the density of the affective ties within the undercommons I have been describing. This is not only a world of heterosexual dyads. It is also one that relies on chosen bonds and interpersonal commitments that we might gather under the name of friendship, or what Leela Gandhi terms an "affective community."[24] Gandhi's *Affective Communities* examines the subcultures of fin de siècle anti-imperialism that weaved together utopian socialism, Marxism, anarchism, and additional political imaginaries coalescing inside Britain in the late-nineteenth century, designating their actions a "politics of friendship." Here friendship serves as a "signifier for all those invisible affective gestures that refuse alignment along the secure axes of filiation to seek expression outside, if not against, possessive communities of belonging."[25] It is for this reason I turn to it in a distinctly different context. Like the eccentric anti-imperial Westerners that populate Gandhi's book, many of whom are engaged in secret and unacknowledged friendships with anticolonial South Asians, friendship is not just a trope here. Its Saidian insistence on affiliation, those relations consciously forged of conviction and history rather than born of origin, strongly resonates with the solidarities of migrant workers' Beirut. Again, the sociality of this world is given narrative form not via marginality and exclusion but rather through miraculous surprise and sisterly possibility. Whether pointed to in small gestures, circumscribed by skepticism, or even recollected in exaggeration, the undercommons is permeated with stories that twist the sequence of time, such that an African woman alone in Beirut can recall her experience as one that begins from an instance of deceit and ends with an offer of respite.

A CITIZEN IN EXILE

In four months of near daily visits to Nolawit's café, Sherene was the only Lebanese woman I encountered there. Sherene was over sixty, maybe seventy, maybe older. The first time I saw her it was well past midnight, and she was struggling to reapply red lipstick with a small handheld mirror and insisting she was about to go home. Even in the dim light her pale, powdered skin stood out against the black of all the other women in the room except myself. It was winter in Beirut, colder indoors than out, and Sherene wore a hooded sweatshirt, velour sweatpants, sneakers, multiple oversized jackets, a knitted scarf, and held a large purse. There was something slightly tragic about her, something tending past a limit and towards an edge. She was talking about her lover, a much younger man who did or did not love her back, and it greatly irritated her that I did not remove my woolen toque indoors. Someone switched the music to Arabic. Sherene raised her arms to dance, insisting we watch, for she had once been a great belly dancing beauty. She turned her fingers upward with the expert rhythm of a woman who knows the art, but it was strangely difficult to watch.

Later that week the Ethiopian women told me her story. Sherene lived around the corner and had been visiting the café every few months for a little over a year now. She used to be married but lost all her family in the 2006 Israeli bombing of Lebanon: her husband, her son, and his wife. It was unclear to me how, for Dora had not been targeted in the war, but ever since that time, they said, she had not been well. Whenever she came the women would entertain her tales, offer her a beer, share cigarettes, and tease her about her alleged crush on Ayman. Most of their interactions made me uncomfortable. The exchanges between the young Ethiopian women and this far elder, disorienting Lebanese presence were characterized by a kind of aggressive banter that seemed far crueler in practice than it had been narrated in intent, and I sometimes wondered whether she bore the weight of their anger at the Lebanese population as a whole. But she, like Sami, kept coming back.

Eventually Sherene warmed to me. She shared stories, but she spoke in stilted, guarded sentences, often trailing off and leaving a beginning incomplete or a statement unclear. She once said she had a son in the United States, but she did not want to bother him for money, and he did not call enough, although he invited her to join him in America, but she did not want to leave. Another time, however, she suggested she had no kin that had survived Lebanon's tragedies. Her husband had died many years ago, God rest his soul, although she did not say how, and he had left her the Dora apartment he bought when

they were first married. She was only twenty-one at the time and he used to buy her the most expensive dresses to be found, dazzling and European, and the two would drink and dance with the scions of the city's elite, including that great musical icon of the Lebanese nation, Fairuz. After her husband died, she had been committed against her will to ʿAṣfūriyyeh, the first psychiatric asylum in Lebanon—when I tried gently to probe further about this, Sherene ignored my questions—and now she took many pills to stay healthy. She rarely left the house anymore, but Nolawit and the other Ethiopian women, she liked to see them sometimes—as she had come to like seeing me, she added warmly.

One night I carried two five-liter bottles of water up six flights of stairs to Sherene's apartment, where she had not had running water for months and was reduced to the generosity of the Syrian boys at the nearby gas station. They would let her fill her plastic bottles but never offered to help carry, and as all of us living in Dora knew, there was rarely electricity for the elevator. Her small apartment, dimly lit by streetlights through the window, featured an enormous, raised bed with white covers, a white sofa, and a large white coffee table, the entire surface of which was covered in small bottles of pharmaceuticals and makeup. There must have been nearly a hundred, all different sizes and shapes, some still in their cardboard packaging and others removed. The surface was remarkably clean, not a single spill or streak in sight. They were her medicines, Sherene stated without remark; her body was slowly fading. She apologized for not having cigarettes to offer, as it was the end of the month and her pension funds had been depleted, so we sat facing the table of tiny little bottles and shared mine.

Of all the individuals I met in Dora, it was Sherene who stayed with me most uncomfortably. Perhaps it is strange that in attempting to conduct research within and about a world populated by African and Asian migrant workers, and one with no shortage of terror and tragedy, it was a Lebanese citizen who left one of the greatest imprints of unease. In fact, it is precisely for this reason that she did so. What migrant workers and refugees have created in Beirut is a consequence of their exclusion from the dominant organization of space and sociality in Lebanon. But a Lebanese citizen is supposed to be a subject of both the city *and* the nation. Sherene returns us to the analytic Ayman—her young Syrian counterpart at the café, whose own inhabitation of a limit took the form of a sharp masculinity in direct contrast with Sherene's diminished femininity—named for me earlier: "We're all living together here in exile. Aren't you?"

In the Middle East, the paradigmatic experience of exile belongs, of course, to the Palestinians. Yet, as Edward Said has shown us, the epistemological condition of exile might also be applied to the world's many displaced peoples: a bittersweet distance from any nation, a nomadic sense of independence, a sense of historic contingency rather than inevitability, and the impossibility of security or satisfaction.[26] Through Said's theorizing of the Palestinian experience in *After the Last Sky*, we might think of the concept of exile as also a kind of fugitivity. In his words, the exilic condition is inhabited as a "paradox of mobility and insecurity"[27]; a paradox that has only deepened in the intervening years of globalized and feminized migration. Hence Said concludes his 1984 essay with a description of exile as an alternative to the mass institutions that dominate modern life, namely those of family and nation. Hence also his repeated citation of Adorno's maxim: "It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home."[28] *To not be at home in one's home*—even as she did not choose it in an act of critical consciousness, few phrases could better capture Sherene's condition as I encountered it.

The vast majority of African and Asian female migrants living in Dora have fled private homes and found some combination of speech, mobility, desire, and/or friendship as a result. They walk around. They love, they marry, they divorce, they start businesses, they frequent cafés, they speak with determination and demand. Sherene, who has lived in Dora for longer than many of these women have been alive but has fallen through the cracks of Lebanon's kinship-organized social contract, sits mostly at home. Even in her native language, her speech breaks. Unlike the Ethiopian women, Lebanon has not stripped her of language and possession, and she can recall in her memory of the country these personal traces. Instead, the nation continues to mark her as its own—her native Arabic, her white skin, her belly dancing expertise, her property, her monthly pension—while she lives in isolation. A group of strangers are now the condition of her speech, in a neighborhood that is no longer familiar to her. What does Lebanon, with its social safety net all but destroyed by years of neoliberalization, have left to offer to those like Sherene who fall through the cracks of gendered citizenship? Those that appear to us as entirely alone, madness hovering at the edges, self-medicating against the pain of their loss—where might they seek refuge? The answer, I argue, is in the undercommons that has been forged by the city dwellers who never belonged to the country in the first place.

BEIRUT: ADDIS OF THE MIDDLE EAST?

The three stories above—a tragic story of love and loss between a Syrian man and an Ethiopian woman; an affective community of marginalized subjects offering a Cameroonian woman pieces of care to produce a narrative of her survival; and an elder Lebanese citizen exiled to an Ethiopian café in a neighborhood that has outpaced her—point to the layered interdependences of Beirut's undercommons. This is a world permeated with violence but one in which the experience of migrants in Lebanon cannot be conceptualized through isolation or exclusion alone. Instead, it offers a remarkably diverse cast of characters that come together in excess of identity, legal status, and even language. Today, Lebanon has been largely stripped of the aspirationally European cultural associations that marked its famous Golden Age. Instead, it is mired in financial crisis and a fierce battleground in the endless wars of American imperialism. Along the way, it has also become home to an undercommons of global capitalism, filled with subjects originating across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. What might be the unintended consequences of this globalization from the inside? Thinking with the social map of Beirut's undercommons recalls an earlier moment of transnational solidarity in its history, one when the city served as an anticolonial center amidst twentieth century circuits of internationalist exchange.

Migrant workers are not the first Africans and Asians to enter Lebanon. In the 1960s and early 1970s, numerous students, artists, political activists, and itinerants from around the world found themselves in the city of Beirut, at the time a haven for radical thought and a free press (particularly if ignoring the impoverished and largely Shiʿi population of the "misery belt" just outside the city). Browsing through the yearbooks of the American University in Beirut from these years, one finds dozens of international faces, particularly from newly independent nations including Sudan, India, and Kenya. This was a time of Arab Nationalism, Third World Internationalism, and Havana's Tricontinental; USSR funding on one side and CIA funding on the other, all competing for the mantle of modernism and progress in the great cities of the global South.[29] It was a time when Beirut was the political capital of the Palestinian Revolution and an intellectual refuge for dissidents across the region fleeing censorship and repression inside authoritarian states. Films depicting Beirut from this era are full of Black and Brown faces, whether spies, tourists, sex symbols, revolutionaries, or random extras. A few decades later, however, a combination of the Lebanese Civil War and the new world order has seen the decimation of these networks at the level of both institution and imagination.

In 1973, the Ethiopian Students Union in Lebanon attended a meeting in West Berlin to participate in the founding congress of the World Wide Federation of Ethiopian Students.[30] Today, to say the very word "Ethiopian" in Lebanon is to preclude the possibility of there ever being, even ever *having been*, an Ethiopian Students Union in the country. And yet, unlike in the 1970s, in 2015 the Ethiopian population in the country was approximately equivalent to the Palestinian one.[31] It is the *kafala* system that has served as the key facilitator of this aporetic break. As with elsewhere in the world, transnational labor migration has produced a social infrastructure entirely dependent on exploitation, indenture, and servitude. It is for this reason that domestic workers have been designated the paradigmatic "servants of globalization."[32] The anticolonial vision of a world in which Arabs, Africans, and Asians imagined a shared future of solidarity and liberation—with a free Palestine at the center of a decolonized Middle East—has instead brought the racial hierarchies of an annihilatory capitalism. Yet it is here that the analytics of the undercommons offer us fugitivity in excess of structure.

The concept of the undercommons inhabits a shared terrain of thought on marronage, creativity, and resistance that emerges primarily via Black and Indigenous struggles for freedom from slavery in the Caribbean and the Americas.[33] Described as a method of *spatializing* resistance through the transformation of hostile spaces into those of refuge, fugitivity "forges alternative subjectivities . . . in excess but never fully outside of dominant geographies."[34] Distinct from the operative modalities of "counterpublics" or "hidden transcripts," which tend to emphasize discursive circulation and a Foucauldian sense of productive power under constraint,[35] the undercommons avows a theoretical lineage more attuned to embodied and sensory forms of subversion. Adopting this concept thereby points to the simultaneously material and aesthetic force of the spaces that migrants have forged out of Beirut's eviscerated urban commons. Importantly, Blackness here is not simply a Western analytic that offers a productive parallel for Lebanon. Instead, it is the demographic transition of the majority migrant domestic worker population in Lebanon from Sri Lankan to Ethiopian that intersects with the creation of this undercommons.[36] Yet to situate the world described above as the undercommons of the *kafala* system is to recognize that its paradigmatic inhabitants are not Black and Indigenous subjects forged in flight of enslavement and settler colonialism but rather African and Asian migrants escaping the labor regimes of contemporary globalization.

"Beirut's genius was that it responded immediately to our needs as Arabs in an Arab world gone prison-like, drab and insufferably mediocre," wrote Edward Said, mourning for what was lost after the Israeli invasion of 1982.[37] Nearly half a century later, although Beirut remains a haven for cultural production in the region, it is easy to once again mourn the loss of Beirut to the forces of rampant privatization, political chaos, and the genocidal destruction of the Israeli-American alliance. Yet today's Beirut also cannot be invoked exclusively through a gesture to Arabs. After all, it is Beirut that Rahel describes with the unmistakably internationalist echoes of her statement: "Dora, you know, it's everything—Addis for the Ethiopians, Colombo for the Sri Lankans, Dhaka for the Bangladeshis." It was in Beirut that the region's first Domestic Workers Union was created in 2015, and in Beirut that annual parades for May Day and International Women's Day continue to center the issue of migrant domestic work as key to labor reform and women's rights in the country, something with no parallel in the other regional centers of the *kafala* system. After four decades of African and Asian labor migration to Lebanon, the undercommons has transformed both who and *what* it means to live in Beirut today. Underlaid by the competing violences of national exclusions and global abandonment, inhabited by voices and languages that cross the map of the postcolonial world, this is a city that can yet sustain a life by sitting together through an electricity cut, sharing cigarettes, and watching a dying woman powder her face and dance in the dark.

NOTES

[1] My deep gratitude to the many people in Beirut who trusted me with language, intimacy, and curiosity. Special thanks to Hana Sleiman, Beza Girma, Cynthia Kreichati, Lamia Moghnieh, Tania Tute, Farah Salka, and Mansour Aziz. For helpful comments on earlier drafts of this text, thanks to Lisa Lowe, Onur Günay, Anooradha Iyer-Siddiqui, and everyone at the Mahindra Humanities Center 2017–2018 cohort; Lana Salman; and the very kind reviewers and editors at *Mashriq & Mahjar*.

[2] Assaf Dahdah, *L'art du faible: Les migrantes non arabes dans le Grand Beyrouth (Liban)*, vol. 7 (Beirut: Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 2012).

[3] Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (London: Minor Compositions, 2013).

[4] Bina Fernandez, "Degrees of (Un)Freedom: The Exercise of Agency by Migrant Domestic Workers in Kuwait and Lebanon," in *Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East: The Home and the World*, eds. Bina Fernandez and Marina de Regt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 51–74; Amrita Pande,

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[6] Lina Abu-Habib, "The Use and Abuse of Female Domestic Workers from Sri Lanka in Lebanon," *Gender & Development* 6, no. 1 (1998): 52–56; Louisa Ajami, "Foreign Domestic Workers in Lebanon" (master's thesis, American University of Beirut, 2007); Joyet Beyene, "Women, Migration, and Housing: A Case Study of Three Households of Ethiopian and Eritrean Female Migrant Workers in Beirut and Naba'a" (master's thesis, American University of Beirut, 2005); Ray Jureidini, " 'Migrant Workers and Xenophobia in the Middle East': Identities, Conflict and Cohesion" (Programme Paper, Number 2, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Beirut, 2003); Ha Yeon Lee, "Maid, Mother, or Whore: The Power of Filipina Women in Lebanese Homes" (master's thesis, American University of Beirut, 2009); Joumana Talhouk, "Making the Middle-Class Home: Migrant Domestic Labor and Social Reproduction in Lebanon" (master's thesis, Oxford University, 2022); Fawwaz Traboulsi, "Social Classes and Political Power in Lebanon" (Lebanon: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung – Middle East, 2014).

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[8] For more on the Gulf context, see, for example, Neha Vora, *Impossible Citizens: Dubai's Indian Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Neha Vora and Natalie Koch, "Everyday Inclusions: Rethinking Ethnocracy, Kafala, and Belonging in the Arabian Peninsula," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 15, no. 3 (2015): 1–9; Rima Sabban, "Encountering Domestic Slavery: A Narrative from the Arabian Gulf," in *Slavery in the Islamic World*, ed. Mary Ann Fay (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2019), 125–53.

[9] For work tracing the history of migrant domestic labor in Lebanon, see Khaled Beydoun, "The Trafficking of Ethiopian Domestic Workers into Lebanon: Navigating through a Novel Passage of the International Maid Trade," *Berkeley Journal of International Law* 24 (2006): 1009–47; Ray Jureidini, "In the Shadows of Family Life Toward a History of Domestic Service in

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[10] Dahdah, *L'art du faible.*

[11] Note that migrants have been gathering in these neighborhoods since the 1980s; what is at stake is their increasing visibility and concentration. For more on migrant activity across different Beirut neighborhoods, see Dahdah, *L'art du faible.* For a consideration of the impact of the 2006 war with Israel, see Mansour-Ille and Hendow, "From Exclusion to Resistance." For more on the story of Mala (Malini Kandaarachchige), see Sintia Issa, "Surviving Displacement, Alienation, and *Kafala* in the Nineties: An Oral History of Grassroots Organizing," in *Feminist 90s* (Beirut: Knowledge Workshop, 2021), https://alwarsha.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Sintia-Issa-Surviving-Displacement.pdf.

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[13] Dahdah, *L'art du faible.*

[14] For examples, see Houda Kassatly, Nicolas Puig, and Michel Tabet, "Le marché de Sabra à Beyrouth par l'image et le son: Retour sur une enquête intensive" [Sabra market in Beirut through pictures, videos and sounds: Methodological perspectives], *Revue européenne des migrations internationales* 32, no. 3–4 (2016): 37–68; Noura Nasser, "The Food Geographies of Filipina Migrants in Beirut" (Memo, Urban Politics in the Middle East, Project on Middle East Political Science, Elliot School of International Affairs, Washington, DC, October 2023), https://pomeps.org/the-food-geographies-of-filipina-migrants-in-beirut; Anna Simone Reumert, "Good Guys, Mad City: Etiquettes of Migration among Sudanese Men in Beirut," *Mashriq & Mahjar* 7, no. 2 (2020): 1–22; Dalia Zein, "Embodied Placemaking: Filipina Migrant Domestic Workers' Neighborhood in Beirut," *Mashriq & Mahjar* 7, no. 2 (2020): 70–101.

[15] Beydoun, "Trafficking"; Emebet Kebede, *Ethiopia: An Assessment of the International Labour Migration Situation; The Case of Female Labour Migrants* (Geneva: International Labor Organization, 2002).

[16] Martin Baldwin-Edwards, *Migration in the Middle East and the Mediterranean* (Athens: Global Commission on International Migration, September 2005).

[17] Gulanara Shahinian, *United Nations General Assembly: Report of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Including Its Causes and Consequences* (Geneva, 4 July 2012).

[18] Bina Fernandez, "Precarious Migrant Motherhood in Lebanon," *OpenDemocracy*, 11 January 2017,

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[19] Anti-Racism Movement Lebanon (ARM), "Short Film Screening: Precarious Migrant Mothers," 11 June 2017, https://www.facebook.com/events/236044193554477.

[20] Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, trans. Nicolas Truong (London: Profile Books, 2012), 22.

[21] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 25.

[22] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 44.

[23] In Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 89.

[24] Gandhi, *Affective Communities*.

[25] Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 44.

[26] Edward Said, "The Voice of a Palestinian in Exile," *Third Text* 2, no. 3–4 (1988): 39–50; Said, "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals," *Grand Street* (1993): 112–24; Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 186.

[27] Edward Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[28] Said, "Reflections on Exile."

[29] Hala Halim, "Lotus, the Afro-Asian Nexus, and Global South Comparatism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, no. 3 (2012): 563–83; Zeina Maasri, *Cosmopolitan Radicalism: The Visual Politics of Beirut's Global Sixties* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[30] Bahru Zewde, *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement, c. 1960–1974* (Rochester: Boydell and Brewer, 2014).

[31] Dahdah, *L'art du faible*.

[32] Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[33] Leslie Gross-Wyrtzen and Alex A. Moulton, "Toward 'Fugitivity as Method': An Introduction to the Special Issue," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 22, no. 5 (2023): 1258–72.

[34] Gross-Wyrtzen and Moulton, "Fugitivity as Method," 1261.

[35] For a recent example that adopts the former framework to also examine Ethiopian migrant experience in Lebanon, see Bina Fernandez, "Engendering Migrant Counterpublics: Fun, Care, Solidarity, and Resistance among Ethiopian Domestic Workers in Lebanon," *Gender & Development* 32, no. 1–2 (2024): 159–76.

[36] In my larger body of work, I theorize this more extensively as what I call "Black Beirut."

[37] Edward Said, "Edward Said Reflects on the Fall of Beirut," *London Review of Books* 7, no. 12 (July 1985): 3–4.