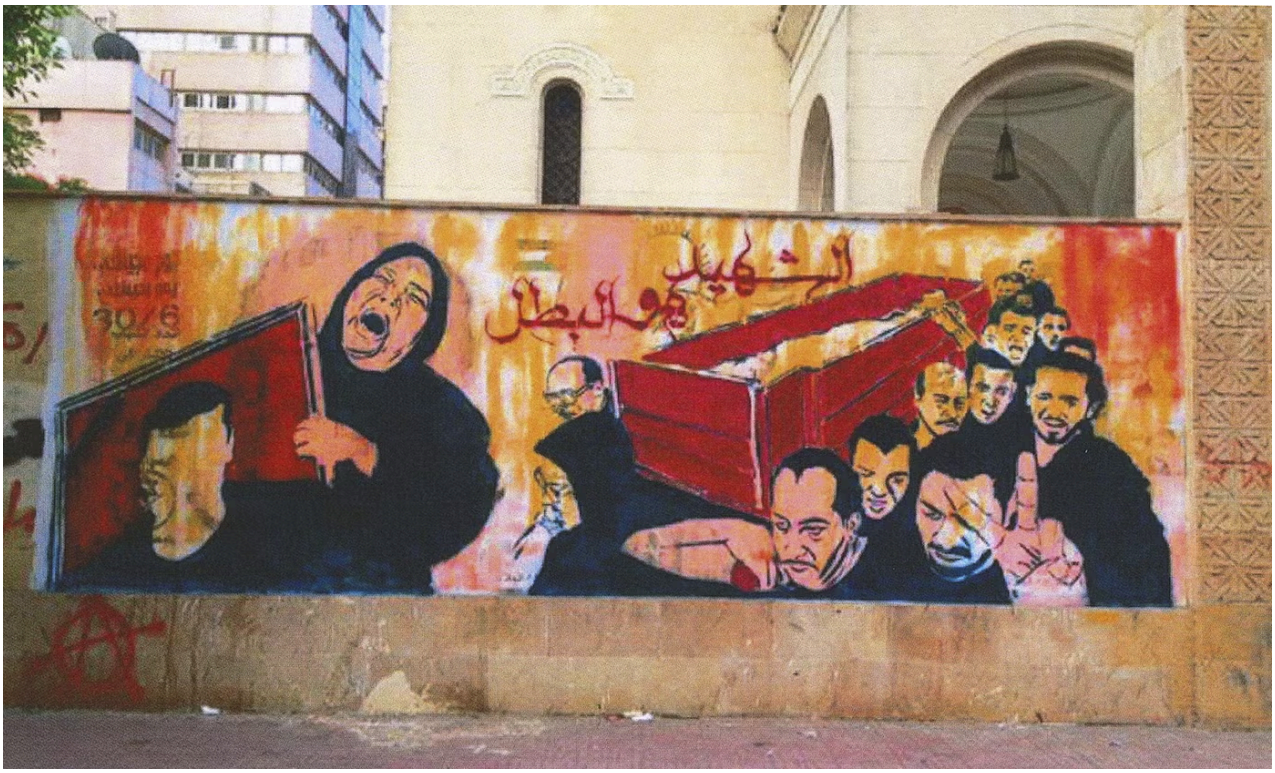


Mother grieves her martyred son. Graffiti by Al-Moshir. Cairo, 2013. Photo by Lucie Ryzova.

Letters for the immortal dead

Foroogh Farhang, Marlene Schäfers, Maria Kastrinou, Lucie Ryzova, and Stephanie Love discuss intersections of life and death

Some topics come at *CSSH* like waves, and their comparative potential is too big for a single issue to hold. In 2024-2025, we received so many manuscripts about the social life of death that we could not group them fast enough. We placed them under a variety of rubrics, where they made perfectly good sense, but four of these essays had a special gravity. They seemed to be pulling toward each other across our production schedule. We've decided to create a special "Under the Rubric" – spanning issues 67/4 and 68/1 – to accommodate their palpable attraction.

Consider this package a holiday gift, in four parts:

Foroogh Farhang. **Death of the Gharīb: A Window towards a Regional Understanding of Displacement in the Middle East. < https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100091>** *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 2025;67(4):761-784.

Marlene Schäfers and Maria Kastrinou. **Martyrs, Dreams, and Past Lives: Insurgent Immortality and the Expansive Logic of Debt. <**

CSSH COMPARATIVE STUDIES in SOCIETY AND HISTORY

< https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/cssh/>

< https://lsa.umich.edu>

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100194> *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. FirstView.

Stephanie V. Love. **The Archive of Displacement: Vernacular History and Urban Cemeteries in Oran, Algeria. < https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100170>** *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. FirstView.

The essays have much in common: they are set in the Middle East; they examine multiple aspects of martyrdom; they fix our attention on the fact that the dead are a living force in political struggles, in resistance; and they show how pervasively urban landscapes are shaped and re-shaped by the movement of the dead—their bodies, names, and our memories of them. Most of all, the essays explore how hard it is for us to let the dead go and to bury them finally in one place. It is hard, too, for the dead to ignore *us*. As our authors show, the living and dead endlessly interact in the liminal spaces they co-create.

We invited Farhang, Schäfers, Kastrinou, Ryzova, and Love to read each other's essays and respond. They chose to do so in letters. As you'll see, the impact of their shared insights is deep and sometimes unexpected, but it carries the fortifying effect of a vigil or a memorial at graveside. Each author is fully aware that she writes in a time of genocide, state collapse, ruthless dispossession, and historical trauma. None writes exclusively about Palestine, but Gaza is the backdrop and brutal intensifier of all their arguments. Beneath the carnage of the moment, each paper connects to older motifs. The stranger. The icon. Graves. Spirits. Martyrs. Mourning. Reincarnation. Resurrection. Blessings and curses. Paradise. It is a rich assemblage of ideas. It generates a feeling of responsibility for the dead.

We always ask you to read the articles before scrolling down. We do so again, this time hoping you will notice that something ineffable is swirling through

these essays. Something barely named. Is it the moral challenge of the "gharib," the stranger? Is it the "anti-power" of death? Can we, the living, know?

Join us in thinking it through.

The Lifelong Process of Death

Foroogh Farhang

Dear Marlene, Maria, Lucie, and Stephanie,

As the ongoing catastrophe unfolds in the so-called Gaza Strip—yet another violent episode in the colonial demarcation of lands and peoples—I think of those who live and die under conditions of occupation, displacement, impoverishment, and violence. And I think of Gharīb. I met him in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Bārid in northern Lebanon. He was born to a Palestinian family in a refugee camp in Gaza. His family were among the tens of thousands of southern Palestinians expelled from their homes by the Israeli occupation in 1948, making up about 80% of Gaza's population. Gharīb was a revolutionary fighter whose world of resistance expanded beyond the refugee camp he was born in and the one he died in. It took him to Moscow, Jordan, and Syria, granting him the "strange" peculiarities of one who can never fully belong.

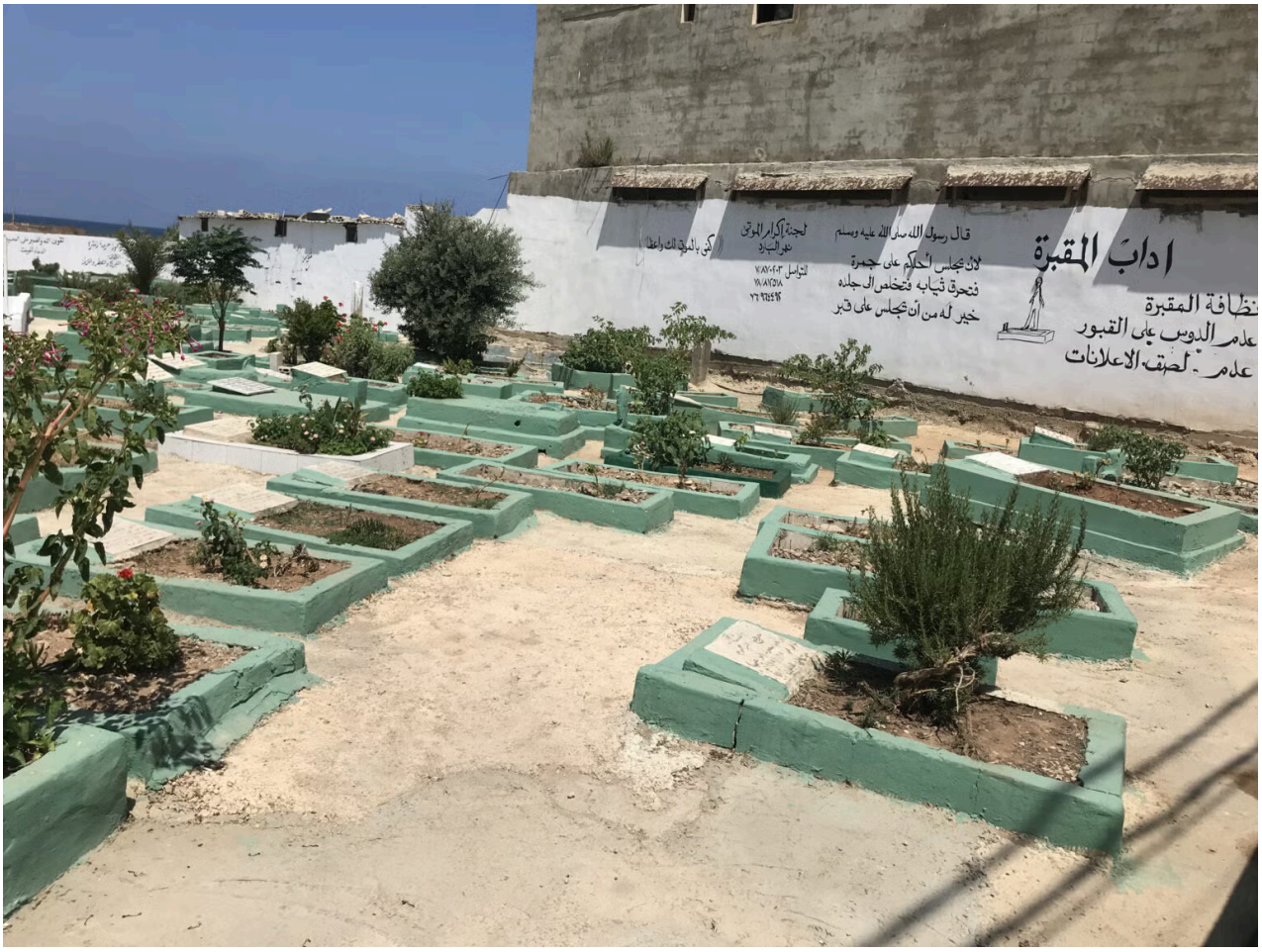
When I met him in 2019, barely a year before his death, he extended his hand and, with a firm grip, uttered, "Nice meeting you. I'm Gharīb [stranger or strange one]," the name he was known by within the camp and one that spread further on the lips of young Palestinian revolutionaries of Nahr al-Bārid, especially upon his death.

In embracing his *gharībness*, or the state of not fully belonging, Gharīb's life and death offer us an alternative lens through which to understand displacement, statelessness, political marginalization, and structural violence in the region broadly defined as the Middle East and North Africa. The *gharīb* is neither a

bounded concept nor a recent one. It is a status, a state and statement of being that existed well before modern national borders or linguistic boundaries.

It is fitting that the *gharīb* is a traveling concept, a word shared among speakers of Arabic, Persian, Kurdish, Turkic, Urdu, Hindi, and more, one that connects these disparate geographies in identifying outsiders and strangers, wanderers, nomads, and paupers. Over its long history across this broad region, it has meandered, morphed, and adapted to evolve different meanings: the outsider who enters and sticks around, the castigated outcast, the castigating rebel, the displaced, the impoverished, the one who abandoned their people and land to find themselves abandoned by new peoples in new geographies.

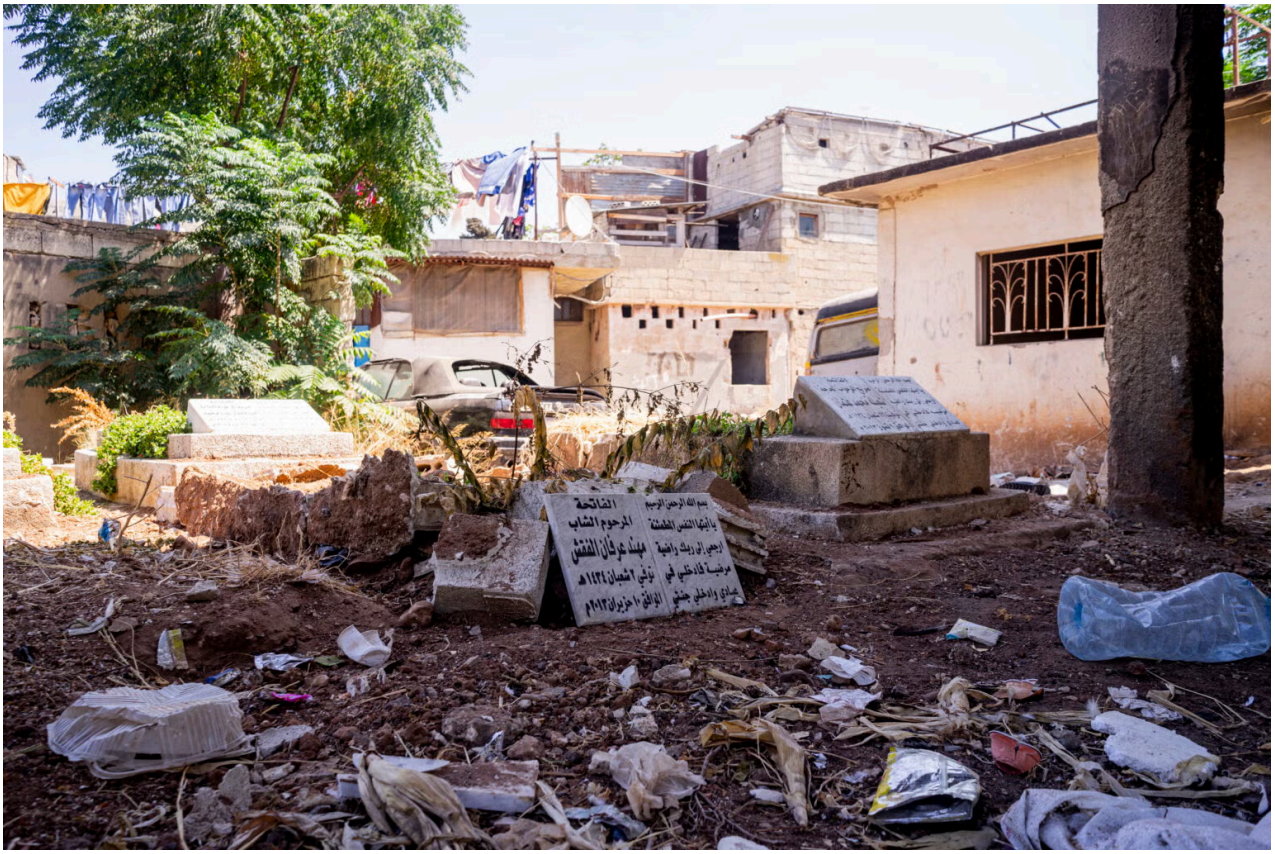
Some are born a *gharīb*, such as *gurbetis*—the name given by urbanites to nomadic gypsy communities throughout western Turkey and Eastern Europe. Some become a *gharīb* through a violent disruption in their economic, social, and political ties to their surroundings, such as internally and externally displaced persons. And some grow out of their estrangement by stitching themselves back into the fabric of life around them. And finally, there are some who die as a *gharīb*, becoming eternally estranged as the old Arabic saying suggests: *al-gharīb gharīb al-qabir* (The stranger is the stranger of the grave).



Cemetery at Nahr al-Barid Palestinian refugee camp, Lebanon. Photo by author.

In the context of Lebanon, the *gharīb* has come to define, in a pejorative manner, Arab outsiders, specifically Palestinians and Syrians, but also outcast and impoverished Lebanese who have moved from rural regions to larger urban areas. It is precisely in this overlapping space between estrangement and poverty that the *gharīb*becomes a generative tool for understanding the messiness of categories of belonging in life, and in death. Here, death is not a rupture in living, but a lifelong process of estrangement and impoverishment, experienced through loss of belonging. The spectrum of *gharībness* and its destructive-generative dialectics are tied with the people, institutions, and systems that define the *ghurabā'* as others. It also is entangled with the spatial boundaries that mark their otherness. *Ghurabā'*, strangers in this sense, occupy both *other spaces* and create *spaces of others*.

My 18-month ethnographic research explored spaces of estrangement, taking me to UNRWA-run Palestinian refugee camps and the outskirts of cities like Beirut, Tripoli, and Zahle, where more than a million displaced Syrians co-inhabit the margins of society alongside impoverished Lebanese. One such space was Al-Ghurabāʾ Cemetery, the Cemetery of Strangers. This large Ottoman-era graveyard, in Tripoli, is designated for the burial of dead strangers. Yet it is now also home to more than a thousand displaced Syrians as well as stateless and impoverished Lebanese who have been living in informal dwellings for years or, in some cases, for generations. The *ghurabāʾ* of the cemetery, as they are collectively known, view their estrangement in contrast to and in conflict with governability and top-down social order.



Al-Ghuraba' Cemetery. Tripoli, Lebanon. Photo by author.

Thinking through the triangle of death, violence, and belonging (or lack thereof), I was struck by the deep resonance between Al-Ghurabāʾ and Stephanie's powerful account of urban cemeteries in Oran. As "archetypical archives of displacement," Stephanie argues, cemeteries contain traces of displaced, abandoned, and forgotten pasts, where the boundaries between life and death, between human beings and landscapes, are transcended (or translated). This process, nevertheless, is often marked by violence.

Extending this analytical triangle, Marlene and Maria's ethnographic accounts turn to the stateless Jawlani-s and Kurds of Eastern Turkey. Violent death and its reverberations in life show, in these cases, how indebtedness opens the liminal spaces in which revolutionary martyrs come alive. In the same vein, Lucie's "Portrait of a Martyr as a Young Man" highlights how representations of premature, untimely, and violent death disrupt the normative flow of time and allow for liminal temporality amidst revolution.

It is in these liminal spaces that one finds the *ghurabāʾ* of Lebanon, stateless Jawlani-s, Kurds of eastern Turkey, revolutionary Egyptians, and displaced Orani trees and city dwellers, all of whom experience and act upon violence as an integral part of their being. It is precisely violence, in its structural forms, that marks the intersection where a *gharīb*'s solitary path meets those of others shaped by occupation, displacement, social exclusion, and political oppression.

Solidarity,

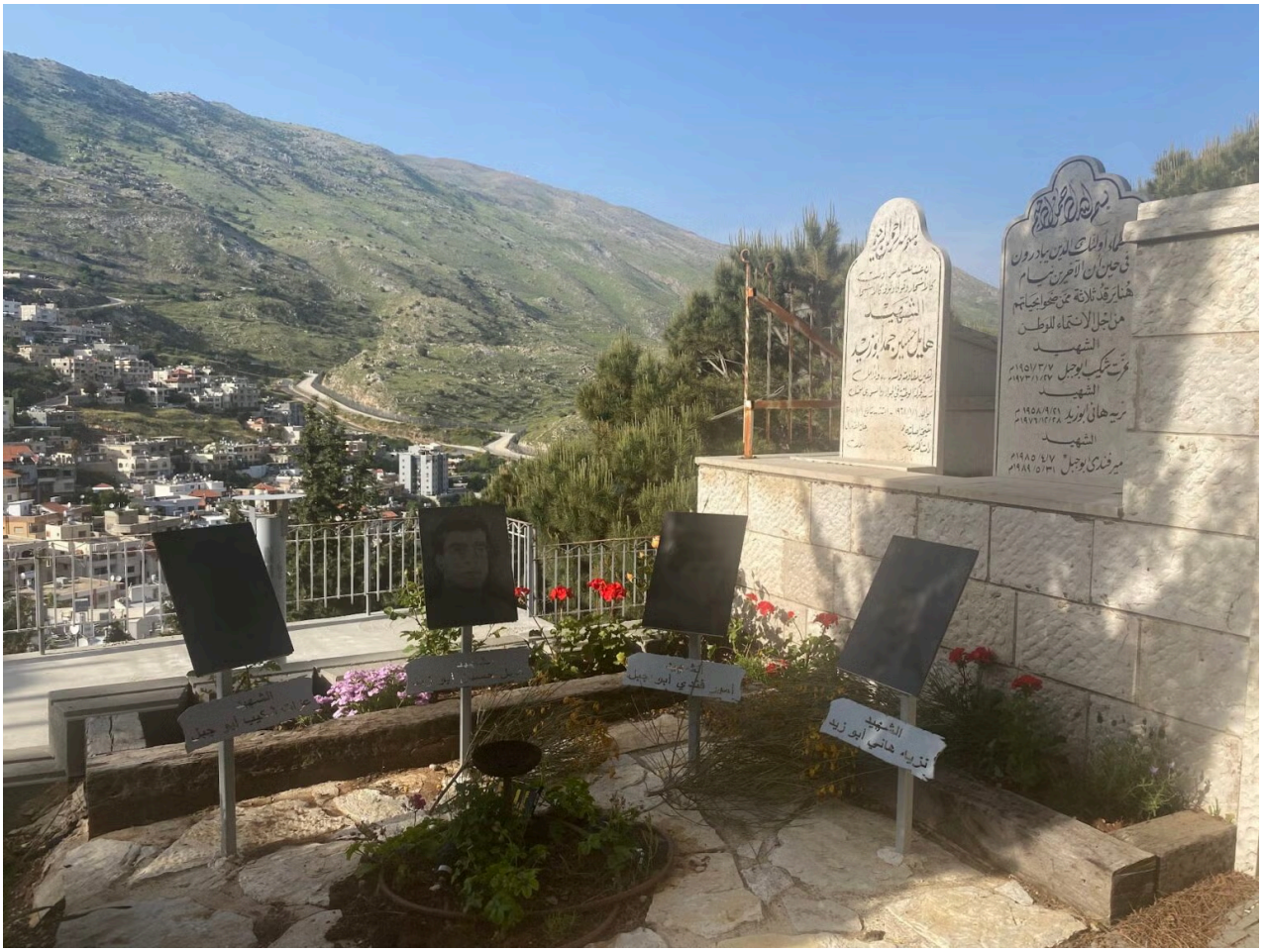
Foroogh

Where the dead refuse to sleep

Marlene Schäfers and Maria Kastrinou

Dear Lucie, Stephanie, and Foroogh,

Reading your papers alongside our own, we found ourselves in a landscape where the dead move with startling clarity—unsettling and unsettled as well as deeply intimate. It is rare to encounter such a resonant constellation of themes across the Middle Eastern landscape. Your writings invited us to linger with the dead and the strange, to follow in their footsteps, to watch how they inhabit cemeteries, city squares, family albums, and the fragile temporality of displacement.



Graves and remembrance plaques for the martyrs of the occupation. Majdal Sham, Occupied Golan Heights. Photo by Maria Kastrinou.

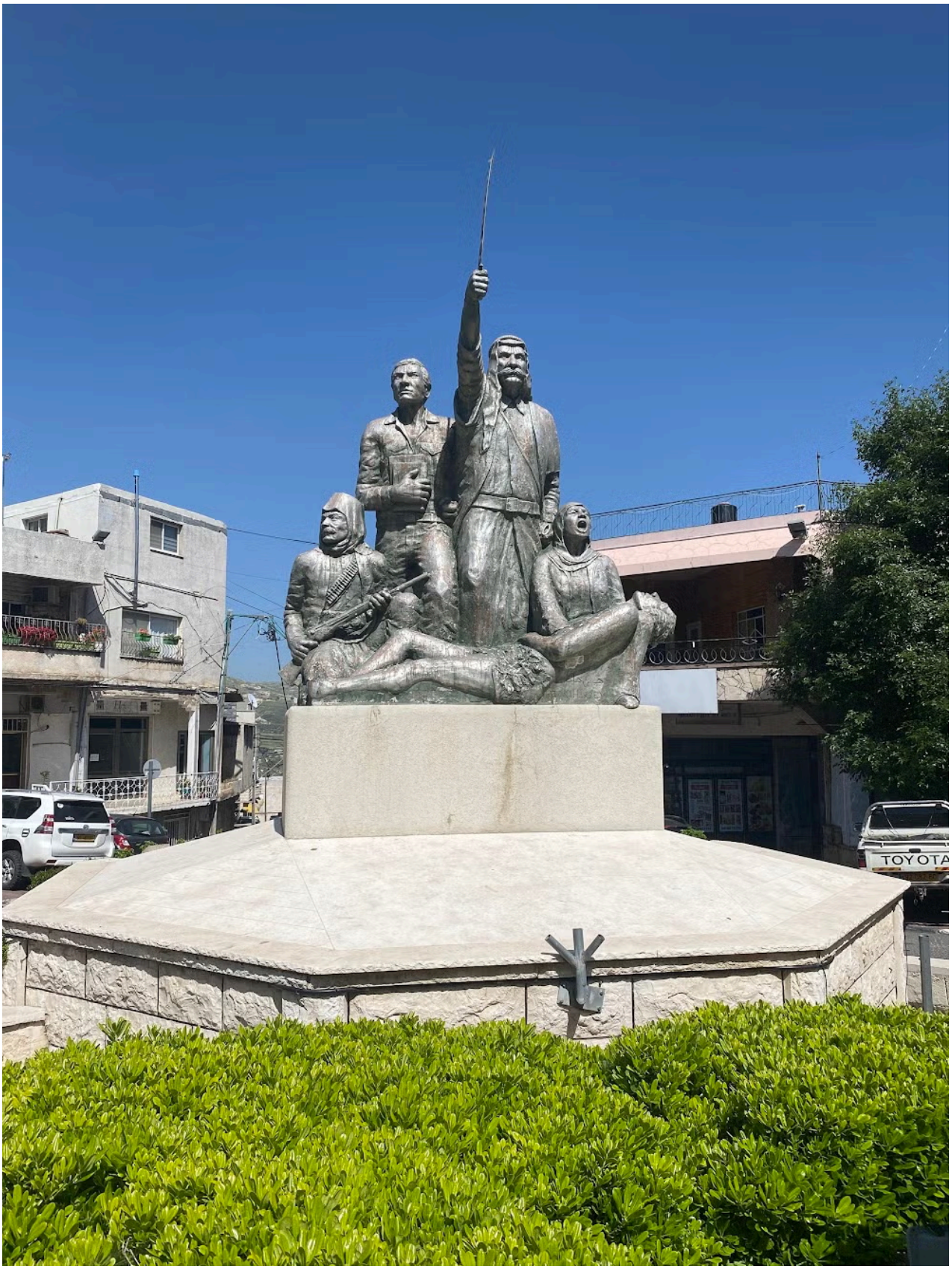
We began our collaboration because, in the stateless and occupied places where we work, the dead are never simply gone. They insist on their vitality, and

the living renew with both fervor and fury their kinship with the dead. Martyrs return in dreams; past lives reappear in new bodies; photographs glow on phone screens and adorn living rooms; WhatsApp messages connect past lives across securitized borders. The potency of the dead is cultivated, even when it is not fully controlled. They are cherished, indulged, and folded into long-term expansive exchanges. And although occupying states wage war against the dead—erasing cemeteries, controlling burial, policing memory, even charging martyrs' families—the dead cannot be killed.

Your papers helped us see three threads running through all our work: the unsettled and unsettling nature of the dead, the shifting temporalities of liminality, and the materiality of immortality.

As your papers show, not only the Kurdish and Syrian dead are restless. Across the Middle East, the dead refuse to remain where they are placed. They are persistent presences, pushing into the lives of the living.

In our contribution, we theorize this insistence as *insurgent immortality*, drawing attention to the long-term reciprocity between dead and living in both the Golan Heights and Kurdistan. These relations unsettle because they nourish political communities that defy colonial occupation, crossing borders without regard for realpolitik or lines on a map. We use the term to capture the insistence—indeed the labor—through which communities cultivate ongoing relations with their dead. These relations are not passive hauntings. They are reciprocal, generative, unsettling, and profoundly political. And yet, in both our field sites the dead themselves are *not* unsettled: they are welcomed, cared for, invited in.



Al-Masirah (The March), by sculptor Hassan Khater. The monument honors Druze resistance and resilience. In the forefront, a mother holds her martyred son. Majdal Shams, Occupied Golan

Heights. Photo by Maria Kastrinou.

In Kurdistan, nightly returns of martyrs are embraced and endlessly discussed. Martyrs are addressed in diaries and letters, and their images are never further than a finger tapping a screen. In the Golan Heights, past lives are examined with great care among the stateless Syrian Druze community there. When souls return through reincarnation, they draw families together, open new homes, and forge new intimacies. Secular martyrs, too, receive special treatment: their tombs, styled in Islamic aesthetics rather than regional or sectarian, stand out among collective ossuaries. Unlike haunting or punishing figures, these immortals are in constant exchange with the living, through relations of debt and reciprocity defying the colonial enclosures that Israel and Turkey are imposing.

This intentional intimacy with the (un)dead contrasts with how the dead become troubling forces across the Algerian urban landscape in Stephanie's account—the "missing masses" whose traces erupt in soil, trash, and talk. And it differs from the estranged dead of Foroogh's *gharīb*, the stranger who dies as they lived: in displacement. Where communities invest in the labor of sustaining relations with and through the dead, their power becomes a force that unsettles political orders. But the dead themselves need not be unsettled.

Lucie, your paper illuminates yet another mode of unsettledness: the Egyptian revolutionary martyrs remain *un-dead* precisely because they refuse closure. The images their families choose—a beach holiday shot, a casual Facebook portrait—reject funerary convention. So does the way these images are placed: at bedsides, on bodies, in squares. These photographs keep the space of revolution open. As long as justice is not done, the martyrs resist settling into the calm of ancestorhood, their portraits permeating public space, graffitied on walls and sidewalks.

Liminality runs through all our papers. The power of the dead relies on the porous space between life and death—on the potential of the betwixt and between. Yet this liminality is far from uniform. It shifts historically and ethnographically as we move from Kurdistan to Cairo, from the Golan to Oran and Beirut. In our cases, Kurdish and Jawlani martyrs and reincarnated souls are liminal because they are embedded in open-ended relations of debt and exchange. Their presence grows through repetition, in the ordinary rhythms of life: dreams, rituals of care, stories told and retold, the slow accretion of obligation. Their liminality is durable.

The martyrs of the Egyptian revolution, as you show, Lucie, are also liminal—but differently so. Tahrir Square was "a place out of place and a time out of time," where new relationships and temporalities surged forth. The Egyptian martyrs' political potency lies in this unstable temporality. Their liminality arises not from long-term cycles of exchange but from their refusal to be confined by commemoration. Their unsettling force—indeed their capacity to make demands—comes from their refusal to be settled into clear-cut categories like "ancestors." Their time is the extraordinary time of revolution: suspended, heightened, open.

These contrasts raise questions about how the political potency of the dead is tied to temporal regimes: ordinary versus extraordinary, steady versus unsteady, repetitive versus unexpected. If the power of the dead arises from their refusal to be put in place, our papers reveal multiple modalities for sustaining this refusal. And they raise a further question: how can the dead remain demanding figures even after revolutionary fervor fades? What allows their potency to endure across generations?

Finally, all our essays trace the material forms through which the dead persist, compelling us to think about the *materiality of immortality*—and, equally, the *immortality of materiality*.

Lucie, your attention to the portraits and drawings of Egyptian martyrs made us think anew about the intimacy of representation. The artist who draws a martyr's face becomes, however briefly, entangled with the person they depict. The drawing is a moment of care, a small act of becoming-with the dead. It is a form of care and a pleasure in indulging the dead, akin to the love our Kurdish interlocutors describe. The "communion" between the artist and the martyr—tragically heightened where an artist becomes a martyr—recalls the recycling of souls into new Druze bodies, lives bleeding into one another.

Reincarnation is a material technology of vitality, an example of the reproductive powers of the dead. Kinship—productive and affirmative but not always controllable and hence insurgent—is an answer to occupation and to the violence of the continuous enclosure of social and political life.

In Stephanie's Oran, materiality exposes what official narratives seek to make us forget: cemetery soil tinged by old vineyards, rubble-strewn shantytowns, abandoned monuments—each storing layers of colonial and postcolonial violence. Across the Lebanese landscapes Foroogh describes, *gharīb* is as much an imaginative horizon as a materially saturated space with harsh edges and violent outlines.

Materiality, our collection of papers makes clear, is not a backdrop for, but a medium of, immortality.

Headstone at Van's cemetery for the unclaimed. Kurdish guerilla fighters and undocumented migrants lie side by side. Photo by Dogukan Tatar.

Across this quintet, our papers share a rhythmic feel, a harmonic territory, a shared idiom. Yet where the dead refuse to sleep, they improvise their own tunes and melodic motifs. Within this formation, the undead martyrs and returning souls we have sought to capture in our paper stand out because of how their embedding in the pulse of ordinary lives, sustained across decades, conjures vitality. Intentionally conjured and laboriously sustained by the living, these engagements are (re)productive. The kinship between living and dead ensures that, against the violence of occupation and dispossession, souls will return and martyrs will stay alive.

With warmest solidarity,
Maria and Marlene

How can the dead commemorate the living?

Lucie Ryzova

Dear Stephanie, Faroogh, Marlene, and Maria,

My first encounter with *al-gharib* came a long time ago in the autobiography of the Egyptian playwright 'Abdallah al-Tukhi, *'Aynan 'ala al-tariq* ("Eyes on the Road," 2002). Describing his coming of age in the 1930s in a small village in the Egyptian delta, al-Gharib appears in the text as al-Tukhi's childhood companion. It soon transpires that this was a nickname given to a foundling, a child stranded, or lost from his family, perhaps during a visit to the annual festival of Sidi al-Badawi. Al-Tukhi's family had raised him as their own, though he occupied an ambiguous position between a quasi-brother and the household's helper.

Ghurba, or estrangement, appears again in al-Tukhi's text in the contrasting perception of departure between the author and his mother. Like most of his peers, modern-educated and upwardly mobile young men from middling, often "traditional" backgrounds, al-Tukhi aspired to leave his village, dreaming to discover and "spread himself" (*yentaliq*) in the "wide world." To his mother, however, leaving the place where one was born, becoming a "stranger in the houses of others, without knowing the worth of people" was abhorrent and nonsensical. Her perspective betrays an older—pre-modern or pre-colonial—perception of departures as something to be endured involuntarily, perhaps justifiable for the sake of seeking knowledge. "Pursue knowledge even if in China," writes another autobiographer of the same generation to justify his own tortuous quest for education, citing a well-known *hadith*. What to al-Tukhi's mother was a precarious estrangement, to the author and his generation of peers meant opportunity and social mobility as they sought to leave behind their spaces of origin, associating them with "backwardness." In the early decades of the 20th century, scores of young men undertook such departures in the name of "civilisation" and "progress," becoming Egypt's modern middle

class (the *efendiyya*), building a modern state, its institutions and its modern national culture along the way. These instantiations of the *gharib* and of *ghurba* illustrate what Foroogh describes as the capacity to become "one of us," as well as different historical modalities of estrangement and belonging. In this modernist iteration of departures a century ago, it was staying behind that entailed social death.

But if certain forms of *ghurba* became mainstreamed in the era of colonial modernity, then other forms of estrangement emerged in the postcolonial period. Most famously in the Egyptian context, Islamists. Few would ignore the legendary song *Nashid al-Ghuraba* ("Ode of the Strangers"), extoling the virtues of those who have voluntarily sought to distance themselves from the corruption of normative society. Sometimes apocryphally attributed to Sayyid Qutb, but entering the national memory following a high-profile assassination in the early 1990s, the song recently became known as an ISIL anthem (as Foroogh notes). Like so much of ISIL mythology, it actually originates in Egypt's prisons of the late 20th century. A self-imposed *ghurba* is here a moral stance, a form of ethical selfhood that can be found only on the margin of society. Seen from a longer historical perspective, such *ghurba* indexes the failure of the secular version of the postcolonial project, proudly espousing an anti-normalization position. The rest, as the saying goes, is politics. Egypt's Islamists briefly returned to the fold of the national community in its progressive, revolutionary iteration between 2011 and 2013; but this re-inclusion (or rebirth) was short lived, marred by contradictions that were largely—if far from solely—of the Islamists' own making. *Ode of the Strangers* was then, unsurprisingly, to be heard in Rab'a Square in the summer of 2013 before the Army's tanks raised the encampment to the ground, killing close to a thousand protesters, closing revolutionary liminality and foreclosing progressive futures for at least a generation. Repeatedly labelled "not really Egyptian," Islamists have thus become postcolonial Egypt's internal others, a status reminiscent of the Kurds in Turkey, as described by Maria and Marlene. While Islamists sometimes embrace their *gharibness* with pride, they are not Egypt's only internal

others. The normalizing neoliberal state has detained countless political prisoners who, upon release, remain forever under the thumb of the security apparatus and are liable to re-arrest at any time. They are also barred from serving in the army, and from entering certain parts of Egypt. The logic is clear: they are enemies of the state. These are all forms of social death, which is yet another form of liminality and another vector that connects our papers.

Martys against the State. Hosni Mubarak's trial, 2012. Courtesy Mosa'ab Elshamy.

Read from Cairo, there are uncanny resonances with Stephanie's paper. Over the past few years, the Sisi regime's bulldozers raised large portions of **the city's urban cemeteries < https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/egypt-city-of-the-dead-sisi/>** , some of which have been used continuously **since the 'Abbasid period < https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egypt-cairo-city-dead-demolitions-halted-damage-done>** . Here, the living and the dead lived side by side for centuries. Displacement, destruction, and dispossession in the

Egyptian case are not marked by trees, but by concrete roads and bridges, whose purpose is to bypass Cairo's overcrowded center and connect newly built exclusive cities on its desert edges. These bridges—concrete testimonies to sovereign power—constitute the unintended archival deposits of the future. They have not yet been read as such; but elsewhere in the city, an archive fever is in full swing: "the archive" is a hot topic in the contemporary Egyptian cultural landscape. Countless initiatives driven by mostly young Egyptians explore the "archive" in a multitude of artistic or public history-oriented projects, all operating outside of conventional institutional structures. What seems to fuel this archive fever is an effort to forge an alternative relationship to the past, to history, in a context where official historical narratives have long been compromised (and where, we should add, official archives remain largely inaccessible to researchers). By turning to and reactivating their own family archives, young people in contemporary Egypt labor to recover alternative forms of history, more "real" (and certainly more intimate, and therefore more credible) than anything the state can offer.

I want to end by gesturing back to Foroogh's beginning on Gaza, refracted through Maria and Marlene's analytical lens: it is currently the Palestinian dead who place an obligation, a debt, on all of us, wherever we are and whatever our origin, skin color, or mother tongue may be. We remain in their debt. So allow me to paraphrase what my interlocutors, the Egyptian revolutionary artists discussed in my paper, said while pointing at the murals of martyrs who, from their perspective, were decidedly "alive and watching": as long as the victims of present-day genocide have not received justice—indeed, as more Palestinians are killed as we write—we, the audiences of this hypermediated spectacle of death, are all more dead than alive. How can the dead commemorate the living? And how can we repay this debt?

With warm wishes,

Lucie

Challenged in the face of the dead

Stephanie Love

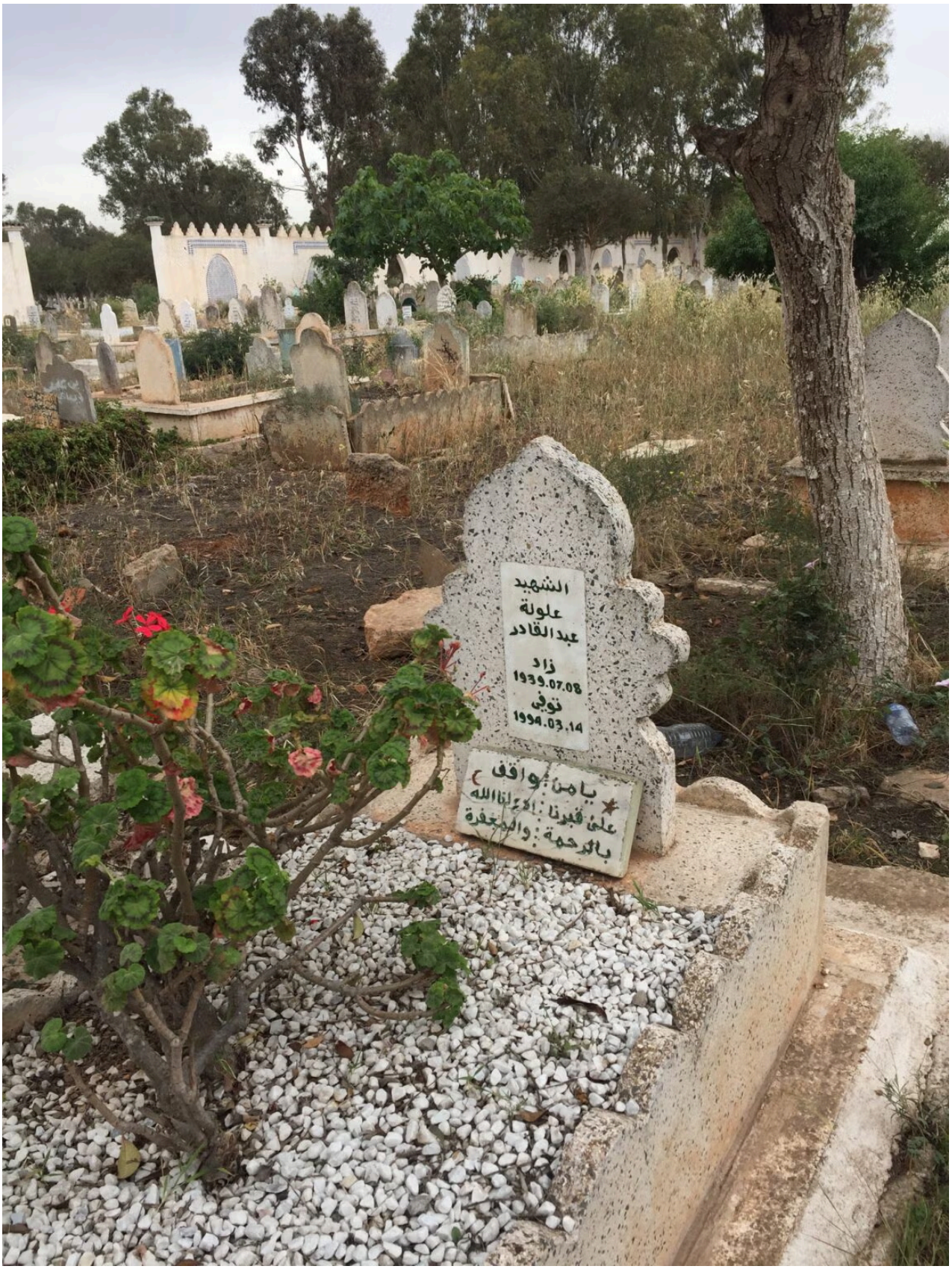
Dear Foroogh, Lucie, Marlene, and Maria,

There is nothing quite like the feeling when I am buried—even drowning—in my own thoughts and ideas, and then, suddenly, I find a piece of writing that speaks so clearly to the dilemmas I am struggling with. It was like that when I discovered Karima Lazali's *Colonial Trauma* (2021) and Asef Bayat's *Life as Politics* (2013) while working on my dissertation on popular politics in Algeria. These texts not only confirmed the direction my ethnographic material was pulling me in, but they also gave me the confidence to follow it.

A similar moment happened to me when I read our articles together; I realized that I must be on to something if four other scholars had independently put their finger on different pieces of the same puzzle I grapple with in my forthcoming book, *Streets of a Million Martyrs: Everyday Poetics and Politics in Urban Algeria*. My CSSH article, "The Archive of Displacement," is based on what one of my mentors called an "orphan" chapter of this book project: it appeared in my dissertation but did not belong in the book. But, here, surrounded by your remarkable articles, I realize the metaphor of "orphan" is all wrong; my article was more like a *gharīb* chapter.

Foroogh's focus on *gharībness* was especially generative for me. I begin my book with an image of young people leaving Algeria—known as the *harraga*, or "the burners"—who "burn" the Mediterranean in risky journeys in search of a future in *ghurbah*. The poetics of *ghurbah* in Algeria and beyond—the myriad songs, novels, films, and poems about it—led my colleague Dr. Amani Attia to develop a new course with me on *ghurbah*. We will teach it this spring. The course was inspired by issues similar to those Foroogh highlights, specifically the problem of terminology. The words "refugee" and "immigrant" have Eurocentric histories rooted in problematic assumptions about the geopolitical order, the nation-state, humanitarianism, and personhood. The

term *gharīb* belongs to a different political and emotional genealogy; it captures a structure of feeling that shifts displacement from the state of exception to a core part of the human condition, following people even to their deaths. While Foroogh develops *gharībness* as a frame for understanding the displacement of the living and the recently deceased, my article aims to understand the long-ago dead as actors and actants from the grave who leave traces on the urban landscape, creating a vernacular archive from which the living draw meaning.



Grave of the playwright, Abdelkader Alloula, killed in 1994 during Algeria's Black Decade. Photo by author.

Lucie, Marlene, and Maria's papers also touch on persistent concerns in my own research. Like Lucie, my work traces the images of martyrs in contemporary popular politics, but with a key difference between Egypt and Algeria: the martyr images I study come from Algeria's 1954-1962 Revolution, one of the few full-scale anti-colonial revolutions in MENA and globally. These images continue to bear witness to Algeria's remarkable revolution as an inspiration to colonized and oppressed people today. Martyr images testify to enduring colonial and postcolonial struggles over authoritarianism, genocide, and injustice—not as a politics of commemoration, but as actors still active in the ongoing work of revolution. As such, they not only witness Algeria's postcolonial struggles but also the ongoing Palestinian Revolution, which many Algerians see as the continuation of their own struggle. For example, during the 2019 Algerian Hirak, Palestinian flags were as present as Algerian ones, sometimes on the flipside of the same flag. My book, *Streets of a Million Martyrs*, explores how popular politics in the 21st century openly dialogues with the martyrs of the Algerian Revolution, where the body politic is sustained by the martyrs' blood, creating an "imagined community of the living and dead" (à la Amira Mittermaier), similar to what Marlene and Maria describe as a "martyrial lineage." Likewise, Algeria's imagined community of the living and dead is not confined to its national borders; it encompasses struggles against colonial violence anywhere.

What these papers collectively encourage scholars to do is to recenter death in the political, not just through necropolitics (though that is undoubtedly an essential part of these stories), but also by redefining political agency. Mohammed Bamyeh argued: "Death is decisively and primarily the opposite of power, not life" (2007: 3). Bamyeh's theory opens up at least three different semantic possibilities. First, the powers that be are challenged in the face of the dead—the enduring voices of ancestors and martyrs who speak from the hereafter against injustice. Second, the powerful will also die; it is the "great equalizer" despite any masculinist fantasies of immortality and denial of reproductive obligation and exchange, as Marlene and Maria highlight; instead,

"real" social reproduction occurs amid care-work for the dead, who "act as debt collectors of past injustices" (p.5). Especially in conflict zones, the dead must be "actively nourished to sustain the labor of socially reproducing community," a concept Marlene and Maria strikingly describe as "insurgent immortality." Third, and perhaps most intriguing, is the idea that the dead reveal an alternative vision of power itself—a form of "anti-power" rooted in the imagined community of the living and the dead. Maybe death is the ultimate form of anti-structure (à la Victor Turner), but, as our papers show, it is not anti-politics (à la James Ferguson). Meditating on death, Charles Hirschkind observed in Egypt, is an ethical, moral, and political way of being in the world.

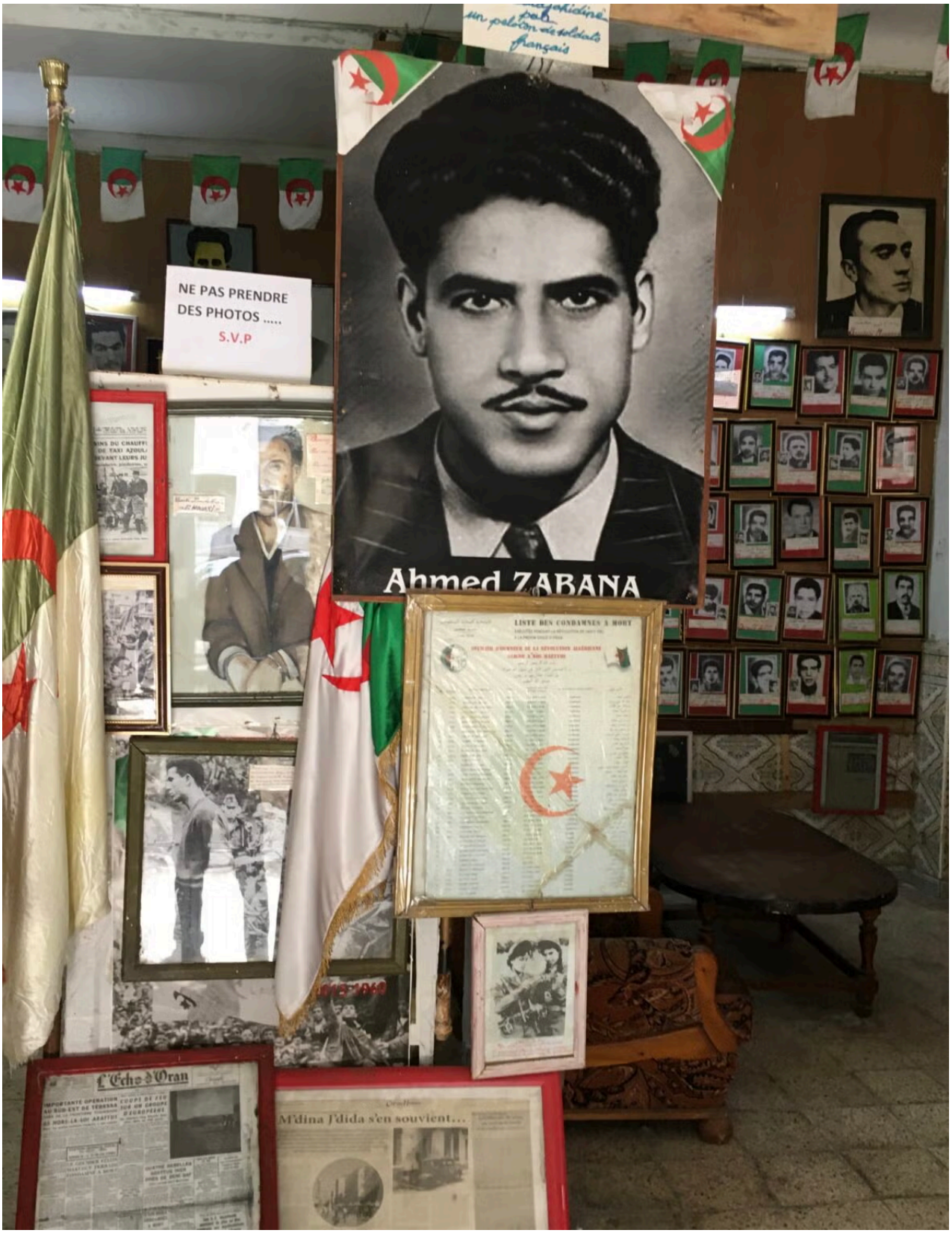
Foroogh, I was struck by the similarities between our articles, especially in our focus on the overlapping spaces of urban life where estrangement and poverty reveal their underlying structures. My article, in many ways, was an attempt to understand the urban spaces co-inhabited by the dead and the most marginalized living, a structure of contemporary life that doubly spatializes what you call "a way of living and dying that is marked by not fully belonging." Your conceptualization of *gharībness* as both a human condition and a material space that transcends the linear boundary between life and death is particularly useful for me. Paradoxically, there is something intimately familiar about the *gharīb*—its form transcends space and time, offering an alternative vision on the supposed normativity of belonging. "The stranger is a stranger of the grave" is a powerful way (though cryptic, at least for me) of grappling with the non-linear, longue durée of estrangement; death can be a place not of rest but of the continuation of one's alienation or restlessness. This is what I conceptualize as "colonialism's mortal remains," another double entendre that refers to the dead from the colonial era, but also the alienation colonialism inflicts on both the living and the dead even after colonialism's death. For example, the French colonizers stripped the Algerian landscape of its pre-colonial names and, in Lazali's words, "the subjects who go through this are also dispossessed of their own death. They wander through a zone of infinite time and space" (48). Such lasting dispossessions have not been fully or even

partially restored in the postcolonial aftermath; they haunt social space to this day.

Therefore, I am not at all surprised that Foroogh's research led her to cemeteries; the social life that emerges around cemeteries in Algeria offers alternative histories of the displaced and marginalized, exactly the "problem" I address in my own article. And I fully agree that this ethnographic vision pushes us toward an adventure in the messiness of social life, as Foroogh argues. In a twin article I published in *Semiotic Review* on Orani cemeteries, I argued that ambivalence is a structure of feeling central to the *gharībness* of things, people, and ideas that don't fit neatly into preconceived categories of understanding. Toward the end of Foroogh's article, we hear Amer's voice, mediated through Foroogh, expressing that "what separates those who belong to the structure of any given society from those excluded from it is whether they can speak out against oppression or must stay silent" (p. 779). In this context, "we are [all] *ghurabā'* here" becomes a powerful critique of social realities increasingly shaped by illiberal authoritarianism and disenfranchisement, including in the US. Once again, I am reminded why the whole world should pay attention to the political and social theories emerging from the MENA region.

Indeed, the importance of theorizing revolution, violence, and afterlives in MENA is laid bare in Marlene and Maria's powerful article. Their comparative approach reveals the interconnected struggles and "shared genealogies of anti-colonial resistance" (p. 4) across unfolding genocides and anti-colonial movements in the region. Despite attempts by states to kill revolutions and resistance through violence, the dead instead keep hope alive amid destruction. I am moved by the idea that the dead engage in claims for "counter-sovereignty"—where sovereignty becomes necropolitical, whether as a monopoly on violence (à la Max Weber) or the power to decide over life and death (à la Achille Mbembe). The dead here are border and boundary-crossers, actors and actants (though ambiguous ones) who resist biopolitical regimes, challenging imperial territorial claims. They are restless, a source of potency that states cannot kill. I am also moved (and profoundly disturbed) by the idea

that the dead circulate more freely than the living in this world. Marlene and Maria, your social reproductive framework is especially powerful here. It shifts attention away from the masculinist mythology of martyrdom toward a form of martyrdom that fosters communitas through relational economies of debt and reciprocity, opening up space for the dead and the living to co-exist. Your paper brilliantly illustrates the sociological agency of the dead, something I have long been trying to theorize.



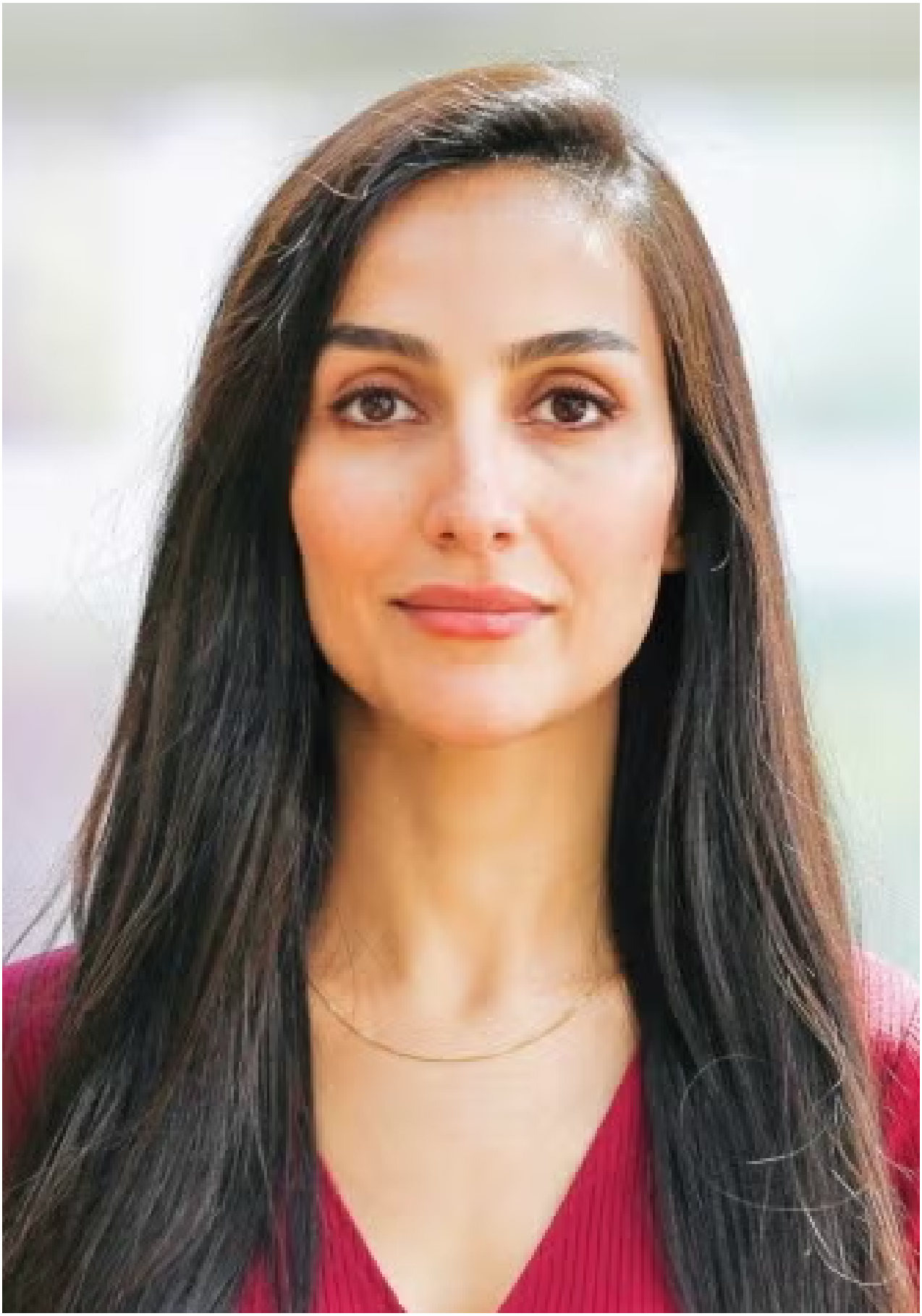
Exhibition Hall of the Photos of the Martyrs of the Revolution in central Oran, Algeria. Photo by author.

Finally, Lucie, your article resonates strongly with the power of martyrs' images that I explore in my book and elsewhere, adding another dimension to the agency of the dead. This is because photographs are no mere representation of "reality," but are material actants in and of themselves, pulling people and other objects into their force-field (à la Christopher Pinney). As you demonstrate so vividly, martyrs' images are central to the "revolutionary process." At the recent MESA annual conference in Washington DC, I was struck by scholars like Mona El-Ghobashy who argued that revolution, one of the most contested categories of political thought, must be conceptualized from the place of the Middle East and North Africa. These papers indeed show why this is so. Lucie, your paper testifies to why revolutions should not be judged from the hindsight of "outcomes;" instead, it is often revolutionary structures of feeling that are potent and enduring. Martyrs' images capture and transmit these sentiments beyond mere representation; their revolutionary temporalities become modalities of political action, as you convincingly show. The transduction of the image, from photograph to graffiti stencil to hand-drawn sketch, reveals how the political and emotional work of photos is centrally related to how they are touched, manipulated, and brought into material contact with bodies and places (à la Elizabeth Edwards). This is their power beyond the "reality" they are said to represent. They are witnesses, a fact made clear by the closely connected words martyr (*shahīd*) and witness (*shāhid*), where martyr means the "ultimate witness." Witnessing as a mode of political and social action foregrounds the power of listening, observing, and human modes of being that are sometimes seen as "passive" but actually form the basis of moral life. Perhaps this is one way, Lucie, that the "dead commemorate the living".

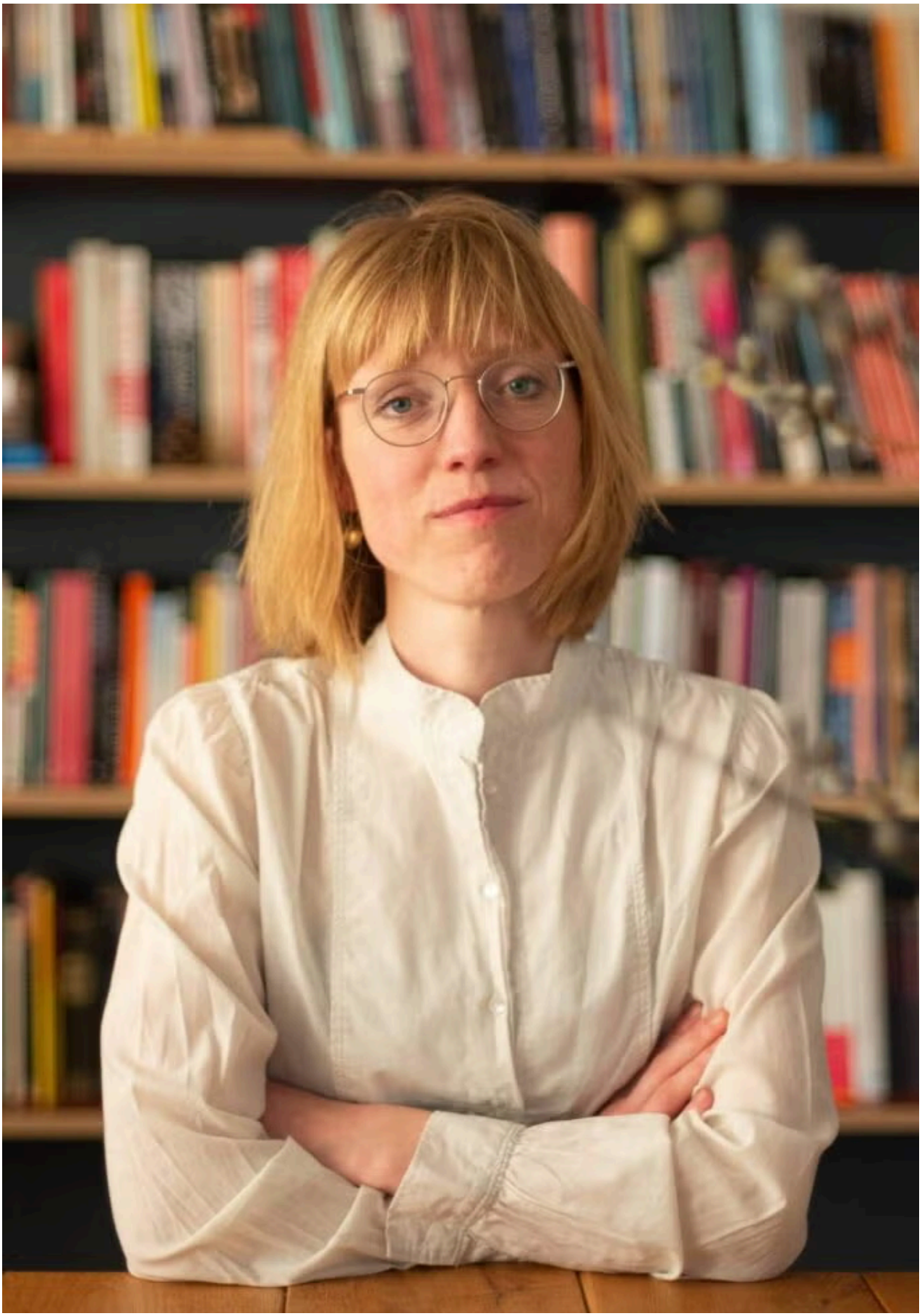
Finally, each of our papers engages with a complex temporality of mourning—mourning for all the lives lost, all the futures past not realized, and for our world at a time when climate catastrophe, genocide, and illiberal governmentality make the future hard to imagine. Thank you all for embarking on this journey with me, in this society of the *ghurabā'*.

Warmly,

Stephanie

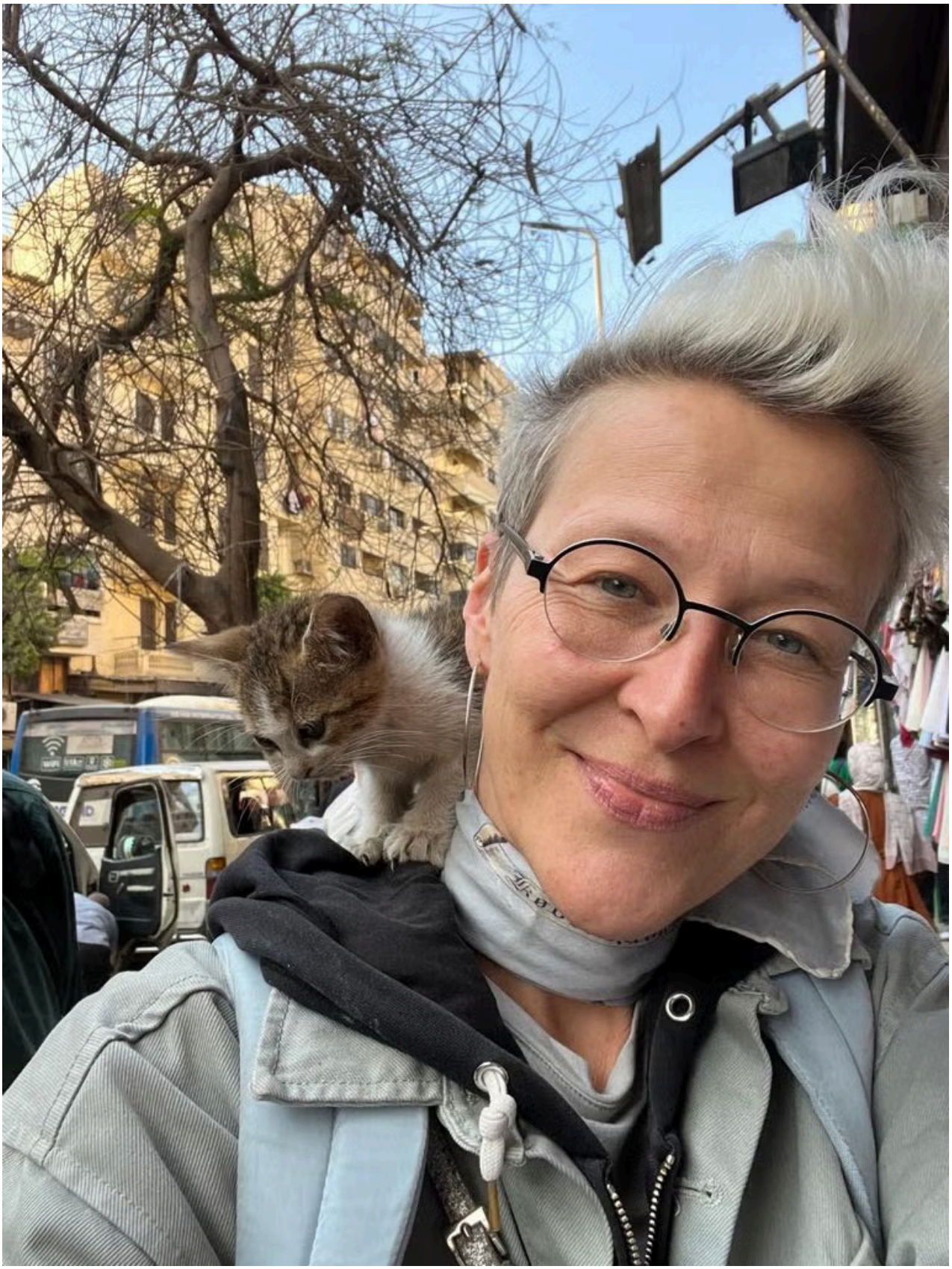


Foroogh Farhang is a cultural anthropologist and Middle East scholar. She is Assistant Professor of Middle East and North African Studies at Soka University of America. Her research explores the shifting governance of borders and bodies amid ongoing and intensifying migration flows. Using a multi-method approach, she combines long-term ethnographic fieldwork with in-depth interviews, media and document analysis, and archival research. Her current book project draws on eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork with Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians in northern and eastern Lebanon. It examines how networks of people self-organize to navigate the constraints of national and transnational systems of care, and in so doing forge new ways of living, dying, and building community.



Marlene Schäfers is Associate Professor in the Department of Cultural Anthropology at Utrecht University. Working with Kurdish communities in Turkey and Europe, her research focuses on voice, memory, and the politics of death and the afterlife. Her first monograph, *Voices that Matter: Kurdish Women at the Limits of Representation in Contemporary Turkey* (University of Chicago Press, 2022) received the 2024 Book Prize of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association. Schäfers is editor of the *Kurdish Studies Journal* and, together with the Orient-Institut Istanbul, is involved in the digital archiving of Kurdish women singers' repertoires.

Maria Kastrinou is a social anthropologist working at the crossroads of religion, politics, and resistance. She is senior lecturer in Social Anthropology at Brunel University of London, UK. Her fieldwork in Syria, Greece, Lebanon, and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights explores sect, statelessness, kinship, death in war, occupation, and refuge. Her book *Power, Sect and State in Syria* (I.B. Tauris, 2016) is the first ethnography of Syria's Druze. She leads "Lives across Divides," a Druze Heritage Foundation–funded project tracing stories of connection and loss from the occupied Golan Heights. Bridging anthropology and performance, she co-founded the Hotspot Collective and co-created *The Price of Water*—a political play on borders, capitalism, and the cost of survival.



Lucie Ryzova is a social and cultural historian of modern Egypt, with particular interest in popular culture, vernacular modernity, and the history of photography. She is the author of numerous articles and book chapters. Her monograph, *Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt < https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-age-of-the-efendiyya-9780198824398?cc=us&lang=en&>* (Oxford, 2014), won the 2015 Royal Historical Society Gladstone Prize and the 2017 Philip Leverhulme Prize in History. Between 2014 and 2025 Ryzova taught at the University of Birmingham, UK. She is currently Research Fellow at the Czech Academy of Sciences.

Stephanie V. Love earned a Ph.D. in linguistic and cultural anthropology from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) in 2022. Before joining the University of Pittsburgh's Department of Anthropology as an Assistant Professor in 2023, she held a postdoctoral fellowship at the Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis and participated in the interdisciplinary seminar "Repairing the Past." Her work has appeared in numerous journals, including *American Ethnologist*, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *City & Society*, and *Semiotic Review*. Love's first book, *Streets of a Million Martyrs: Poetics and Politics in Urban Algeria*, is under contract with the University of Chicago Press.

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