Rooftop recipes for relating: Ecologies of humans, animals, and life

Noha Fikry

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Rooftop Recipes for Relating: 
Ecologies of Humans, Animals, and Life

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Sociology, Egyptology, Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Master of Arts in Sociology-Anthropology

By Noha Ezz El-Din Fikry Ismail

Under the supervision of Dr. Munira Khayyat
July 2018
To Mama, Gedo, and their irreplaceable genealogy.

To Baba, for his investment in me, his support, and his discipline flowing through my veins.

Please, give footnotes a chance.

“He is not…simply a modest data-collecting ‘observer’. Essentially he is engaged in saving his own soul, by a curious and ambitious act of intellectual catharsis”

-Susan Sontag on Claude Lévi-Strauss (quoted in Bell, 2009, p.52-53)
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This thesis might (and only might) appear as a composed body carried in unison, somehow implying an equally composed body of flesh (namely its author) who brought it to being. In reality, however, this thesis was written in patches and shreds, with a backstage “kitchen” of threads and inconsistent rushes and surges of blood and adrenaline. It was brought to being sideways, backwards, and only rarely forwards. The chapters were not written in the same order you are about to experience, and have likewise witnessed several faces, shades, and shapes of the author. Recipes for Relating include those recipes of relating to writing in general and to this thesis in particular, and I write this and hereby claim with full awareness and decided agency to confidently and maternally let go of this work as it grows to a wider audience across an unknown stretching temporality, hope that it gives the readers lightness, comfort, and faith in times of tragedy, uncertainty, and utter confusion. The first of these recipes for relating lays bare and wide open some of the ingredients of its very own author, as beautifully encountered in real life and hopefully poetically and anthropologically brought to paper.

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To each and every reader who picks this thesis up for any reason in the world, this is for you. May reading this bring you solace, a light company, and a cheerful set of rooftop wonders to live by.
Figure 1: A Trees Affair, Safaa’s rooftop, photograph taken by the author
I. Introduction

On yet another sunny afternoon on the rooftop, with Nahed sipping her coffee, she asked me if she ever shared her story of how she got married to Farid while I shook my head in excitement. She laughed and the story began, taking us back to over 50 years ago yet with an unchanged story setting. On the same rooftop stood Farid’s mother and his maternal aunt, feeding their animals while looking through the other neighboring rooftops in anticipation. On a somewhat nearby rooftop stood 16-year old Nahed, also feeding her rooftop animals as per her mother’s orders. Too embarrassed to look anywhere but at her goats and chickens, Nahed began hearing someone calling from afar. A few minutes later she realized it is her neighbors, now fast-forwarded to be her in-laws, trying to speak with her. She was scared and so shy and rushed down out of the rooftop. Nahed’s mom asked her to go up again, resume her rooftop duty, and respond to the neighbors’ questions without any fear. Nahed rushed up again and continued feeding the chickens when Farid’s mother again tried to speak to her. Both women tried to make friends with Nahed, asking her for how long she has been taking care of the rooftop, what kind of food she uses for the chickens and goats, and some technical questions about how frequently eggs hatch and goats deliver their kids. Aware of all the technicalities, subtleties, and intricacies of their rooftop, Nahed answered all the questions very eloquently and confidently.

A few days later Nahed discovered that this initiated conversation was part of a rather systematic pattern of hunting for a wife to Farid. Both women go up every day and spend some time looking around for young unmarried neighbors who work on their rooftops. The questions asked were intended to know if the girl is responsible, sufficiently mature, and ready to take up a duty as difficult and critical as that of a lively rooftop. After successfully “passing” the test and answering all their questions, Nahed was the chosen bride for Farid. In a few weeks the family proposed and within a few months Nahed got married to Farid and moved to his household, taking care of his rooftop accordingly. More than half a century later Nahed stood there, sipping her coffee, still feeding her goats and chickens, wondering at a looming horizon while looking at me, her aging self, and her fighting granddaughters. She tells me how precious this rooftop is, and it all suddenly falls into place, as more personal, social, and continual than ever.

Fieldnotes, July 29th, 2017.

Herein lies a vastness that you can neither fully grasp nor entirely comprehend. A rooftop, plenty of animals, goats shouting, chickens eating, rabbits running, pigeons flying, and eyes of all kinds staring. And you are standing there, with senses and anthropological sensibilities feeling too incompetent to document everything. A literal opening on top of
buildings and a metaphorical opening to an exposed universe of clouds, skies, chains, and connections lies a set of unique rooftops with which this thesis tries to think about relations, connections, continuities, ecologies, environments, and life. Pulling together or rather providing a crossroad between “home” and “outside”, ground and sky, closure and exposure, ceiling and roofing, rooftops also provide a fertile soil for grappling with theoretical debates on humans, nonhuman animals, and their collaborative meaning-making processes.

With rooftops architectural and literal in-between position comes an intellectual desire, classically and wholeheartedly anthropological, to begin with a tension, a divide, or an opposition of some kind. As lived, witnessed, and practiced in Egypt, rooftops are pulsating nodes of multispecies relations. On rooftops stay humans – perhaps sporadically in most cases – yet also an impeccable variety of nonhuman animals including goats, chickens, turkeys, rabbits, pigeons, and sheep. These are mainly raised from their birth all through their growth and maturity, with a sustained intimacy and long-term relation, to be later usually slaughtered and eaten for sustenance. Hence, I take my point of entrance to be the human-animal tension, through the eyes and multilayered ethnographic experiences of my interlocutors with their rooftops, and push this to see what kinds of debates, conversations, lived realities, and meaning-making projects of survival it allows and in fact forces in a critical and challenging moment of 21st century Egypt (Lyons, 2016, 76). I follow these multispecies relations to explore life further, death clearer, home muddier, and collaborations murkier. With the growth/maturation of this research my questions gradually became: how does life proliferate¹ and continue on rooftops along multispecies lines? Pushed even a bit

¹ Throughout this thesis, I use the word proliferate remarkably often. As my dearest mentor Reem Saad sharply pointed out to me, I use this word to sometimes denote a temporal multiplicity while at others I use it to denote a spatial one. Etymologically, proliferate originates from the French adjective prolifère coming from the Latin noun proles, which means offspring and the form -fer which means bearing. Sharing roots with proletarian and aquifer (an amusingly ironic etymological combination), proliferate thus came to mean growth or an increase in number (proliferate, 2018). At first sight then, we might argue that an increase in offspring is a multiplied temporality (in that offspring by extension mean a temporal stretch of the genealogy and the
further, I ask what recipes of relating, entanglements, and intimacies with surrounding environments – of humans, animals, and beyond – do these multispecies worlds make?

The theoretical and intellectual beginning of this project, as expectedly, is anthropology. In its very basic roots stands *Anthropos*, the study of “man”, as we were brought up to learn, but what happens if we push this a bit further to explore how this man is entangled in worlds – or webs of significance à la Clifford Geertz – that extend beyond species lines. What if we propose and poke into an anthropology concerned with life in all its shapes and forms, not just man’s (Dave, 2014, p.451-452)? Exploring our intellectual roots a bit further however, both etymologically and disciplinarily, offers some more concerted guidance. Culture, here functioning as our ancestral concept and fundamental bedrock of social/cultural anthropology, originates from the Latin root *colo*, originally used to describe the practices of cultivating, tending, tilling the land, keeping and breeding of animals, and looking after one’s livelihood (Jackson, 2013, p.52). That said, therefore, it might really be the case that cultural anthropology is not necessarily restricted to “man” but rather to following the various worlds and relations through which “man” survives.

Given our limitation as humans in being human, however, we can only look through fellow humans and their extending proliferating relations to other worlds, other beings, and other species. In and through poking into relations of various modalities, anthropology as Viveiros de Castro guides becomes not about restricting our worlds to humans with the sole task of explaining the mechanics of these worlds but in fact about multiplying our worlds to

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bloodline), yet with a closer look it is in fact the case that a multiplying offspring denote both a temporal but also a spatial extension since offspring literally take up space. Myriad other layers can potentially be added here. For example, offspring also denote a particular carnal, physical, and corporeal relation which beautifully goes in line with multispecies intimacies. With this unique and playful etymology in mind, I hereafter consciously use proliferate to operate on both its spatial and temporal levels of meaning (ever more blurring the lines between both). A proliferation (of life or otherwise) is here about an extended temporality but also a widening spatiality of taking up more space, stretching one’s skin perhaps through eating, or relating across a wider space of rooftops.
include all those that we relate to and live with (de Castro, 2014, p.196; emphasis added).

With *Anthropos*, culture, and relations on top of all, I hence begin my journey of attending to multispecies rooftops as they proliferate, unfold, and shape the worlds of their inhabitants.

**Where do (intellectual) Babies Come From? A Conceptual Note**

“I owe myself to mankind, just as much as to knowledge. History, politics, the social and economic universe, the physical world, even the sky – all surround me in concentric circles, and I can only escape from those circles in thought if I concede to each of them some part of my being. Like the pebble which marks the surface of the wave with circles as it passes through it, I must throw myself into the water if I am to plumb the depth”

*Claude Lévi-Strauss* (quoted in Khan, 2014, p.247)

In its most zygotic phases, this thesis stood as a conceptual fascination with the worlds of animals and interspecies intimacies. Gradually, I began regarding theory and the conceptual frameworks contouring my work as recipes, ones that are not any more important than my fieldwork encounters and my interlocutors’ theorizations on their own lives as woven through their everyday experiences and entanglements on rooftops. As the title also alludes and makes clear, I take recipes as a proliferous analogy, metaphor, and way of presenting what this thesis tries to communicate vis-à-vis multispecies worlds of relating, and how these modes of relating guide us into different ways of living, growing, dying, and surviving. Quite serendipitously, the profound political philosopher Michael Oakeshott regarded theories like recipes; in his own words, “a theory…is like a recipe…it is not an independently generated beginning from which cooking can spring; it is nothing more than an abstract of somebody’s knowledge of how to cook; it is the stepchild, not the parent of the activity” (quoted in Jackson, 2013, p.25). As an abstraction, a conceptual roadmap, an intellectual stimulation, or an insufficient stepchild thirsty for some ethnographic vigor and rigor here stands theory, excitedly deserving a brief intellectual genealogy of its formation.

My concern here in this brief section is how have we come here, as anthropologists with our
current research interests, and where does anthropology now stand in its genealogical formation more broadly?

The interest in relations with broader environments, variously labelled as “nature”, “environment”, or “ecology” stretches back to the nineteenth century version of cultural ecology which originated mainly as a North American speciality through the synthesis of materialism evolutionism and more specifically the work of Leslie White, Julie Steward, and Gordon Childe, with further genealogical roots taking us back in time as far as Lewis Henry Morgan and E. B. Tylor’s social evolutionism (Ortner, 1984, p.132). Quite later, specifically in the sixties, developed a new brand of cultural ecology mainly through the work of Marvin Harris and Marshall Sahlins who both pushed cultural ecology away from its evolutionist roots and more towards a rigorous interest in social relationships extending to surrounding environments (Ortner, 1984, p.133). With its increased appeal in the sixties, however, also came an astounding critique to cultural ecology labelling it as “sterile scientism, counting calories and measuring rainfall, and willfully ignoring the one truth that anthropology has presumably established by that time: that culture mediates all human behavior” (Ortner, 1984, p.134). This expectedly and gradually pushed cultural ecology out of anthropological theory’s hall of fame.

Fast-forwarding decades later, Viveiros de Castro and Marcio Goldman have recently labelled our current age in anthropology\(^2\) “post-social” or “post-cultural” anthropology, mainly as a result of the endless showering critiques on both society and culture as the two basic pivots of the anthropological fortress (de Castro and Goldman, 2012, p.428). As budding anthropologists in this current post-social age, we are expected to work on certain topics, with certain cited theorists, certain mentioned scholarly works, and intricately and

\(^2\) More specifically, this current age refers to the last twenty or thirty years.
politically-chosen areas of interest – what Appadurai calls “theoretical metonyms” or “gatekeeping concepts”\(^3\) (cited in Abu-Lughod, 1989, p.279). Building on this even further, Sherry Ortner’s freshly blossoming remarkable piece “Dark anthropology and its others: Theory since the eighties” provides a more detailed roadmap for where anthropology currently stands (2016). She takes the point of departure of her analysis to be the 1980s and the dominance of neoliberalism, which brought to fore questions of power and inequality as the most important themes in anthropology classes across various universities around the globe. This translated into an almost sudden fascination with/fixation on or re-discovery of Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, and Max Weber as canons of social theory after a history of their derision\(^4\), along with an outpouring wealth of researches and studies exploring colonialism, neoliberalism, patriarchy, and racial inequality.

Ortner names this wave of change “dark anthropology”, a disciplinary tectonic shift which forced a restructuring of anthropology as mainly derived by a body of theory that “asks us to see the world almost entirely in terms of power, exploitation, and chronic pervasive inequality”, with an ever increasing demand on “misery porn” and a broader interest in tracing back all these questions of power to colonialism especially when it comes to “the Third World”\(^5\) (Ortner, 2016, p.50). Ortner further cites Joel Robbins who reflected on a response to the looming disciplinary darkness as an “anthropology of the good” in which the

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\(^3\) Appadurai explains that these gatekeeping concepts “seem to limit anthropological theorizing about the place in question, and...define the quintessential and dominant questions of interest in the region” (cited in Abu-Lughod, 1989, p.279). It is surely a tale as old as time than disciplines discipline, yet this is here specifically about the rather unspoken rules of the game of anthropological knowledge production; with “ways of speaking, ways of writing, ways of thinking, ways of researching, ways of doing fieldwork that are no longer possible [or fashionable]” (de Castro and Goldman, 2012, p.424).

\(^4\) According to Ortner, referring back to Anthony Gidden’s classic *Capitalism and modern social theory*, both Karl Marx and Michel Foucault (especially in English-language anthropology in the 1970s) were deliberately left out of the canon across the two sides of the Atlantic (2016, p.50).

\(^5\) This translates more closely in what topics are deemed “politically sexy” to work on in Egypt, as a “national intellectual milieu” to use Abu-Lughod’s phrasing (1989, p.280). At this current moment, there seems to be an unspoken expectation to research anything political, as still affected and shaped by the aftermaths of 2011’s uprisings.
suffering subject ceases to be the elephant in our anthropology room. Instead, themes like value, morality, empathy, love, care, hope, and time began to assume a competitive dominance (Ortner, 2016, p.60).

Standing with our feet half-muddied and pants too wet, therefore, we can now only follow de Castro and Goldman’s invitation to begin with where we are, work with the concepts we currently have and move from there to again multiply our worlds not just of ethnographic weight but equally of theoretical innovation, rigor, and freshness (2012, p.432). All the previous discussions then somehow situate my research within a broad and wide permeable umbrella of “an anthropology of the good”, affected by anthropology’s current arguably mid-life crisis, pushing for a closer grounding in existing literature to follow.

The More-than-human Investigator, its Ethnographer, and the Ecologist: A Literature Review

In terms of theory and scholarly literature, since this rooftop ecologies arena is largely an uncharted and undertheorized territory, I have attempted every effort to weave, patch, and montage different scholarly works, theoretical and conceptual frames, and theorists’ oeuvres in order to engage with my ethnographic material as justly and rigorously as possible. Given also the specificities of Egypt’s legal, social, cultural, and political context when it comes to rooftops vis-à-vis issues of land, ownership, and inheritance, very little has significantly been written and published on interspecies relations in my part of the world. Accordingly, most of the literature at hand is relatively recent, and this might be a weakness or a limitation since the efforts of critiquing, “testing”, and experimenting with these fresh theoretical terrains are still few and highly improvisatory. Yet this can also be regarded as an opening into a potentializing yet in-formation horizon, with this piece of work hopefully further pushing the boundaries of ecological anthropology, multispecies worlds, rooftop lives, and most importantly the anthropology of the Middle East.
In the first part of this review I briefly explore what Viveiros de Castro calls “the animal turn” in the social sciences, with a particular emphasis on some manifestations of this turn, namely relational epistemology, indigenous human-animal relations, posthumanist animal studies, and multispecies ethnography. I then explore ecological anthropology as yet another very foundational body of theory that has helped push and fine-tune what this thesis tries to discuss through its ethnographic content.

The Animal Turn

“Man, Clifford Geertz has declared, ‘is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.’ One is led to suppose that nonhuman animals are not so suspended. Spiders spin webs, and do indeed suspend themselves in them, but their webs are tangible objects – they catch flies, not thoughts” (Ingold, 2000, p.173)

In a discussion on the foundational categories of the social sciences, Bruno Latour argued that there exists two divides through which anthropology operates: the Internal Great Divide between nature and culture and the External Great Divide between us and them (quoted in Blaser, 2013, p.18). With an also age-old interest in tensions and contradictions, anthropology gradually adopted a turn to the nonhuman animal, as that which can be contrasted with the human, and which we can anthropologically explore as yet another “other” of our image. This can be seen as an added response to the previously discussed neoliberalism-induced fixation on “misery porn” and the suffering subject, but also and more broadly “humanism” and the centrality that humans have assumed in all our theoretical discussions almost worshipping the secular, agential modern human subject freed from shackles of tradition, religion, and authority. In short, the animal turn was “a turning away from the human in the sense of a turning towards the animal to see whether we can find in its animality – in our shared animality with other animal species – a better way of being human,

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6 Yet again, this is another exhibit of modernity narrated as a restriction of concepts, here through a restriction of the human to the secular, middle-class, and fully-abled male (Green, 2013, p.31).
or better, a way of getting away from the human in search of a better way to be, and stay, alive” (Green, 2013, p.30-31). Yet as humans, how can we gain access to these nonhuman animal worlds, in a manner that is more genuine and less alienated from the long-critiqued “natural sciences” and their distancing methodologies and researches?

One potential answer was to argue that all boundaries are fuzzy, constructed, and hence conquerable. Both human and nonhuman animals then unfolded as permeably different and similar, rather than strictly oppositional. This gave way to an extended analytical reach to engagements with the natural sciences and their modes of research along with their rigorous interest in nonhuman others. As this animal turn began growing and maturing, its trails expectedly diverted in different – though not necessarily contrasting – paths. In her profound piece on this suggested animal turn, Danielle DiNovelli-Lang suggests two of these disciplinary tracks to be indigenous human-animal relations and posthumanist animal studies, which will be discussed in the following sections (2013, p.150). What needs to be recalled here, however, is an anthropological timeless interest in the savage/other. Can we then hesitantly suggest that the animal turn is yet another “discovery” of a new anthropological savage that we need to explore, anthropologize, exoticize, save, deem as “less human”, or another postcolonial subaltern that we should at best ascend to our humanity (Chagani, 2016)? This stays a conceptual opening, limitation, or assumption that needs to be kept in mind throughout the following sections. One way of poking into this is through keeping in

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7 In its very origins, the animal turn as reflected in various disciplines including geography and cultural studies is indebted to animal welfare activism for laying the most basic foundations of animals as “subjects with rights” rather than mere surroundings (Ogden, Hall, and Tanita, 2013, p.8)
8 Some examples of these interdisciplinary efforts with biological or botanist research include anthropological engagements with xenotransplantation (Jackson, 2013, p.199), cats and dogs shelters and vets (Alger and Alger, 2011), ethnoprimatology (Fuentes, 2010), impressions of cup corals (Hayward, 2010), and zoonotic ethnography (Singer, 2014).
9 As Haraway puts it, “we polish an animal mirror to look for ourselves” (quoted in Mullen, 1999, p.211)
mind the itching question of what makes a human, especially within this recent literature on nonhuman animals.⁠¹⁰⁠.

To scale these curiosities correctly, though, as a social and cultural anthropologist under training what drives me is not a hunt of what these concepts like human and animal actually mean or the philosophical variations or interpretations that have been debated and discussed. Rather, what first and foremost drives me are the social ways through which these concepts travel, are used, and variously deployed through an everyday engagement with people and nonhuman fellow animals. It is the processes of meaning-making through which these concepts become socially and culturally real and alive that are most central to anthropology. Yet for this to take place, one has to first fulfill the disciplinary genealogical demands of coming to terms with the conceptual makeup of this topic at hand. Learning the rules by heart is always the first key to improvisation, or ethnographic play.

I. Relational Epistemology & Indigenous Human-Animal Relations

In exploring existing literature on human nonhuman animal relations, the first body of work that I have encountered has its origins stretching back to decades older than the realized and acknowledged animal turn. This dealt more with multispecies relationality on a philosophical and conceptual level, focusing on the relation but more so on how this can be conceptualized. Philippe Descola is arguably one of the first anthropologists who rigorously and diligently worked on bringing these questions to an ontological level through which people understand and live their worlds. In his incomparable Between Nature and Culture, Descola designates four ontological states that can potentially help us decode the human nonhuman animal relation: naturalism, animism, analogism, and totemism (2013). For Descola, these are ontologies through which humans and nonhumans are made and live their

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⁠¹⁰⁠Plenty of authors attempted to poke into answering this pressing question. For a quick guide, see De Castro, 2014; Ingold, 1988; Ingold, 1994; Ingold, 2000.
worlds yet were not yet seriously regarded as epistemologies or sources of knowledge and organizing the world. For example, in her piece titled “Animism Revisited”, Nurit Bird-David compares between what she calls modernist epistemologies with Indian Nayaka: “If ‘cutting trees into parts’ epitomizes the modernist epistemology, ‘talking with trees’, I argue, epitomizes Nayaka animistic epistemology. ‘Talking’ is a shorthand for a two-way responsive relatedness with a tree....To talk with a tree – rather than cut it down – is to perceive what it does as one acts towards it, being aware concurrently of changes in oneself and the tree.” (Bird-David, 1999, p.S77). This shift from relational ontologies to epistemologies was a generative attempt to push ways of being to ways of seeing and organizing the world (Bird-David, 1999, S69).

In her thorough analysis of the animal turn, DiNovelli-Lang coined one of the tracks that the turn has taken to be indigenous human-animal relations, most uniquely characterized by an ethnographic emphasis on “indigenous” populations, knowledges, and ways of living (2013, p.150). Some examples of this indigenous human-animal relations include literature on cannibalism and hunting. Concerning the former, Viveiros de Castro sheds light on European anthropology’s fascination with the indigenous ways of regarding cannibalism – also known as anthropophagy, surreally etymologically close to anthropology – as a process of taking life in through eating, and how this is further implicated in strengthening or cutting social ties, resolving factions, or seeking revenge (De Castro, 2014, p.143). As for hunting, quite similarly, plenty has been written and published on theorizing the multilayered multispecies relationship involving the hunter and the nonhuman hunted animal, one that

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11 While the word indigenous might imply a specific frowned upon politics of research with regard to othering and interlocution, we might here still need to use the term with some care and critique to further engage with this wealth of material under indigeneity studies. For the time being, we can regard indigeneity as just an anthropological jargon that refers to (environmental/ecological) modes of living and understanding the world gathered through ethnographic experiences by way of the eyes and lives of our interlocutors, regardless of “how far” or where they live.
extends beyond the apparent superiority of the hunter over the hunted to include for example “the bestowal of favor by animals” or animals offering themselves to be hunted (Kohn, 2013; Ingold, 2000, p.14).

What indigenous human-animal relations offer is a genuine anthropological curiosity coupled with a rigorous ethnographic element that does not claim to do any more than an exploration of interspecies relations and how these extend as parts of the social webs through which life is spun. We witness this very evidently through the work of the brilliant anthropologist Naisargi Dave who begins with herself, looking at the “limitations of [her] worldview” when compared to that of her Indian interlocutors and how their interspecies moral biographies inspire various modalities of political and social engagements (2014, p.439). She then takes the various acts of witnessing to narrate and theorize interspecies biographies stained through moments of love, hatred, self-hatred, confusion, and vulnerability bound to take place when a human and a nonhuman animal come together in a workable context. In a rather heart-wrenching eloquence, she explains:

“I want to think about what this means – what it means to kneel bareheaded in the heat of the midday sun, pulling maggots deep from the ass of an unknown animal one by one, naked hands on its armadillo skin, whistling a tune to soothe her trembling body. And then, when you let her go, and she walks headlong into her own death, you shrug and say, ‘she’s old’. This is immanent ethics. This is love without a future, love that has no interest in continuities between man and man, man and animal, man and woman, something and everything. This is love that does not endure – what is it to endure when there is no future – but simply is, the radical newness of being this and becoming nothing and therefore everything... a living death that enables life because of the presence of death in its every instant” (2017, p.45).

2. Posthumanist Animal Studies & Multispecies Ethnography

As the title implies, the other path that the animal turn has sought leaned more philosophically towards posthumanism, with an arguably fetishistic interest in the animal. While the philosophical roots of this body of literature is most concerned with de-centering the human from our researches, problematizing the abstracted Enlightenment Man of our
literatures, and worlds, the anthropological marriage that took place with this in mind turned out as largely methodologically weak, too philosophical, or sometimes too utopic (Chagani, 2016, p.626). This is primarily because, methodologically and pragmatically, as I previously mentioned, how can we move beyond humans if we can never cease to be humans ourselves?

According to DiNovelli-Lang, “the whole thrill of contemporary posthumanist theory resides in the wild hope that we might subsist in our animal others, out of reach of the biopolitical determinations of man and his attendant liberal apparatuses” (2013, p.151). While posthumanist literature does indeed offer a hopeful fresh breeze in the midst of an excessively human-centered, authority-driven world of late capitalism, it still assumes an “outside” or a pristine world where the human is not as powerful and the nonhuman animal is still wildly reigning. More importantly and problematically, what this quite consequently suggests is an opposition between on one hand the social world of “work”, capitalism, modernity and its accompanying apparatuses, and alienation and a utopic – asocial? – world of play, myths, and nonhuman animals agency on the other. Ingold eloquently calls this “eco-centrism” as “that attitude which credits the world of nature…with an intrinsic value quite independently of the purposes and activities, even of the presence, of human beings” (2000, p.218). What I am more interested in, as a social and cultural anthropologist under training, is rather how both of these worlds continually and inevitably converse.

When it comes to taking these questions to the ground of research, “from contemplation to experimentation”, a variety of reactions, consequences, and research accounts came to life (Jackson, 2013, p.261). In her astounding work, for example, the very heartwarmingly genuine and profound Donna Haraway exposes different layers, shapes, and forms that multispecies relations and intimacies can hold for us to explore. Written entirely on her intimacy with her dog, *The Companion Species Manifesto* is a beautiful zoomed in account of the heart-warming and central multispecies worlds. As she briefly puts it, “in sum,
‘companion species’ is about a fourpart composition, in which co-constitution, finitude, impurity, historicity, and complexity are what is. *The Companion Species Manifesto* is, thus, about the implosion of nature and culture in the relentlessly historically specific, joint lives of dogs and people, who are bounded in significant otherness” (2003, p.16). Slightly different from an ethnography in the strictest sense of the term, this account is more of a multispecies biography/personal memoir than an interlocution-based monograph. In her latest book, however, Haraway worked so much more concertedly on grounding her theorizations in ethnographic worlds, including multispecies projects of pigeons, insects, dogs, and humans for example, to better weave a text that is less autobiographical than potentially ethnographic (2016). That said, however, Haraway was largely absent as a researcher taking part in the various multispecies initiatives she points to. She continues to play the role of the weaver, the storyteller, or the multispecies philosopher, especially given her eloquence in living and engaging with nonhuman animals by virtue of her own personal life living with plenty of these. On the whole, then, Haraway’s work will always be a fresh breath of earthly concepts, genuinely written multispecies worlds, and a very personal engagement with lively worlds around us, yet will always leave us wondering how these multispecies worlds might be different in our part of the world, if at all.

In their review on multispecies ethnography, as a research modality through which the animal turn was brought to life, Ogden, Hall, and Tanita define it as “ethnographic research and writing that is attuned to life’s emergence within a shifting assemblage of agentive beings…[one that] writes the human as a kind of corporeality that comes into being relative to multispecies assemblages, rather than as a biocultural given” (2013, p.6). As a methodological endeavor, its origins reach back to Morgan’s 19th century multispecies ethnology as bringing together anthropology and natural history (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010, p.549). Quite significantly later, however, multispecies ethnography developed as an
interdisciplinary quest resulting from conversations among environmental studies, science and technology studies (STS), and animal studies (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010, p.566). Yet the main and first question that begs for some attention here is how both “multispecies” and “ethnography” can be combined? At its core, ethnography is most briefly “the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one’s own experience in the world of these others” (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 2011, p.10). That said, then, to what extent can we as humans “represent” worlds of chickens, horses, cows, or goats?

In most instances, multispecies ethnography is arguably used as just a label or brand to denote an interest in nonhuman worlds of collaborations, yet without fulfilling the due responsibility of the ethnography part of multispecies ethnography. Methodologically, most of these accounts self-labelled as multispecies ethnography fall short of realizing the intensities and rigors of living and doing ethnography. Watson argues in his profound review of animal anthropology that this multispecies brand, fashion, turn, or label has proved to be mostly either not entirely about nonhuman animals – because it is quite impossible to do so, at least ethnographically – or not actually designed to radically change status hierarchies, especially given the unchangeable privileged human academic authors subject-position that we are doomed to occupy (2016, p.161). He argues that most of these accounts outweigh “indulge[nt] speculation” over “empirical footing”, cornering nonhuman animals as mere “literary vehicles for multispecies ethnographers to help mythologize matters of post-industrial concern” (2016, p.169).

To end this section on a less melancholic note, however, it must still be mentioned that with all these critiques in mind, multispecies ethnography – very loosely defined – has

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12 For some examples of multispecies ethnography, see Schneider, 2013; Lowe, 2010; Porter 2013.
13 Also put differently and more generally, “the problem is that these debates about the so-called ‘ontological turn’ are pursued entirely in Western vocabulary and inferences, at a level of abstraction that rarely deals with ethnographic material in its own language games that would provide the grounds to know how and where the Western words lead astray” (Fischer, 2014, p.348)
brought to our libraries plenty of multiplied worlds to work with, various ideas to think about, and a wealth of material to think through in moving to our own ethnographic experimentations. Not all that has been published under multispecies ethnography is ethnographically thin, though, since there are very few exceptions that did provide excellent models to follow and work with in thinking about my rooftops. Anna Tsing, for example, in her brilliantly groundbreaking *The Mushroom at the End of the World* follows Matsutake mushrooms as an opening to multispecies worlds, networks of people, and wider ecologies through which we can still live inside the human regime and attempt to exceed it by freshly looking around us (2015, p.19). Tsing has been very fortunate in coming across a species of mushrooms that requires certain very unique geological disturbance-based environments for it to flourish, and she sharply uses this rather unusual recipe of growth to provide a fresh commentary on capitalism, survival, and making landscapes through multispecies collaborations. The only thing I missed, quite childishly but honestly, is a proper following of the lives of Tsing’s interlocutors. We do get bits and flashes of mushroom-entangled-people’s lives yet I cannot claim to be left with anyone to ponder on but mushrooms and capitalism.

With all this reading, re-reading, critiquing, and waiting for holes and hopes, there was absolutely nothing to be done but take those patches and ideas and jump into rooftops. And it is only here and now that I can argue for an understanding of literature reviews as biographies of our researches. In sketching out the conceptual skeletons of our research fetuses, we need to realize these existing scholarly works as nodes in the maturation of our topics and research adventures. These need to be taken seriously and genuinely, but with a

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14 And quite expectedly, not all of our biographical origins can ever be cited and properly mentioned/credited. For example, a significant body of literature forming the initial fetal phases of this research in dealing with multispecies was that of urban studies and the presence of animals in the city. Plenty has been written on the making of cities and presence of animals, as always a story of exclusion, human-exclusive modern cities, and the reduction of multispecies worlds to pets – with cities gradually unfolding from metropolises to petropolises.
motherly selfless openness to the endless potentials awaiting her baby in her/his baby steps to childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. I had to eventually close the books, get out of the library, and take off to wherever rooftops are.

**Initial Response from Fieldwork: An Animal?**

"Theory informs; it need not be worn on one’s sleeves" (Sanjek, 1990, p.252)

Quite a few weeks/months after the beginning of fieldwork, and through very preliminary readings of my fieldnotes, I realized two particularly important conclusions. First of all is a gradual dissatisfaction or at least skepticism with the existing literature’s proliferation of categories and analytical labels. A brief revisiting of those last few sections provides an inventory of tens of labels including: animal turn, animal studies, indigenous human-animal relations, posthumanist animal studies, nonhuman turn, multispecies ethnography, interspecies relations – the list can forever multiply. What this might tell us is a confusion and beginner’s naïveté when it comes to this new body of literature fueled with a relatively recent interest in post-s and outside-s. While the proliferation of these categories and concepts might give off a false impression of openness and some momentary orgasmic relief, what this has actually been doing is challengingly straitjacketing my budding researcher-self. With all these multiplying labels, we are still running around in one endlessly

(Olson and Hulser, 2010). When it comes to Egypt more specifically, natural historian Alain Mikhail writes extensively and beautifully on how the “modernizing” of Egypt especially under Mehmet Ali came with a transformation of relating to animals from ecologically aware bonds based on garbage collecting, eating, and co-existence to a sanitized affective bonds regarding animals as family adjuncts but never anything more (Mikhail, 2005; Mikhail, 2014). As he beautifully puts it, “thus, paradoxically, as affective bonds between humans and dogs began to emerge in the 19th century partly to replace older social, economic, and ecological roles for dogs in human societies, widespread violence against them also increased in ways unprecedented in Egypt” (2005, p.85). Surreally similar stories of modernizing human-only cities are also particularly inspiring to engage with (Holmberg, 2013; Franklin, 1999). The reason I did not include these in my actual analysis is that this interest in the urban has gradually faded through my fieldwork encounters in which no significant mention of the city as a unit of analysis ever took place. Moreover, the unique position of rooftops (and their accompanying farming practices) beautifully traverses and problematizes the neat dichotomies of urban and rural since this very particular modality of multispecies worlds on rooftops is usually deemed as uncivilized, premodern, or at best rural. That said, however, perhaps in a later phase of this research whenever I pursue it further this body of literature will be more relevant or pressing to follow.
renewing loop with more convergences than divergences: animals, humans, and everything in between.

Gradually, I found myself leaning more towards forgetting about all of these concepts with their variations, internal factions, conflicting genealogies, debates, and forcing myself instead to focus on my ethnographic worlds as they freshly and genuinely spell out the very categories they operate through. As Lila Abu-Lughod rightly advises, one of the main duties expected of anthropologists is to let “the worlds they come to know bring their assumptions and analytical categories, not to mention their whole enterprise, into question” (1989, p.300). This smoothly takes me to my second fieldwork-maturing realization, which is that the category of the nonhuman animal is not as central to my work as multispecies ethnography or the animal turn would suggest. I could not for a minute imagine myself asking about one specific goat – may be only if she is sick for example – or introduce myself as interested in the lives of animals. Rather, my fieldwork forced me to think in terms of not only relations but also chains of life, connections, and multispecies cycles that exceed but inevitably include the human.

Slowly but surely, my fieldwork conversations began including not only rooftop goats and chickens but also grandparents, streets, trees, mice, bats, and memories of marriage and bird flu. In keeping a close and regular relationship with my fieldnotes, I slowly came to realize that my literature review needs to literally and metaphorically grow into maturation. The existing literature gathered through my research proposal and pre-fieldwork phase

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15 I was mistaken as a veterinarian in the first few weeks of my research and continually asked about vaccines schedules, feathers deficiencies, and low rates of productivity. It took a significant effort on my behalf to come to terms with what this means to my research, what my topic is, but also presenting my research in a way meaningful to my interlocutors. As de Castro strikingly describes of his first fieldwork engagements, “usually, any of my questions of an ‘anthropological’ nature prompted a shower of laughter and replies of ‘why do you want to know that?’ followed by a confusing polyphony of humorous, untrue explanations or a rapid recitation of names” (1992, p.16). In my case, it was always a rapid recitation of measurements, productivity levels, breeds names, and some illnesses that rooftop animals suffer.
proved a bit too shallow, insufficient, incomplete, and sometimes even quite paralyzing. Only ecological anthropology, loosely defined as the happy marriage between ecologies, environmental studies, and anthropology, provided a loving fulfilling sanctuary to those fieldwork imponderabilia.

**Ecological Anthropology**

Through moving a bit more towards cycles and environmental relations than mere fetishistic humans and nonhuman animals, I began consulting a different body of literature that prioritizes a more inclusive outlook into surrounding ecological and social worlds. I take ecological anthropology as a subdiscipline whose origins as previously mentioned date back to Marvin Harris and Marshal Sahlins’ cultural ecology (Ortner, 1984). More recently, however, ecological anthropology similarly witnessed a disciplinary eclecticism most evident through the reliance on publications and conceptualizations from neighboring disciplines such as philosophy, cultural studies, and environmental humanities. Its rise is mainly a result of a helplessness with available literature theorizing the social and its surroundings, as Plumwood argues: “modernity, despite its pride in throwing off the illusions of the past, has failed to provide an ecological or earthian identity or narrative to replace the heavenist one…the old narratives of post-earth transcendence are dead, but modernity has not replaced them by any meaningful or comforting new ones about earthly life”\(^{16}\) (Plumwood, 2008, p.327). In a very anthropology-friendly way, ecology unfolds as etymologically originating from ecognosis, which Timothy Morton explains to be a riddle, a bit like knowing but more like “letting be known. It is something like coexisting. It is like becoming accustomed to

\(^{16}\) Rather, as Gregory Bateson makes clear, the unit of analysis/survival or focus in what he called “the epistemological fallacies of Occidental civilization” were either the family line, species, or subspecies – with no broader regard to the environments in which these organisms survive (Bateson, 1972, p.340). What we have best concluded from these individual-based and narrow epistemologies is that “the organism which destroys its environment destroys itself”, hence the shift to environments and its mutations along with collaborative efforts of survival (Bateson, 1972, p.340).
something strange, yet it is also becoming accustomed to strangeness that doesn’t become
less strange through acclimation. Ecognosis is like knowing that knows itself. Knowing in a
loop – a weird knowing” (2016, p.5).

What ecological thinking grants us is the privilege of thinking on various scales, only
as continually processual and conversational rather than coldly distinct. An ecological
approach would not prioritize humans, nonhuman animals, trees, soils, or winds, but will try
to explore these as simultaneously unfolding through the relations that bring them together.
The unit of survival in ecological thinking, then, is perhaps most aptly put as “the flexible
organism-in-its-environment” (Bateson, 1972, p.324). The aim, most ideally, is to move
away from the paralyzing dichotomy of nature and culture towards the “dynamic synergy” of
organism and environment, through beginning with a lumping organism-in-its-environment
patchiness rather than at best mere one-on-one multispecies relation (Ingold, 2000, p.16).

To take all this back to our cacophonous ethnographic worlds, ecological
anthropology attempts to strike a balance between on one hand these ecological relations and
the broader social contexts through which these relations are vocalized, practiced, and made
meaningful on the other. At the heart of ecological anthropology, as evident through Tim
Ingold’s brilliant The Perception of the Environment, is an urgency to understand humans
and their worlds as both and simultaneously social and ecological, with the human as both a
person and an organism, with both axes of existence equally meaningful and worth of
exploration (2000, p.48). As he puts it, “human life, I therefore proposed, is conducted
simultaneously in two domains – a social domain of interpersonal relations and an ecological
domain of inter-organismic relations – so that the problem is to understand the interplay
between them” (Ingold, 2000, p.172). It is then only through human social worlds – as lived
through intimacies with other species – that we are able to weave an ecologically aware
anthropological account of which ecologies are most meaningful, which relations are
prioritized, and how these work to sustain survival in various socio-ecological conditions. More generally and as will also be more ethnographically apparent in the following chapters, Gregory Bateson succinctly concludes that “herein lies the charm and the terror of ecology – that the ideas of this science are irreversibly becoming a part of our ecosocial system” (1972, p.354).

More concertedly, a number of young bright anthropologists have been researching this blossoming domain of ecological anthropology. For example, the profound Marisol de la Cadena writes on her fieldwork in Andean worlds and provides an excellent account of her interlocutors’ perceptions of multispecies “earth beings” and how these are understood, spelled out in native language, but most importantly ecologically “practiced” in their social worlds (2015). Her book brilliantly strikes a challenging balance between ethnographic rigor, stories with her interlocutors, research politics including efforts of translation and speaking with nonhuman others, analyzing textual artifacts relating to her interlocutors’ stories and lifeworlds, and using all of these to weave a broader well-rounded theoretical commentary on ecological anthropology, posthumanism, and politics as always emerging anew.

Geographically nearby, and beginning with the infamous “War on Drugs”, the inspiringly magnificent Kristina Lyons takes us on a brief journey in Andean-Amazonian foothills to poke into “the tenacious vitality of life in the midst of war” (2016, p.59). She does this through intimate fieldwork on a pulsating farm where she explores the twin forces of life and death as emergent and sustained under military duress. She realizes, quite similarly to my account, that the only way to provide a real, perhaps even dystopic, commentary on the current instability and fragility of conditions is to turn ecological; “what I learned was that rather than productivity – one of the central elements of modern capitalist growth – the regenerative potential of these ecologies relies on organic decay, impermanence, decomposition, and even a robust fragility that complicates modernist
bifurcations of living and dying” (2016, p.59). On a slightly more theoretical/philosophical note, Naveeda Khan prolifically writes on ecological worlds as instances of weaving together “physicality” with the metaphysical (2014, p.260). She beautifully explores human-dog worlds and their corresponding instances of intimacies bringing together “mutual fated-ness” as ways through which earth as a whole is constituted and made sense of. She relies on combining fieldwork encounters with fables and tales along with ecological theory to make a case for how “Creation narratives provided the filaments of Muslim ecological thought as a perspective on our interconnectedness and mutual entanglements” (2014, p.247).

With all this stimulating literature in mind, I do not regard ecological anthropology or ecological thinking as distinct from or opposite to any other “kind” of anthropology. The genealogy of ecological anthropology that I hope to have grounded myself in, work myself through, and rigorously/freshly contribute to is one that takes the ecological as growing with and through the economic, the spiritual, the cosmological, the religious, the political, the personal, and all the other spheres of life. This is perhaps only going to be clearer and livelier through the ethnographic multivocal worlds that follow, from which and through which I learned how ethnographic enunciations are always plenty – serendipitously, enchantingly, and magically bringing together the ecological with the social and beyond. I thus tried to very consciously walk this fine thread of pulling together the various scales constituting ecological anthropology, with a balanced fascination with an intimate environmental awareness soaked in social pulsations.

What is now missing is situating all this vis-à-vis our geographical nexus, asking how can all this converse with the given context of Egypt and its anthropologies. As Lila Abu-Lughod and later Lara Deeb along with Jessica Winegar followed up, “the Middle East” has long stood as an anthropological minefield, with plenty of research to be done, published, and critiqued (1989; 2012). This brought to fore a wealth of ethnographic publications but
one that is arguably far from haphazard or entirely free-floating. The geographical nexus has gradually, systematically, and surely been “coded” for certain anthropological gems to be excavated, mainly including tribal segmentation, women/gender, violence, revolutions, youth, politics, religion, and modernity (Abu Lughod, 1989; Deeb and Winegar, 2012). To research rooftop ecologies, human-animal relations, and environmental/social entanglements then proved challenging, sometimes too risky, and quite increasingly uncertain – since the topic is by and large “unattractive”, sometimes deemed too apolitical or irrelevant especially to a post-2011 politically charged Egypt. The labors of maturation here thus entailed not only working through existing material of multispecies ecologies, but also simultaneously managing to somehow make relevant this body of research – with a special attunement and prioritization to fieldwork in setting the terms of the game – and carve its path in a cacophonous geographical and social nexus where similar themes are largely understudied (Deeb and Winegar, 2012, p.552).

Perhaps what is direly needed now then are some more rigorous ethnographic work and publications on multispecies ecologies in this region of our world, moving a bit far from Amazonian and Andean fertile multispecies worlds, in order for us to realize how these concepts work here, how they need to change, and where fieldwork takes us. More local-based theory needs to be written and published, providing situated commentaries on our unique socio-ecological configurations, our own linguistic inventories, and our own old and new ecologically-conscious social practices on rooftops and beyond. This pushes our role as Arab researchers from barely contributing to theory about the Arab world (Abu-Lughod, 1989, p.271) to carving new paths to theory of and from the Arab world. In the following chapter, I move more narrowly to the next bit of this research biography, namely how I came to rooftops, where I stand vis-à-vis those, and how we have ethnographically unfolded.
Later in the chapters to follow, I explore my ethnographic encounters conversing with the available theoretical toolkits through the different themes discussed in each of the body chapters of this thesis. Along with the debates and labyrinths discussed here at length, fieldwork embellished, matured, and strengthened the literature-biography with even more layers as witnessed through the social lives of my situated interlocutors as living in Cairo (and Alexandria) with their specifically fertile spatiotemporal nexuses. In the third chapter titled “Spaces of life, states of death”, I attempt a close engagement with how life and death as concepts, processes, experiences, and feelings are theorized and practiced through the presence of multispecies others on rooftops. These themes emerged through the frequent discussions on slaughtering, sacrifice, and grieving, pushing life and death to inevitably mold part of this thesis. I try to look at life and death unfold as dual forces/processes best enunciated ecologically, as cycles of composition, decomposition, and re-composition, each of which valued and treated differently.

My fourth chapter titled “pulsating collaborations to/of resilience: Compositions of bellies, attachments, and selves” pushes my inquiry further into the slow and gradual making of selves and beings through interspecies worlds on rooftops. Throughout fieldwork, it was obvious that I needed a treatise on the very specificities of those recipes of relating, in the closest and most intimate ways of loving, hating, and eating. The chapter begins with the proposed intimacy, proximity, or togetherness that brings two or more species together for a sustained period of time on a lively rooftop, and pokes into the terms of this intimacy and what it makes, of people, rituals, habits, and imaginaries. Since most of my fieldwork grew and matured in the interiors of homes – not necessarily and strictly rooftops – it only made sense to spend more time meditating on how “home” takes shape through the pulsating presence of rooftops. In the fifth chapter titled “homecologies: Entanglements of city-making and world-making”, I then try to look for any footing, stability, or rootedness in the midst of
all these flowing and moving life-and-death-infused multispecies relations. Through exploring varied/multiple temporalities, alternative conceptual ethnographic tools, and pre-marital exchange rituals, I put or rather collage together a proposed view of the home as lived through the presence of multispecies rooftops as more ecologically connected, environmentally rooted, socially consequential, and seasonally shifting, with the perceptions of “cities” and “worlds” flowing accordingly.

In the sixth and final chapter titled “the only way out is through: Now what?” I unsurprisingly try to provide some roadmap or a guiding conclusion as to how rooftop ecologies might help us answer this urgent question of what is to be done now after all is said, critiqued, done, and theorized. I attempt to provide a brief commentary on how my ethnographic context relates to, responds to, and converses with existing bodies of theory, and finally closing with two experimental modes of other ways through which this thesis can be read, discussed, and disseminated, namely children’s fiction and a rooftop ecologies manual titled Stylish Survival Strategies through which I try to draw all of the previous material together for a concluding finale.
Interlude: Anthropological Confessions: How to be a Friendly Stranger/Strange Anthropologist, or Some Positionality-continuity

The last thing I wished for was nagging phone calls at 3 am, but may be that’s what happens when you are too friendly of an anthropologist-turning-friend.

November 27th, 2017. Clock about to tick midnight, while I asked mama to spare me the living room where the good network coverage is so that I can happily receive the surely expected raining phone calls celebrating my 24th year of staying alive. My two best friends already texted me a few hours earlier, for one of whom sleeps too early before midnight while the other is abroad so she already had class when our midnight was due. 12:10, the phone did not even ring. I checked the phone and found no messages except from Malak, my lovely-yet-so-talkative interlocutor/friend. She sent me a long text with a photoshopped picture of a cake with my name printed on it. She waited a few minutes then called me. I thought I wouldn’t answer because I would be waiting for so many calls. Got none.

I picked up Malak’s call and we spoke till it was almost 3 am. We spoke about my birthday, my wishes for the year, what I will do next day, my university classes for this semester, her thoughts about marriage and having children, and our favorite nail polish colors. We hung up and I was left with so much to ponder over. First, none of my friends called. Second, Malak did. At this point I realized quite viscerally how fieldwork has changed me, shaped me, and hope it is literally how I began the unfolding new year of my life.

The story is not so rosy, though. Since Malak is living alone till her husband comes back from his one-year conscription, she has nobody to speak with except very few friends. She is already living away from her parents, so I was sometimes her only way out. As we grew closer, I found Malak texting and/or calling me every day, speaking about anything and everything for hours and hours. Within a few months, I found myself knowing more about her than I do about some of my closest friends. She began opening up so quickly, with sharing intricate life details that I never expected to know. There are matters they don’t teach you in anthropology classes. You are thrown in the field, and you learn how to swim there.
With the elapse of time, I began feeling a bit uncomfortable with Malak’s over-
presence in my life. I could not be spotted online on Whatsapp and not respond to
her text - that I am texting someone else is never an excuse. I had to be there,
always, answering her calls, texts, help her choose new outfits, colors, and shoes,
and lovingly react to her child’s growing steps. It all felt a bit too burdensome at
times, especially with an approaching midterm or a semester coming to an end. I
began thinking of strategies for not picking the phone, perhaps at best resorting to
texting but not allowing the extended-hours phone calls to take place. I began
making up excuses.

I am not feeling particularly guilty for sharing this, let alone for it taking place. I tried
as much as I can to keep an open, sincere, and genuine relationship with Malak but
it got so draining at one point that sometimes I couldn’t deal with it. With the
increased excuses, she began decreasing the calls then stopped calling altogether.
A few weeks ago she texted saying she misses my voice so since then we have been
calling each other every now and then for a long catch-up. I cannot shut her
up/down, and cannot tell her I am not your friend for I indeed increasingly thought
of her as such. Her closeness is genuine, sincere, and very sisterly. She made
writing easier, less burdensome, and more bearable with her frequent though long
calls and texts. With time, Malak became so familiar for these excuses to feel
strange or “unethical”. Malak is a fieldwork interlocutor, but so much more. We
recently spoke about how busy I am during the semester, and thus that I would
prefer us texting or calling less frequently. During summer vacations, we speak way
more often and less burdensomely.

This is about every attempt to make familiar all those inconsistencies, nuances, new
routines, and strange/r moments. Something about fieldwork will remain strange
and scary, no matter how physically close and habituated. Something about the
laptop’s screen will remain familiar and comfortable. And as anthropologists,
luckily, it’s for a living that we try to ethnographically blur the boundaries of both.
II. Set, Scene, Ethnography: To and On Rooftops

In Search of Rooftops: the Journey

It all perhaps started long ago, as I gradually grew up to find my maternal Gedo (grandfather) Mahmoud Mohamed Youssef El-Aidy aging in fragility, especially after Teta’s (grandmother) death putting an end to an elongated fight with cancer. With her death appeared ‘Am Saeed, who stayed with Gedo every day and went home to his family only at night. ‘Am Saeed used to work in the same factory where Gedo functioned as a medical doctor and their friendship gradually grew into a lifelong intimacy. With the death of Teta, my mother and her two sisters looked for someone to take care of Gedo and live with him, so there was indeed nobody more fit than ‘Am Saeed. I thus grew with ‘Am Saeed as Gedo’s main assistant, friend, and confidant. With Gedo’s death a few years ago, ‘Am Saeed stayed as a main family’s confidant and sometimes even an almost-father for mama and her sisters. In searching for rooftops in Cairo, ‘Am Saeed was the first one to come to mind. As a trusted access point (key interlocutor in anthropological lingo), ‘Am Saeed also serves as someone who can help me explore the parts of the city that I have never been to and never likely to navigate alone.

With my heavy, eclectic, and quite confusing conceptual baggage and struggles in mind, the question remains as to how these interests could be/were translated into a grounded ethnographic research topic – an alive world of flesh, blood, and tears so to speak, academically briefed as “the field-site”. Standing as a disciplinary metaphor of some kind, as Gupta, and Ferguson instruct, “the field” here as those lively rooftops that I will discuss at length stands for an ethnographer’s ability to locate her/his own interests, research questions, and conceptual curiosities to an experimenting ground (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, p.8). With this decision also came another set of challenges, namely the burdensome and challenging task of how to locate these rooftops especially in a city that stretches far beyond one’s control and knowledge. In Egypt at the current precarious moment – vis-à-vis research, securitization, but also beyond – the only way to do this is to exhaust one’s circles and find a way to access one’s “field” through familial connections, or a trusted circles of friends, acquaintances, etc.
As Vered Amit eloquently reminds us, “the ethnographic field cannot simply exist, awaiting discovery. It has to be laboriously constructed, prised apart from all other possibilities of contextualization to which its constituent relationships and connections could also be referred” (quoted in Candea 2009, p.29). With ‘Am Saeed and his connections and relations in mind, I prefigured my “field” as those four-walled-no-ceiling rooftops that he has accompanied me to throughout my fieldwork journeys. This demarcates my field to some bounded unit, rather than an unbounded city like Cairo or Alexandria for example, therefore granting me a relief of a setting that is sufficiently (en)closed to explore those multispecies relations as unfolding within a sustained long-term relation with humans\(^{17}\). Candea sharply reminds us, however, that any local context, specifically when we think of multispecies worlds with variously extending nodes, is always “intrinsically multi-sited” (2009, p.34). Quite admittedly and shamelessly, most of the ethnographic content discussed throughout the thesis have taken place in the living rooms of my interlocutors’ apartments, with conversations and “situated listening” or “chance interviews” over lunch and coffee, rather than strictly on the physical rooftop (Sanjek, 1990, p.212, 244)\(^{18}\). I can here think only through a *permeably bounded* field-site, since the relations, connections, and extensions that ecologies are premised on will inevitably involve beyond-rooftop realities.

\(^{17}\) This is of course only after a proposal-phase ambivalence as to where my multispecies interests can be realized. As Candea also puts it, “any fieldwork is initially and potentially multi-sited...[yet] as research evolves, principles of selection operate to bound the effective field in line with long standing disciplinary perceptions about what the object of study should be” (2009, p.33). Very pragmatically and practically, questions of access here also play a significant role. My utmost concern was to carry out proper intimate fieldwork involving humans and nonhumans where I can stand as a genuine participant-observer, in order to produce a rigorous ethnography fulfilling its ethnographic and intellectual potentials. Rooftops, compared to stray animals for example or rescue shelters, have the privilege of a sustained ethnographic intimacy that I can build and work through.

\(^{18}\) Malinowski’s student Audrey Richards described “situated listening” as: “Besides questioning his informants, the anthropologist listens to speech between natives in the natural context of daily life...[this provides] information unlikely to be given in direct answer to a question, but sometimes vouchsafed during the performance of an associated act, or overhead in casual conversation” (quoted in Sanjek, 1990, p.212).
Mama then pulled the first ethnographic thread and called ‘Am Saeed and asked him if he knows of any rooftops around him. In a few hours, he called back and told me that he has organized me a first visit in his daughter’s own marital home, in Alexandria however. I was a bit discouraged since Alexandria throws me into a completely set of different geographic and social configurations that I am admittedly ignorant of, but first attempts are always improvisatory and chances somehow have to be worked through. On July 14th, 2017, mama and I headed to Alexandria, for an ethnographic first exploration.

**Guest and Daughter Revisited: The Ethnographer and her Mama**

With the first field encounter being Malak’s home, ‘Am Saeed indeed chaperoned my coming of age as an anthropologist since the beginning of this thesis-baby. I was introduced and taken home as a second daughter, fictively playing as a kinsperson from Malak’s paternal side of the family, even though ‘Am Saeed’s deteriorating physical condition and aging body could not allow him to physically accompany me to Alexandria (Abu-Lughod, 1999, p.15). Yet it was not just ‘Am Saeed who brought me to being a daughter-anthropologist, quite corporeally and literally, mama did too – as with all the other ethnographic first encounters to follow.

With a proudly felt affinity with Lila Abu-Lughod’s sentiment on her field entrance accompanied by her father, I felt I carried this burden of the Middle Eastern female unmarried anthropologist more than 20 years later (1999, p.11). I attempted to convince mama not to accompany me to Alexandria but she adamantly refused. As a crawling anthropologist-to-be, I had to give in and accept her presence on my first fieldwork exploration, hoping that she acquiescently stays in Gedo’s apartment in Alexandria. High hopes crushed part two. Upon our arrival, mama insisted that she physically joins me to my first visit to Malak. She believed there is something reassuring but also central about accompanying me on my first day, and that this is not just about her but also about me and
what kind of first impression we would leave, with her presence somehow showcasing that I come from a respectable honorable family rather than lightly and suspiciously on my own for some unreasonable educational purposes (Abu-Lughod, 1999, 14).

While this stickiness and clinginess of mama did indeed leave me bitterly feeling insufficient, childish, and insecure, it did admittedly ease my way into each of my fieldwork encounters. I was always unsuspiciously introduced as a daughter, accompanied by her pious abaya-wearing mother. Mama mastered those cultural “communicative norms” of apologizing for being a nosey visitor and an expectedly frequent guest who is most probably going to visit every week for a good five or six hours for the next eight or nine months while peeking over the rooftop and its corresponding intimacies (Briggs, 1986, p.94). Quite enchantingly, mama functioned as a senior anthropologically fine-tuned mastermind. Sitting there always almost entirely silent during our first field encounters in each of the four homes, in an ambience of a haunting non-participant participant observation, I would observe and later try to mimic all of her moves, gestures, reactions, and complimenting expressions whenever needed (Wolcott, 2008, p.51). For example, she taught me, by ethnographic doing, how to react whenever I step on a lively rooftop for the first time, with lots of masha’Allah – Arabic shorthand prayer asking God to bless all that is around – and a rather unstaring look prioritizing the humans talking than the vividly procreating nonhuman animals. While this might have taken away from my coming-of-age hardcore training, I do regard this as a strike of luck that gave me more privilege in staying longer, closer, and more familiar throughout my fieldwork stays.

In Alexandria for Malak’s visit, mama took the upper hand to the extent that I did not even get a chance to speak to Malak on the phone before heading to her home. She got the detailed address, knew the place, and only took my opinion as to when we should go in the morning and what kind of gifts we should take on my first day. I made it clear to her that she
will not stay there for the full day, and will not come pick me up when I am done. I knew where Gedo’s apartment was since we stay there every summer for a good couple of weeks, and I am old enough to pick a taxi and know my way back home without her. She resisted and kept murmuring on how stubborn I am but I could not compromise with this; I need to grow up and this was my only chance to push myself to.

**Scene I, Family I: Wafaa’s Rooftop**

With our two boxes of pastries/sweets for Malak and her mother-in-law, as well as a perfume for Malak, then quickly picked a taxi to take us to Skyna. We arrived in about thirty minutes, with every elapsing minute taking us out of the familiar Alexandria where we spend a couple of weeks almost every summer. We finally reached a bridge when the driver told us that this is kobry il-’awayid that we said we wanted to be dropped off by. With its name denoting a return in Arabic language, kobry il-’awayid marked a historical boundary of the city. Il-’awayid means those who are returning, with the bridge acting as a welcome home marker to those who are finally coming back to Alexandria (or, leaving it to elsewhere). We picked a tuk-tuk and asked him to drop us off in the new land of Skyna, road number seven, as Malak’s recipe holds.

Located east-south of Alexandria, izbet Skyna is only one of three other neighborhoods of similar geographical/geological nature. Until around 1940s, Skyna was a thriving agricultural vastness of land owned by a number of people prior to tenure law. With 1952’s change of governments, updated/changed laws, and consequential developments, Skyna was held in limbo, sporadically inhabited by some of the farmers who used to work the land. Not long after that began waves of migration from neighboring villages and cities to Alexandria, with Skyna offering a safe and quite affordable haven for those looking for a place to reside (Rizk 2011). Gradually, it became a vibrant residential neighborhood, with bits of agricultural lands, rivulets, and some herding and pastoral activities persistent till this
very moment. As for its current status vis-à-vis the government, however, Skyna is yet another neighborhood deemed “unplanned”, in a dire need of state-led-and-sponsored development campaign to better fit the image of the urban city (Abdelhalim, 2017).

After picking the tuk-tuk, the two of us stayed there, sweating, with our gifts on our laps, listening to the deafening Electro-Sha’abi music the driver is playing, while looking around for any sense of familiarity, with the largely unpaved roads providing a sense of suspense cacophonously matching the music beats. All the roads were very narrow and long, alley-like, with dangling decorations for the just-finished Holy month of Ramadan. Out of these convoluted little streets came a relatively huge street with a rivulet cutting it across, along with some agricultural lands and cattle at the horizon. This is where the suq (local market) is, with plenty of little shops of vegetables, bakeries, beans, and fish. The tuk-tuk turned again into one the barely walkable streets, slowed down, and pointed to the extension of the street as number seven.

Two buildings away stood a very crowded bakery so we both went to ask anyone there if this is where Kamal Ramadan lives. We both stood there silently, in a crowd of black abaya-wearing women hurrying for fresh bread, while mama quietly asked where Kamal Ramadan’s house is. One woman wearing black niqab (face veil) piercingly looked back at us, asking if we are wilad siyadt il-liwa Mahmoud (major general Mahmoud’s children). Mama smiled in pride and familiarity, while I sighed in relief; finally someone is taking us home. She laughed and introduced herself as Wafaa, Malak’s mother-in-law. We followed her for another five minutes or so.

We stepped into a cozy-looking three-story poorly painted building, with a metal long door with a huge lock for safety and privacy. Once we stepped in we found a lovely, cheerful-looking lady in a nightgown coming to greet us. A youthful, very energetic, and full-
of-life lady with bun-wrapped wet hair surely just pulled out of a refreshing shower came Malak and hugged both me and mama. We went up to Malak’s marital apartment which is only less than two years old. Malak took us in, with Quran playing at the background on her TV, and a little tiny creature laying on the couch. This was Salma, an eleven-month scarily looking body of flesh, prematurely born with plenty of health problems and challenges putting her life at risk. We stayed there as mama caressed little Salma while I watched in absolute fear, as Malak went to the kitchen, brought us some soda and came back asking if we had breakfast. Mama swore that we did, even though we both did not even have time to have some coffee or tea before heading to here, a mama-decided hunger games just began.

We stayed there with Malak while we spoke about Salma, her growth and inconsistencies, and how scary it is for Malak to have a child at the age of 22 – while the only child I can currently think of having is indeed my thesis. After around 30 minutes of pure boring small talk, mama got ready and told Malak that she absolutely has to leave because she did not sleep well. Mama was then allowed to leave, while I still stayed with Malak speaking about her husband, her changed familial life, and how everything is cooler in Alexandria. Malak was absolutely friendly and excited about my visit, yet she stared a lot. It was a bit difficult for me to realize whether this was a gesture of a lack of interest, fear, hatred, or just an attribute of hers. With time and sustained closeness, I came to realize this is how Malak expresses genuine interest and presence.

In about an hour, Malak then asked me to choose anything from her closet to wear while going on the rooftop because it is so smelly and full of bacteria and viruses up there so it is better to go up with anything other than my outfit. I insisted that I can go up in my own clothes and she told me that ‘Am Saaed made sure she does this and I would not want to upset him. She picked me a pair of leggings that she wears at home, along with a loose white linen chemise that she loves, and my own veil that I refused to change. In a few minutes came
Wafaa, who I now saw without her niqab. A pretty round-faced woman with an equally round figure stood Wafaa who barely looked like the mid-50s that she is. Wafaa has been a housewife since her graduation, and is married to Kamal, a public-school Arabic teacher. Together they have Mostafa and Samir, two tall and handsome men in their 20s. Samir is still in his last year of high school while Mostafa is a graduate of pharmacy who used to work in a nearby pharmacy, but is now fulfilling his conscription.

As the kinship “tree” illustrates, Mostafa is married to Malak and together have their lovely tiny Salma\(^\text{19}\). Yet the kinship tree also extends beyond these affinity links to include consanguineous links ancestrally pulling Mostafa and Malak together. Mostafa is one of Malak’s extended maternal cousins of the family branch living in Alexandria. They enchantingly fell in love and got married. With Mostafa living and working in Alexandria, and given his nuclear family home in Skyna in which he owns an apartment, there was no other option for Malak but to move from Cairo to stay with him in his marital home.

I wore what Malak gave me, and looked at the mirror feeling so alien. The leggings were so short and tight and the chemise’s short sleeves showing my unshaved arm hair made me feel so unsure about this decision of giving in to Malak’s nagging demands. Wafaa then took me and we went up one more story of stairs to enter the first rooftop of fieldwork. A bit

\(^{19}\) I preferred to use “trees” as encompassing figures/models for my kinship trees in the appendix below since trees grant the interlocking qualities of genealogies (that here also include the multispecies rooftops as we will be later witnessed in the upcoming chapters) but also the roots specifically highlight the continuities, growths, and endless extensions through which kinship and relations can be felt. I deviate from one specific history of using trees as genealogies, however, which goes back to the Biblical imagery, “depicting the family of man as so many branches radiating from a trunk whose roots are planted firmly in the land. Here, at the base of the trunk, lies the autochthonous Adam, the first man” (Ingold, 2000, p.134). Quite later, unfortunately, W.H.R Rivers introduced the genealogical method for which the tree remained the model/figure most used, with some modifications later taking place. The tree was upbend, placing its roots on top and thus erasing the image of the tree as a living and growing entity to be just an abstract geometry of points and lines (Ingold, 2000, p.135). For me, contrastingly, with the roots in place, both the base of the trunk and its roots point rather to a continuity that we can never fully realize or control – namely “earth” manifested in the soil in which the trunk and roots grow and suck nutrients. More contextually, trees as “shagarit il-‘yla” (literally family tree) stand as a well-known local genealogical referent, further bolstering my choice of trees for the purpose of this thesis.
contrary to what I expected, the rooftop looked more like an apartment without a ceiling than an entirely exposed open space unearthing the sun and wonders of the sky. We walked in and the first thing that Wafaa warned me of was the rooftop’s intense smell, asking me to place my veil over my nose whenever I feel uncomfortable.

We stepped inside with the smell indeed penetrating my nostrils but not as badly as I thought. When we first walked in there was a relatively big room or a hallway with a temporary ceiling of plastic, with around 12 chickens, five ducks, and a couple of turkeys. They all stared at each other, then at my colorful leggings sideways, then began moving quickly away from me as I approached them. I kept saying mash’Allah while Wafaa kept talking to them, asking them to behave as they have a guest today. In a closed room (with a proper ceiling of bricks) next to the hallway were a couple of cocoa brown goats, peeking their heads out of the room’s half-door staring at me with sporadic murmurs to each other. Wafaa asked them to step away as she unlocked the door and asked me in. They all hurried to a corner as I stepped in then they gradually and quietly came sniffing at my shirt and leggings, with Wafaa pushing them away while I ask her not to.

Wafaa took me to a third room, with a proper ceiling, in which a strange cylindrical structure stood. The room smelled quite distinctively different from all the others, much more intensely and piercingly “animalistic”. Wafaa asked me to guess what is living inside this “battery” and I said it must be rabbits, since I have previously heard that rabbits are sometimes housed in “batteries” which are certain metal structures designed with specific measurements and calculated heat/warmth ideal for rabbits to mate and healthily stay productive. I then walked closer to find more than twenty rabbits of different ages and gradients of colors, ranging from light brown to cloudy white. They all looked almost too angelic to be true, with wide glowing eyes staring at me in absolute silence and vibrating bodies. We walked together to a final room full of feathers and feather-ly smells, indeed
pigeons. In this room with another temporary plastic ceiling stayed around a dozen pigeons of again different colors and breeds, all rushing towards some arches near the ceiling looking everywhere but my direction.

We then moved our chat a bit away from these rooms, to another corner of the rooftop where there is no ceiling, but also no animals. We stood by one of the rooftop’s ends, overlooking the street where we came from, and stayed there for more than an hour while the sun moved to the other side of the rooftop and our conversations accordingly left, right, and everywhere. As with all my unfolding ethnographic encounters, I usually preferred relying on “semi-structured” interviews, since the emphasis for me has always been my interlocutors and where they want the interviews to be directed, rather than the theorists’ voices in my head (Wolcott, 2008, p.56). I usually came with a set of itching curiosities and questions in mind, and used those only as an open guide for reference. I never recorded interviews, or had any notebook with me – just relying on “headnotes” that I later write properly as fieldnotes after going back home (Sanjek, 1990, p.93). I preferred these chats to be heartfelt intimate conversations in which my interlocutors teach me about their worlds. For that, I then depended on what Bernard and Gravlee called “person-centered interviews”, relying on shifting roles between the respondent and the informant slots expected of an interviewee (2015, p.299). I tried to always keep those first-round interviews with all my interlocutors as nondirective as possible, beginning with a monologue in which I openly ask my interlocutor to tell me about her/his relationship with the rooftop, with all the preferred dynamics, histories, memories, and stories (Jackson, 1990, p.60; Abu-Lughod, 1999, p.23).

With sunset obviously approaching, Wafaa invited me to come back down to Malak to have lunch so that I can have time to go back home before night takes over, marking the first macaruna and firakh panne in the pasta and fried chicken crusades of fieldwork. The following day flowed accordingly, with more rooftop ecological worlds magically unfolding
through the enriching Wafaa and Malak’s company and endless conversations. Wafaa took me to visit her neighbor Um Muhammed, which again helped me unfold once again as Wafaa’s fictive daughter. On that next day I unfolded as a more genuine participant-observer, especially when Wafaa allowed me to feed the animals and clean the rooftop with her as we shared some “secrets” before I left back to Cairo.

**Scene II, Family II: Safaa’s Rooftop**

After coming back home from the first day of fieldwork, ‘Am Saeed immediately called me to make sure the day has proceeded smoothly and that everyone was as helpful as expected. Very excitedly, he told me that my second rooftop is ready to visit and that we shall arrange the date and time once I head back to Cairo. I asked who these were and he told me they are his “second family”, the household of his non-biological daughter Safaa. We immediately agreed on a day and ‘Am Saeed promised to meet me at the closest metro station to Safaa’s home. Mama accompanied me, as quite expected, while we agreed that she would depart back home once we meet ‘Am Saeed. I have not seen ‘Am Saeed in perhaps more than five years but could not ever forget his facial features and his thick eye glasses. As if years have not even approached him, he looked exactly the same. Same olive-colored galabiyya, same thick eye-glasses, same stick like Gedo’s on which he depends for walking, same smoke-stricken tone of voice. It is only his wrinkles that have perhaps multiplied since we last met, but not even slightly affecting his unworldly energy, laugh, and excitement nevertheless. We shook hands and he patted me on the shoulder so lovingly, asking if I am still always anxious and scared of exams as I used to be. I laughed; some things just never change.

‘Am Saeed held my arm as we walked to pick a tuk-tuk to take us to Safaa’s home. He kept reminding me of how young and scared I always used to be when he lived with Gedo. ‘Am Saeed held me tightly, as if his firm grip over my arm was a keeping of his promise to
Gedo to always take care of me whenever he gets a chance to do so. He picked a tuk-tuk and we sat next to each other at the backseat while he masterfully narrated the geography of istabl ‘Antar, where Safaa lives close to ‘Am Saeed’s original home. Through sharing these critical geographies with me, ‘Am Saeed also wanted to make sure that the driver knows that “we” are no outsiders, and that at least ‘Am Saeed knows the neighborhood like the back of his hand.

Located at southern Cairo as part of Misr il-Qadyma district, istabl ‘Antar is, according to one historical narrative, uniquely named after a horse stable that the famous Arab pre-Islamic poet Antara ibn-Shaddad built for himself (Istabl Antar, 2012). More specifically, Safaa lives in the ‘Arab part of istabl ‘Antar whose houses are sporadically built on il-Mokattam Mountain, on an edge closer to the Nile than to the deserts of Egypt. Historically, these lands of istabl ‘Antar were somehow trespassed and forcibly taken by some reportedly unknown people who illegally built houses and buildings – mostly two or three story high – and sold them for cheap prices due to the lack of basic services such as electricity and water. In a few years, the government had to “give in” and provide the district with water, electricity, and sewage infrastructure – though precarious and indeed quite inefficient (Ibrahim, 2016). Given the geologically distinctive nature of this side of the mountain, however, it later came to be known that the land on which these houses are built are quite unsafe and with the consistent exposure to water – whether that of sewage or nearby agricultural activities – the mountain might partly fall down at any moment. That said, the government has indeed regarded this area as first-degree hazardous, currently even rejecting applications to national ID cards for residents (Hassan, 2018). They were repeatedly promised or rather threatened to be re-located to one of these new state-owned and military-

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20 See appendix for maps.
prepared neighborhoods in the desert, those spared for impoverished communities inhabiting “dangerous” ashwa’iyyat and beyond.

Looking around, the area seemed quite familiar, reminding me of where Gedo used to live in Giza. Relatively small houses, not so long, with women selling popcorn, sweets, and fresh vegetables between the houses in narrow alleys giving way to slightly bigger streets. The streets and alleys suddenly became way narrower and smaller, with the houses seemingly encroaching towards us, as the tuk-tuk found its way up a real slope, to the ‘Arab, where Safaa’s rooftop is. In less than a minute, the tuk-tuk stopped while ‘Am Saeed paid him and we hopped off right in front of a lovely yellow-colored two-story building, with a beautiful ceramic terrace/doorway with some built-in couches, and lovely little stairs easing the way to the actual house.

We rushed towards the matching-pajamas-wearing Noor and Jana who quickly hugged ‘Am Saeed’s knees and belly as he got inside. They screamed calling their mom Safaa and their sister Toto to come greet Gedo Saeed, while exchanging looks with me in their brightly glaring green eyes. I hugged them and introduced myself as ‘Am Saeed’s relative as we then all got in. On our way inside came out a beautiful chubby lady with equally bright green eyes, sharp deep-pitched voice, and a glowing youthful face. Expectedly, this was Safaa, who ran kissing and hugging ‘Am Saeed, then hugging me so intimately for knowing that I am coming through ‘Am Saeed. Safaa shouted calling Toto to come down as we went to sit inside the living room with maroon walls, and some cushions laid on the ground to serve as couches in front of a huge TV and a set of gigantic DJ-like speakers. I stepped inside and sat as close to the fan as possible, as ‘Am Saeed also came to sit right next to me. A tall, well-built, charming girl in her late-teens, with equally glowing green eyes like her siblings’, Toto rushed towards ‘Am Saeed to hug and kiss him. She then gently looked at me and smiled so widely, telling me how excited she is that ‘Am Saeed has brought someone new to the family.
As the kinship tree makes a bit clear, this house is inhabited by one nuclear family living in this building with a spacious hallway and a sunny rooftop. Safaa married Nagy when she was in her mid-teens. He was a great m/catch; a hard-working persistent car mechanic living nearby while also owning a house that he promised to re-paint and polish for the bride. The house dates back to Nagy’s father, who somehow claimed rights over this piece of land and built this house for his family. He lived there with his wife and children and stayed there till Nagy married Safaa. Together, Safaa and Nagy brought 16-year old Toto, 14-year old Mohamed, 11-year old Noor, and eight-year old Jana. Nagy now owns his own warsha (workshop) for fixing cars and takes Mohamed to work with him there every day to also soak him in the skills of the craft at a young age.

We stayed inside as Toto got us cold soda to treat our sweaty heated bodies, while we sat and chatted about ‘Am Saeed missing the children, Safaa missing him, and all the familial updates since ‘Am Saeed’s last visit. In an extended moment of silence, ‘Am Saeed asked Safaa if she remembers Doctor Mahmoud Youssef who used to be the doctor of the factory. He reminded her of a particular incident when her mom got so sick and they were helplessly looking for a doctor in the middle of the night when ‘Am Saeed quickly came with Gedo to check on the sick mother. Upon hearing that, Safaa quickly shouted in excitement that she indeed remembers the doctor who saved her mom on that scary night. ‘Am Saeed pointed at me and told Safaa that I am his granddaughter. This was an ideal moment of familiarity, in which those nostalgic pasts and heavy histories of ours somehow magically make their way to fieldwork, an ideal moment where these “home” and “away” of fieldwork confusingly merge and blur (Caputo, 1999). Gradually and onwards, this house unfolded as a literal home in which every visit involves at least a few minutes of chatting about Gedo, their memories of him, and his aging stories.
In a bit, Toto and Safaa asked me to join them to the rooftop as they will now feed the animals up there. We walked up two floors on a little old brick stairs then faced a wooden locked door with goats’ heads peeking over its top. Safaa asked them to get inside as she brought out her keys and pushed the door open. It smelt so much lighter than Wafaa’s rooftop, with a couple of goats and one sheep wandering around the open hallway of the rooftop, while again staring at me sideways and slowly stepping closer and sniffing my pants – a pattern of now increased familiarity. Safaa shouted at them to leave, as Toto got a huge bowl of vegetable peels that she threw in the middle of the hallway where they all stayed. Looking up, the entire rooftop here is covered with a wooden ceiling improvisatory made of wide wooden sticks.

As the goats and sheep devoured their vegetables, Toto opened a small room’s door where around ten chickens, a couple of ducks, and a few turkeys rushed to a corner while staring at us and quacking. I did not get in, sufficiently repeating mash ‘Allah as I stood at the room’s door. We walked toward the last room as Toto opened it for me to see that there is only clutter inside. Even beyond this room, clutter was somehow everywhere. On a tin ceiling covering the chicken’s room were a number of old magazines, newspapers, and some old home maintenance utensils. I stayed there watching the goats as they ate while Safaa and Toto stood with me on one of the rooftop’s edges overlooking the entire locale of istabl ‘Antar from one of the highest tips of the mountain.

In a few minutes we found Noor and Jana joining us, fighting on who will ride the swing first. I looked around and quite expectedly found no swing as Noor approached and took a huge black wheel hinged on two plastic hoses fixed on the wooden ceiling. I was so fascinated with the sight of this DIY (Do-It-Yourself) swing and quickly offered help to push them swinging higher and farther. With the repeated motion of the swing came an increasing familiarity for my presence on the rooftop, so magically eased here and in my other rooftop
homes through the presence of the young and vigorous spirits of children. Slowly but surely, this swinging movement and its awaited repetition with every visit stood as one of my most favorite moments of building ethnographic rapport, “a state of interaction achieved when the participants come to share the same goals, at least to some extent – that is, when both the ‘informant’ and the researcher come to the point when each is committed to help the other achieve his or her goal” (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2010, p.47). With the elapse of time, I unfolded as not only the swing-long-arms-kid but also the teacher. As the academic year began, I usually spent a long bit of my field visits studying English and science with Noor and Jana, as Safaa asks me to be cruel and shout at them because nothing else works. This helped me ease the burden of myself as a researcher, since here I came to assume another equally important – and reciprocal – role in Safaa’s life.

Around 40 minutes elapsed when Toto then asked her siblings to stop nagging and tiring me on such a sunny day and suggested that we go back down for a drink and some shade. After taking one more farewell look at the rooftop animals, I went down with Toto for yet another round of drinks as well as lunch as the elongated familial chat still continued. As we finished food I found mama already leaving a text message asking me to leave soon as ‘Am Saeed must have begun feeling so tired and fatigued. I looked at him and he did look so tired and quite sleepy; did I make him miss his nap time? I patted on his knee and asked if it is better to leave now and he so quickly agreed, after making sure that there is nothing more I want to “ask.” I indeed shook my head and thanked them, promising Safaa that I will nag her with more visits in the next few months while she so welcomingly agreed.

Contrasting to my initial proposal-phase expectations, I could not spend as much time as desired on any of the rooftops I have frequented during fieldwork. I assumed that the entirety of my fieldwork will take place on actual rooftops, yet as it unfolded I discovered that so much little time is spent there during the time of my visit. With each five or six-hour
visit came at best one hour of being on the rooftop. This is mainly because my interlocutors never spent so much time up there except after sunset – and mama would never agree to have me visit any of my fieldwork homes at night. While a bit uncomfortable or shocking, I had to remind myself that this project is about my interlocutors and their rooftops, and not my preconceived self-flagellating assumptions of how they live on the rooftops.

‘Am Saeed took me and we walked back to the metro station, with me again holding ‘Am Saeed’s shoulder as if providing some extra strength to make up for the now-due nap time. It was a fabulous 15-min sunset-charming walk back to the station, as ‘Am Saeed told me more about the area, its changes, history, and development. He explained how this area is strictly divided between the ‘Arab and the “new” area of istabl ‘Antar. The former is more unplanned, a bit too chaotic, yet quite distinctively tight-knit with a closed community of neighbors and extended family all living right next to each other. The latter, on the other hand, is a newer part of the neighborhood, with the price of apartments but also “status” of the residents climbing up and up as we move closer to the metro station. Upon entering the metro station, I asked ‘Am Saeed to allow me to take care of him in this last bit of our adventure and he acquiesced. I waited for him till he got on one of the trains on the route taking him back home then I crossed the bridge, waited for my train, hopped on to the women’s car, and ran back home.

Life and fieldwork unfolded hand-in-hand in Safaa’s home and rooftop as imponderably as always, with me still habituating the fictive daughter/kinsperson role with some serendipitous developments (Abu-Lughod, 1999, p.15). Whenever someone came to visit while I am there, especially during my late months of fieldwork, I would be asked to help with serving food, drinks, or staying outside the salon to spare room for the guests. While sitting in the terrace, whenever a neighbor passed by, I was always introduced as a distant relative of the family from the family branch that lives in Nasr City – a middle class
marker indeed. These positionality-troubles most obvious through the social class differential usually casted me off as either sometimes different, sometimes too relative or close, or sometimes as someone to show off with/through. A few months later Safaa asked me if my father has bought an apartment for my older brother to marry in yet. I responded that he has not, because apartments now are so expensive and my father can only afford my education and the other more urgent living expenses. In spite of this, there have always been repeated jokes on how Toto should break up with her fiancé, who is taking forever to have his apartment fully ready, and marry my brother instead, since the latter would definitely buy her a fantastic “house” in the fanciest neighborhood in New Cairo. In instants like that, my reaction is always unchanged: a strange neurotic smile.

**Scene III, Family III: Nahed’s Rooftop**

In an attempt to extend the search for rooftops beyond ‘Am Saeed, mama also called my two maternal aunts in case any of them knows of any rooftop around. My older aunt Nora, a pediatrician, reminded mama of Eman, her loyal close nurse with whom she has been working for over 10 years. Nora called Eman and told her that we would like to visit a couple of times and speak about the rooftop, so we exchanged mobile numbers, set a date, bought a fancy chocolate cake and some sweets for Eman’s young niece and nephew, and went to Magra il-Uyun. As the maps in the appendix illustrate, Magra il-Uyun is similarly located within Misr il-Qadyma district in the Southern of part Cairo, historically playing a major role in the management and distribution of water to and from the Salah El-din Citadel. With the increasing need for more water to supply the Citadel came the idea of constructing a ring of arches or waterwheels – in Arabic Qanatir; a source building located nearby at fum il-Khalyj was thus built, extending from which are the suspended arches with water flowing 2.2 km towards the east (Morsy, 2012, p.9-13). Although no formal documents exist dating Magra il-Uyun back to the Ayyūbid Salah El-Din during the actual period of his reign, 1169-1193, the
district is still firmly and dearly held as a monumental one through which the power, wit, and masterful architectural skill of the Egyptians is unnegotiably exhibited (Morsy, 2012, p.11). Socially speaking, however, with the elapse of those long years, the neighborhood increasingly came to be regarded as an old *ashwaiyyat*, most famous for its tanneries where animal skins are treated and dyed for future commercial use, but also for its drug-dealing gangs selling and circulating all kinds of drugs ranging from mild narcotics such as Tramadol to hard-core heroin and cocaine.

Mama and I picked a taxi that dropped us off by Magra il-Uyun Bridge, where Eman told us she will be waiting once we give her a call, since she thought the area is too dangerous for us to wander alone. In about ten minutes rushed two women with two children towards us. An obviously older woman wore a pair of jeans along with a pretty long floral chemise, with an equally floral purse, a yellow hijab, while the younger woman holding the two children wore a plain black abaya with a white hijab. Quite expectedly, the older one was Eman while the other was her sister-in-law Sahar, with her little two geological/social disasters Hana and Hooda. 11-year old witty Hana stared at me with brilliant wide dark brown eyes, high-pitched voice, and an outspoken persona teasing her mom and aunt since the very first moment. She greeted me with hugs and kisses, cruising my watch, bag, and rings like a little girl would in seeing an older girl she would look up to – an embodiment of the goals of coming of age in girls and femininity, quite faulty though. 4-year old Hooda, nicknaming his real name Mahmoud, shook hands and hugged me with his back and shoulders only, quite embarrassingly looking me in the eye every now and then.

It took around ten minutes for us to reach home, walking through a couple of streets where people continuously greet Eman and Sahar through the commute. We passed by an overcrowded ‘*ahwa*, at the back of which was Eman’s home. An old three-story building, painted in an old light yellow paint, smelling like years of dust and aging, with a tinge of
nostalgia. Eman asked us to go up the round, old, black, irregular stairs till we reached the third floor, with another closed metal door before the apartment’s actual door. We entered the apartment to find an old obese lady wearing a long loose colored galabiyya along with a light triangular headscarf exactly like the ones my grandma used to wear. Eman introduced us to the amazing Nahed, as we greeted her and breathed in the intensely sentimental smells of grandparents, cooking skills, and fresh odor of freshly washed clothes. We all stayed together in a lovely salon, next to which is also Farid’s bed. A very wide and big window by the salon was open, allowing in a strangely unexpected summer breeze, with an incomparable view of overlapping trees blossoming in red and green, and a rather dystopian lower view of a crowded street and a couple of shorter buildings’ rooftops full of clutter, old boxes, and some dead pigeons. Very quickly, Eman got out of the kitchen and served us some cold drinks and a bottle of sealed mineral water for the duktura. I laughingly told them that I am only doing my Master’s but somehow, any studies beyond the Bachelor’s automatically craft you as a duktura.

We drank our cold drinks and gave Hana and Hooda their bags of candies that they really loved and fought on, then Farid came in. A tall and thin man with sharp features in his late 60-s, Farid used to work as a state accountant in a public sector institution but has been on pension for a few years now. Since then, he has been idly staying at home and occasionally on the ‘ahwa just downstairs. He helps with the grandchildren’s commutes from and to their school and nursery whenever Sahar is busy cooking while Eman is at work. Farid has lived in this home for almost all his life, with Nahed as a polite neighbor of him living only a couple of streets away. Together, Nahed and Farid brought to life Saad and Somaya in their late 30s, Eman in her early 40s, and Hamdy in his mid-40s. All of their children are married except for Eman, who has been engaged a couple of times but it never worked out.
Hamdy is married to Sahar while currently working in Saudi Arabia, as both Hana and Hooda are staying with Sahar in Nahed’s apartment.

Farid came in to greet me and mama, while asking about my dad for courtesy purposes, even though he knows absolutely nothing about him, a brilliant moment in which Lila Abu-Lughod’s (father) blessings repeatedly loomed around (1999). He then sat down for a while and gave me a rather comprehensive brief on the history of the neighborhood as one of hidden historical gems that nobody knows of or appreciates. He situated his home as uniquely enclaving a number of historical churches, mosques, and synagogues – a religious complex known as mugama’ il-adyan. He told me that the neighborhood is so geologically and monumentally wealthy, but drastically underappreciated and contaminated by those drug dealing gangs that misrepresent what the neighborhood is all about: prideful history. Eman and Sahar looked at him while laughing so hard at the recurrence of this history lecture that he shares with whoever visits. They looked at me and Eman laughingly said that Nahed even has one historical basin which she uses to water the goats on the rooftop, and that it will sure be confiscated if anyone finds out it is there. They somehow found it on the rooftop one day and since then have been using it while knowing or at least guessing that it belongs to an old affluent dynasty of some kind.

Eman was very friendly and joyful with me and mama, continuously cracking jokes and recounting funny stories about the neighborhood and growing up there to lighten the weight of the first encounter. With that in mind, however, Eman’s eyes were also very sharp; she would crack the joke and instantly look at me and mama to see if we laughed, if we are secretly having a conversation, or if we look disgusted by the surroundings or the smelly fish fried downstairs in the fish shop right opposite to the door. I then felt I need to be more in control of my expressions, be more clear and vocal about what I want to say and how I feel, and never try to send mama any indirect messages of any kind – an anthropologist’s gaze
indeed so reversed. Mama and I unfolded as the observed, with barely any observation on our part except perhaps shyly.

This was intended to be a short first visit, so Eman and Nahed invited me to come up and take a look at the rooftop before sunset. It was just a couple of stairs to the rooftop. Nahed decided she will go up first, followed by Eman, then finally myself, as Jack the guarding dog is known to be a bit aggressive. Just as she approached, Nahed heard Jack barking accompanied by some goats murmuring in the background. She shouted saying they have guests and that they all should behave. A lovely rooftop, wide open with no ceilings except in the different closed rooms, this so much reminded me with Gedo’s rooftop, in a flash of memory that would have never occurred to me otherwise. All the rooftop’s ground was full of brown dry mud-like substance, mixed with the animal’s waste, but also vegetables leftovers, and some peeled onions for immunity. In the middle of the rooftop stood around 7 staring goats, brown, white, and black, of very different kinds and ages. I touched one of them, a black old goat that came and stood next to me without smelling my shirt – just standing there, looking at me and then at Nahed. I was happy that she was not scared, and more importantly that I was not. She stood there for a while, then Nahed gave me some green leaves to serve them.

Nahed asked me to come into each of the rooms and know the rest of the gang. In the first room, closed with an unlocked door with a light wooden ceiling, stayed around three big turkeys, seven chickens, and four ducks. She told me that normally she does not keep them inside their rooms except after sunset but since it is now July (2017), she does not leave them out for long in the sun as they might get sick with the heat or even perhaps die if it is too hot. They all ran out and rushed at the vegetables to eat with the goats, while running away from me once they find themselves approaching. On the other side of the rooftop stood just one room at the back of the stairs. Before stepping in, Eman told me that this is the craziest room
on the rooftop, full of old machines, a washing machine, a couple of other utensils, and a million old used boxes full of unknown clutter. Inside, expectedly, are the hide-and-seek rabbits. Once she opened the door, however, there were none. Eman got down on her knees and kept looking through the boxes and the tunnels in which rabbits usually hide.

Before going back down, Eman asked me to come watch the street from the rooftop here. We stood at one of the rooftop’s ends and I looked down. It seemed, or actually was, more of a forest than a buzzing city neighborhood. I could barely see the streets, the cars, the buildings, or the people. Everything and everyone if compared to the trees was negligibly tiny. The interlocking trees, with their blossoming red and orange flowers and proliferating green, hid everything from view. Before moving down, Eman pointed to a basin right next to the rabbits’ room. A small, off-white, intricately adorned basin stayed on the ground, full of a bit oily water stood the monumental basin belonging to an unknown dynasty. Eman told me that this is what they use to pour water to the goats and Jack to drink, while laughing so hard at only imagining the original now-dead owners knowing about how shamelessly Nahed is using. Soaked in greyish water on the muddy rooftop made more sense to me than being deadly stocked in a four-walled museum quite frankly.

I suggested we go back downstairs as mama must have finished all that could be said and done and indeed wants to leave back home. After resting for a few minutes, Eman asked me to take just a quick final look at the pigeons. Next to the salon was the biggest bedroom, with a king-size bed, a huge cupboard, and endless loads of Hana and Hooda’s clothes dropped everywhere on the ground and bed. From the bedroom protruded a tiny balcony whose ground was full of feathers and little remains of seed-like food. I came in to find on my left hand a number of old cages placed over each other, with over a dozen pigeons of different shades that Eman explained to be Hana’s and her own favorite creatures. We went back as I drank some more cold water then mama signaled me to get ready as we are leaving.
She began standing up and greeting them, promising that I will be visiting often for my research, and repeatedly apologizing that it will not be an easy one-visit duty.

The next few months witnessed me growing most intimately, closely, and happily whenever my scheduled visit is for Nahed’s home. I never felt like an authority-crippling researcher; on the contrary, I always felt more like an ignorant upper-middle class kid sitting for lessons on goats, pigeons, chickens, but also life, eating, loving, and growing. As most eloquently put, “most people underestimate the extent to which people value someone else’s interest in their lives and the extent to which people enjoy being ‘teachers’ to eager ‘students’” (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2010, p.65). A few weeks into fieldwork, Eman and Nahed fired a campaign against me and my waning health condition, (mainly because of) my lack of red meat proteins, my ignorance with the food sources and the environments around me, and my occasional lack of outspokenness.

I serendipitously grew to be Sahar’s close friend, but also Hana’s most awaited confidant. Hana shared her secrets with me, we played many card games and she showed me how to make homemade slime from scratch. Fieldwork here was a real exercise for my imagination to visit many worlds, with an improvisatory balanced ethnographic sensibility of both experiencing and enquiring (Wolcott, 2008, p.49). I became the upper-middle class friend/fictive-relative that they be proud of knowing or sometimes even show off through. The social class differential is real, and consistently stayed yet gradually became of no sensitivity. Whenever I bring them an expensive box of sweets for example, Eman would half-jokingly tell me that she will spare it for a formal fancy occasion to serve the guests. With some exceptions that I admit to operate within most Egyptian extended families, I can safely say I never felt embarrassed to ask anything, participate in any activity, feel shamelessly conscious of my class position, or even doubt my entitlement to have a say in
Hana or Hooda’s upbringing. We closely unfolded as a strongly bonding unit, of fictive family, friends, or some uncoded intimacy that evades all attempts of proper labelling.

**Scene IV, Family IV: Zahra’s Rooftop**

On a scarily lonely night of solitary fieldnotes writing, mama called her paternal cousin Howaida to ask if she knows of any lively rooftop around. In an hour or so, she called mama back and told her that she has agreed with Michael to allow us a visit to his family home in il-kilo 4 wi-nus. Michael is Botros’ son, who works as a nearby building’s janitor. Howaida knows Botros too, but most of her everyday dealings are with Michael as he is the one who takes care of running errands, sorting out the building’s issues, and keeping up with Howaida’s endless demands and questions.

We agreed on the day and time, as mama and Howaida – not just the ethnographer’s mama but also her cousin! – insisted on joining me “for the first time only”\(^{21}\) as the neighborhood is known to be quite dangerous. The condition for visiting Michael’s home, indeed specified and strictly implemented by Howaida and mama, was to always be accompanied by Michael since I can never reach his home all alone. Mama and I thus arrived at Howaida’s around sunset to find her waiting for us then Michael joining in a bit. A rather skinny, tall, cheerful young man in his late 20s, Michael greeted me and mama with so much love, hospitality, and genuine interest. We picked a taxi and he sat next to the driver, guiding him with the directions till we arrived at the (in)famous il-kilo 4 wi-nus neighborhood, around 30 minutes away from my Nasr City home by car\(^{22}\).

\(^{21}\) Alas! On tantes and their bargaining powers I can write volumes. Howaida ended up accompanying me, unquestionably along with mama, to almost every other visit to Michael.

\(^{22}\) Technically, Michael’s home is the “closest” from where I used to live during fieldwork as I can easily pick a taxi and arrive in less an hour whereas with Nahed, Wafaa, or Safaa, the commute requires more than one means of transportation to arrive (I first take a taxi to the metro station, then more metros, then a tuk-tuk). That said, however, many other factors and dynamics shape how frequently I visited Michael, ironically this was the home I visited the least (Caputo, 1999).
Located at the eastern part of Cairo, strategically on Cairo-Suez road, stands a conglomerate of buildings and homes named il-kilo 4 wi nus, or izbit il-hagganah. Historically, the neighborhood got its name as the distance covered from Heliopolis to there is 4.5 kilos, back in 1963 when Heliopolis stood as one of Cairo’s borders or “ends” contouring the city. As for its other name, izbit il-hagganah name arguably originates from 1868 when a certain group of military personnel who used to ride camels (to which the name hagganah refers) and secure the city’s borders were the first ones to inhabit this part of the city and built houses closer in design to limestone houses famous in more rural governorates than in Cairo (il-kilo 4 wi nus, 2009). More contemporarily, most of the land/houses now built in this area was owned through squatting and building without the interference/blessings of the government. Some of the oldest residents explained that they have “bought” their lands from Bedouins who claimed rights over this part of the city long ago, and built their own houses and lived there ever since (il-kilo 4 wi nus, 2009).

Since it is the closest to Nasr City from which we moved with Michael, we arrived in almost no time. Passing first by a huge suq of vegetables and fruits of all kinds, I looked around in overwhelming cluelessness to all that is around. Right after the suq, it began getting darker and more labyrinth-like in shade, shape, and ability to comprehend streets and directions. We went up a slope into il-kilo 4 wi nus then it all seemed like another city or an enclosed republic of some kind. Lots of overlapping streets, little alleys, shops of clothes and abayas, fried meats of all cutlets and shapes, hurrying tuk-tuks, staring men and women, and running children. We entered into a narrow very little alley in which the taxi was barely able to move, when Michael asked him to stop. The three of us walked after Michael into a four-story red brick building with absolutely no paint and no door and excitedly into his family home.
Being an anthropologist with two women in their mid-50s was not easy when it came to climbing the stairs, yet again occupying a rather strange position vis-à-vis my research. Both mama and Howaida held each other’s arms while laughing so loudly at their waning health condition as I hurried up with Michael a bit before them. On the third floor stood Mariam, a beautiful pregnant skinny young lady in her mid-20s and Michael’s wife. She smiled so happily and allowed us all in, while rushing to the kitchen with her protruding stomach to bring us cold sealed soft drinks. She served them and left us alone with Michael, disappearing so silently as I insecurely thought we must be so annoying or visiting at a horrible time as she is suffering with her sixth month of pregnancy.

Mariam then came and joined us as Michael told me that she will not be that useful for me as she does not really participate in keeping the rooftop for her pregnancy and as she does not really like dealing with animals. A few minutes later joined Zahra, Michael’s brother’s (Fady) wife. A bright, loud, excited woman in her early 30s, Zahra greeted us all so warmly along with her beautiful seven-year old Magy and five-year old Mary. A while later joined Michael’s mother, Nagiyya; a vibrant decent woman in her late-50s who helps her husband Botros in taking care of the building he works at as a janitor. Botros later joined the company; a short, strong, man in his early 60s, with a *galabiyaa*, a deep voice almost too dramatic for the everyday, and a pair of powerfully staring eyes. He asked me a lot about what I am doing, what exactly I study about rooftops, why rooftops, and what I think about animals. He was a bit too intimidating for me, unlike the rest of the genuinely welcoming family. His piercing eyes and rush of endless interrogative questions inverted the anthropological gaze again in a manner that was sometimes too intense for me to make peace with.

Nagiyya told me that it is Zahra and herself who mainly take care of the rooftop, while Botros mainly takes care of the pigeons and Michael occasionally helps out with
slaughtering and taking care of the animals whenever extra help is needed. Zahra sat next to me and told me all the details of her rooftop and how it is very enjoyable for her to work up there because she used to care for way more animals before marriage when she used to live with her parents in il-Sharqiyya governorate. In a bit less than an hour, mama asked me to hurry up so Michael right away asked me to join him and Zahra for a quick rooftop adventure. The three of us went up, climbing two more floors till an open rooftop, again in red bricks with no ceiling, began to loom in the horizon.

It was already way after sunset so all the animals were asleep\textsuperscript{23}. Just in arriving I heard Rita barking so loudly, another white huge dog looking at me with so much suspicion. Zahra told her that it is just a guest visiting. This rooftop looked so different from all the ones I previously visited. It seemed to me more like a cluttered attic than a lively rooftop at first sight. Zahra then asked me to join her for the first room, Botros’ favorite property of all time. In a little closed room with a temporary wooden ceiling and some highly suspended long wooden sticks stayed around 10 pigeons staring at us while murmuring. The room smelled so much like feathers, wet feathers mixed with food leftovers. The only source of light in this small room were a couple of tiny annoyingly yellow lamps in the corners of the room.

Zahra and Michael took me then to the next corner of the rooftop, where around eight chickens, three turkeys, and two ducks were hiding behind an old metal plane and a hanging cloth for the time being. This was not a closed room, and had no ceiling, but Michael told me that they usually move the chickens with the pigeons when it gets too sunny then bring them back out with sunset. He ran towards the chicken and grabbed one of them for me to “inspect” as it began shouting so loudly that I got scared. All the other chicken joined the screaming and began running around so quickly and alarmingly. I looked at the chicken that

\textsuperscript{23}I remember on that day I was on campus in the morning and before leaving, my witty cool friend/cyborg Radwa Fouda jokingly asked me: “won’t your interlocutors be asleep by the time you arrive?”
Michael held so quickly and said *mash’Allah* then asked him to leave her with the rest of them as she looked so scared. He told me that she is not scared but just blind, as they all are when asleep. Until now I am not sure of the validity of this claim; whether all chickens are blind when they fall asleep. Yet it did seem like they were, because they kept running around so madly in the dark and trying to find somewhere to hide. They ran away towards the light, then away from the light once it got so near, then looking for a place to hide from me and Zahra but also from Michael.

Right next to the chickens and ducks stood a wide piece of blue cloth, serving as a separator between two parts of the rooftop. This other part had a weak tin ceiling below which stood three goats, brownish and black. We did not walk into this other side, but stood where the chickens were and opted for just looking at the goats peeking their heads over the blue cloth to look at us and hear what we say. I thought we were done then Michael asked Zahra to bring him the slaughtering knife from his apartment. He looked at me and said it is not time for a practical lesson in dealing with animals. He told me that he and Zahra will slaughter a couple of chickens in front of me to witness the procedure first-hand, take note of it, and include it in my research. I absolutely refused and hoped I could run downstairs and ask mama and Howaida to take care of it – they can handle this better than myself.

It took me more than 20 minutes of begging, negotiation, and convincing to terminate this slaughtering plan. After so many rapid heartbeats and scary scenarios in my head of what mama will tell me if this slaughtering stunt took place, we finally landed in the same salon where Howaida and mama waited for us. Zahra and I tried to resume our chat on her stories with the rooftop and how it came to being, yet for the most part this ethnographic setting – with mama and Howaida – felt more like an intensely performed extended family gathering.

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24 Thinking of a less Islamic/more Christian alternative proved quite futile, but I ended up saying may God bless them (*rabbina yithmihom*)
than a fieldwork experience. I did very little talk, as Howaida and mama collaboratively took the lead. Their conversations always somehow led us back to anti-sectarianism, love of Christians, and religious unity – although we always began with goats and chickens. The religious difference was somehow so vocally and vividly spelled out by my ethnographic collaborators, preventing me from teasing out any fieldwork memorabilia and hardly any stories with animals, more so on the first visit than all the upcoming ones. Howaida looked at mama and myself asking us to get ready and leave so we rapidly did. Michael took us down, picked a tuk-tuk, and took us till the suq from which we can easily pick a taxi back home.

First impressions of first fieldwork encounters aside, I must confess that this is the home where I was never able to entirely take off the researcher’s hat – as an inquirer in the first place. Michael and his family have always been incredibly welcoming, wishing to help with floods of stories, rituals, and practices, but perhaps it was the persistent presence of mama that never gave me a chance to practice my ethnographic qualities as outwardly as possible. I was always scared she would think I am too nosey, too annoying, or too intruding – especially given their background as Christians with whom we need to be excessively “sensitive”. Very few barriers were broken, very few secrets shared, and very little of the initial roles problematized. I remained to a great extent the researcher, who is still excessively friendly, with gifts and candies to the little ones, and an ability to excitedly listen to stories for hours and hours. That said, though, I still tried to make the best out of these frequent visits especially whenever I am with Zahra and Michael alone on the rooftops – with some enjoyable intimacy and a chance to stay open and free to chat beyond the bounds of the old ladies and men sugarcoating-ly speaking politics and sectarianism downstairs.

Scene V, Family V: The “Elephant” in the “Room”

“A group of Brahmins is engaged in quarrelsome dispute about the nature of reality. The Buddha tells them a story – the parable of the blind men and the elephant – as follows. A king orders all men in his kingdom who have been
blind from birth to be brought together and led before him, each having been partially introduced to an elephant, by each being given just one part of the elephant’s body to handle. The king then asks each of these people what kind of thing is an elephant. Those who had felt its head replied that an elephant is like a pot. Those who had held its ear said it resembled a winnowing basket. Those who had held only the trunk likened it to a plough, and so on. Then, just like the Brahmins, the blind men began to quarrel. The parable is used in the Buddhist text to warn against trying to reach conclusions about the nature of reality on the basis only of the partial view of the unenlightened” (Cook, Laidlaw, and Mair, 2009, p.47).

In their brilliant piece, Cook, Laidlaw, and Mair used this parable to sharply argue against a long-held anthropological conviction/fetish of finding a “hidden truth”, one that needs a holistic God-eye view to be revealed (2009). In my case here, the “elephant” in the “field”, too obvious to be ignored and too complicated to be undisputed is pretty clear: the nonhuman animal. Should I regard the nonhuman animals encountered during fieldwork as interlocutors – just as central and pivotal as Hana, Nahed, and Wafaa for example? Do I even have the faculty to move beyond the description and include anything more than perhaps a sustained exchange of gazes or at best an intimate eye-contact lasting for no more than a few minutes every visit?

The first challenge concerning this question of nonhuman animals is whether I should take all of them as genuine fieldwork interlocutors. One of the main functions or indicators of proper interlocution is reciprocity, as an ongoing sustained sharing of goals followed by a series of conversations and balanced interactions (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2010, p.48). To a great extent, admittedly, this did not take place among most of the nonhuman animals I have encountered. I could never “speak with” a goat or a chicken on its own. In general, I was never able to focus with one single nonhuman animal, except in brief of occasions of sick goats, newborn ones, or perhaps some wandering-alone chickens. I therefore technically lack the power, entitlement, and authority to use the label interlocutors for my nonhuman animals for an absence of the very basic prerequisites of what this relationship requires.
That said, however, certain intimacies that took place with nonhuman animals during fieldwork, though temporally short and truncated, involving living physical proximity and sometimes very corporeal intimacy through actually eating them, were intense enough, unusual enough, and unfamiliar enough for me to bravely and riskily use interlocution to denote at least one of the rather unfathomable layers of this bond. These brief moments of closeness, ignorance, and a lacking ability to speak, or asking Wafaa or Toto to “translate” what the goat is trying to communicate or why a chicken is behaving this way, did get right across my worlds of the familiar and the unfamiliar, forcing a reflexivity and heightened awareness about the topic, my presence, and what a proximity like this can anthropologically offer – a state of affairs that I take as worthy of being linguistically expressed as interlocution, even if taken loosely.

The second challenge when it comes to this unfathomable elephant-in-the-field is how to refer to these nonhuman animals? Should I simply say nonhuman animals? The solution that existing literature provided was to use new attractive terms like earth beings (de la Cadena, 2015) or companions (Haraway, 2003). Looking at my interlocutors and through my long and boring fieldnotes, however, I found no use of any Arabic words that relate to earth-beings, companions, or even friends. More interestingly, I realized that my interlocutors rarely referred to these animals as anything but their species: goats, chickens, or rabbits. Very rarely were any nonhuman animals given names; only perhaps when a newborn is uniquely special/deal or unusual in appearance or attitude, or when Hana wants to play with one of the newborn goats specifically, or in the case of the guarding dogs. This lack or arguably conscious refusal of naming animals admittedly remains a mystery. When I asked about it, Wafaa and Safaa both told me that there are too many animals to all be named and never have the names repeated after these animals die, although they both made it so clear that they still know every single animal up there on its own. This takes place in a country where humans
are not only named but also frequently nicknamed, cars sometimes nicknamed too, and pets indeed given fancy names. One potential argument is that eating here as part of the relationship is what makes naming almost impossible, for we can never eat what we name (especially when these names are human-names for example). Yet I still do not feel entirely satisfied with this as an answer, or a full one at the least.

Giving names entails a dearness, personalization, and individualization that might not be straightforwardly evident in rooftop multispecies intimacies. I perceive naming as one tool of contouring a relationship into one of protection, personalization, but also expected long-term presence in one’s life. When it comes to rooftop ecologies, the very pretext of the multispecies intimacies is ephemerality and death – that each of the newborn goats, sheep, chickens, and rabbits is bound to die but also be eaten whenever its time is due. This rather strange and unusual condition or pretext to intimacy makes contouring the relationship – via naming – futile or almost impossible. My current conclusion, then, is that rooftop multispecies intimacies are very special, accelerated, and thus quite challenging to pin down, give a name, or fully comprehend. Rooftop nonhuman beings, then, intricately oscillate between companions, friends, earth beings, their general species, their particular attributes and personas, and their respective values as they grow and mold and share lives.

As a final note, when it comes to the actual Arabic names used in describing nonhuman rooftop animals or rooftop more generally, only one unusual word is used. \textit{Qany} – Arabic قنى – according to Hinds’ and Badawi’s \textit{Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic} particularly

\footnote{That said, however, there are still ways to attach names to nonhumans without necessarily anthropomorphizing them or uncompromisingly fixing the relationship. One brilliant suggestion was offered decades ago by Evans-Pritchard who has profoundly described the Nuer’s cattle names to be mainly description of their colors, horns, or behaviors, rather than a fixed metaphorical name normally given to humans (1940, p.41-45). The particularity of the Nuer’s relationship with their cattle, taken as far as men and women to be named after their favorite ox or cow, prevents me from delving deeper into why rooftops multiple multispecies inhabitants – chickens, goats, rabbits, sometimes differentially valued – are not treated with the same sentimentality or intensity (Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p.18).}
refers to the act of keeping animals (1986, p.720). Whenever I then ask about how the animals are doing or updates, Nahed or Wafaa would always tell me: “il-qany ḥilw” – referring to the entire process or state of keeping these animals as going well rather than the animals on their own. Remarkably, however, qany is also sometimes used to describe the relationship of a man to his wife, with a connotation of property. This then alludes to one potential layer of multispecies relations in which the animals are regarded as property, an ownership of the humans raising them – still not a representative description of all the phases, shapes, and forms through which multispecies intimacies unfold, however, as the relationship by all means exceed a mechanical property operation.

As extendedly narrated, the stories and surprises of each fieldwork encounter helped shape and mold the project as it grew from its theoretical infancy to a gradual ethnographic maturation. Through sharing only bits of the making, the kitchen, or backstage, of my ethnographic worlds, I hope we are now readier for a smooth takeoff to how things unfolded later; how the previously discussed and critiqued world of books and concepts hit grounds of/with kinship trees, geographical realities, and social/economic conditions, to together weave and craft this thesis to being, in the earthly polyphonic chapters to follow.
Figure 2: Safaa’s hallway, photograph taken by the author
III. Spaces of Life, States of Death

*The Promise, Jane Hirshfield – 2011*

Stay, I said
To the cut flowers.
They bowed
Their heads lower.

Stay, I said to the spider,
Who fled.

*Stay, leaf.*
It reddened,
Embarrassed for me and itself.

Stay, I said to my body.
It sat as a dog does,
Obedient for a moment,
Soon starting to tremble.

*Stay, to the earth*
Of riverine valley meadows,
Of fossilized escarpments,
Of limestone and sandstone.
It looked back
With a changing expression, in silence.

Stay, I said to my loves.
Each answered,
Always.
**Vignette A: Carry On**

Mama is the middle child, with two other sisters plus the mom and dad. Teta was always picked up on for not having any male children, for who will carry the father’s family name? After conceiving her second child (who is now mama), Teta was pregnant with a boy that everybody so eagerly and excitedly waited for. After five months, however, to the sorrow of everyone, the long-awaited male child was prematurely born/dead. He was old enough to be a corpse, not so well-defined but a body of flesh nevertheless. Gedo, a medical doctor, helped Teta along with another doctor to get the corpse out of her body. Everybody grieved, cried, and sorrowfully extended their condolences for the lost child. Teta felt like it became a lost dream, grown so nearly and intimately yet elusively fading away in a split of a second. Five months is a lot; 150 days of Teta and Gedo nurturing the dream, watching it growing closer, and thinking of the child’s name, fate, clothes, and future.

He died. They insisted to take him back home, clueless about what could be done then. He should be buried, perhaps? But he was not yet fully a “person” to be placed in a coffin, and buried according to the Islamic Sharia instructions. Teta of course could not just place him in a garbage pile, or a dustbin, so casually and unattached-ly sent to an unknown land. Teta and Gedo decided to bury the child in the home’s garden. They got a huge piece of cloth, covered him, and carved an opening in the garden (right below Teta’s window in the kitchen) and laid him there so peacefully. And the male child/corpse stayed there forever, with Teta always cooking while occasionally speaking to him, and frequently tearing up upon wandering in the garden. Yet he somehow remained there, always.

The young child somehow remained there, as a corpse, a bundle of flesh, a memory, a hope, an awaited dream, and/or a Middle-Eastern-family-desired achievement. The conscious act of burying the corpse in the garden is here perhaps what concerns me the most. It is arguably about the proximity of the garden, as in always keeping him near and dear, but also what the garden is and does. The garden here is an ecology, a site of proliferating life of rabbits, insects, worms, fruit trees, and sometimes turkeys. The burial of the corpse there meant that it will somehow keep growing, into myriad shapes and forms. As unfamiliar or distasteful as this might sound, the corpse will inevitably become food to the inhabitants of the garden. Teta knew her little child would persist living, even though not as the desired

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26 This might be a given, in the biological state of affairs vis-à-vis death. For example, Strathern theorized the garden as “an unexcavated version of the full belly” (Strathern, 2004, p.67). In another slightly different context, Janice Boddy’s fieldwork in Sudan showed that the home and more specifically the house yard to
male offspring for her in-laws, and that’s the best she could do. She still cried whenever she looked from that window in the kitchen, yet somehow this is the ecologically “best death/life” she could have offered him. She carried him through “following his traces”, while making sure he can still find his way to her through the “interstices” of the ecological garden (Ingold, 2007, p.53).

In light of this multilayered, emotionally intense, biographically polyphonic vignette, I begin this chapter with exploring the overlapping, multiplying, twin forces of life and death. With the focus on flesh and “en(flesh)ment”, I attempt to trace the continuities of life-and-death along living with proliferating rooftops (Povinelli, 2006, p.36)\(^\text{27}\). I take life and death not as binary opposing forces, or perhaps sometimes momentarily treated as such, but rather as interacting twin forces that continually make, unmake, remake, but also feed into each other. I therefore ask how are worlds – here taken to denote life as the practical making and sustaining of lives we inhabit and the accompanying conditions of living – enfleshed through the continuing axes of conceiving, birthing, growing, dying, decomposing, and regenerating.

Far from a philosophical/abstract treatise, however, this chapter is guided by and interested in the everyday practices, relations, biographies, and rituals through which life and death are ethnographically lived, enacted, and theorized anew. I do this through beginning symbolize the womb – as the initial stage in the process of becoming human. In case of miscarriages, then, is usually buried in the house yard, since its growth was halted in the womb (1989, p.70). On a similar vein, the brilliant Stefania Pandolfo argues that for his Moroccan interlocutors, a garden is seen as alive through the forced circulation of water, similar to the deceased body which is likewise described as open or loose – it is thus “an opening of the articulations is what happens at death” (1989, p.14). Bourdieu pioneered a similar conceptualization of the garden when he theorized the Kabyle house as divided between the lower part spared for all that is green, raw, damp, or “natural” and the upper part spared for these “noble” humans, fire, and other objects (1972, p.135). But outside anthropological theorization, we rarely speak in this language when it comes to death or burial. We might know that the body eventually disintegrates, but the coffin, the tomb, and the cemetery are arguably forms of “civilizing” or “disciplining” the process by keeping it closed, housed, and covered. But in the case of burying a corpse in the garden, the ecological/biological reality of death as becoming-food is arguably blunter, more apparent, and less veiled for anything in the garden grows, dies, and decomposes into other lives.

\(^\text{27}\) I take the particular phrasing of life-and-death as one hyphenated word from the anthropologist Eben Kirksey and more specifically his work on hope in which he suggests exploring “making life-and-death cuts in entangled ecological worlds” (Kirksey, 2013, p.248)
with and prioritizing the rich ethnographic material that touches upon, theorizes, and speaks to forces of life and death, but also responds to and grapples with existing literature that attempt to theorize life and death as collaboratively the grandest force there is.28

**Witnessing, Grieving, and Relating**

“In these moments of being-with...the social boundaries between humans, too, fall apart, when they are together, all from their varying backgrounds of caste and race, with their butts equally on the shit- and piss- strewn ground and their hands on the crusted body of an animal in pain, sometimes crying, sometimes stoic, sometimes calm, but all the time, and all of them, there, facing the boundary between life and death that will somebody haunt us all down, regardless of the skin we wear” (Dave, 2014, p.448).

On a cold dark winter night, Wafaa came down from the rooftop telling Malak how sick the pregnant rabbit is. She told her that she expected the mother rabbit to give birth today but she looked so sick and very emaciated. Wafaa asked Malak to go check up on her again a few hours later and to take Mostafa to give her an injection that eases delivery. Malak stayed with Wafaa for a bit in her room, while Wafaa cried and prayed for the rabbit to stay safe and not die. As Dave rightly argues in a similar vein, right after an “intimate event” with a suffering animal, the multispecies bond leaves the person with an inevitable sense of dutiful responsibility – that something must be done, changed, or made otherwise (Dave, 2014, p.434). Theorized as a peculiar site of transformation, the intimate event that took place here linked Wafaa and the pregnant rabbit, the latter suffering while the former sharing some of

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28 In terms of literature, this account attempts to carve a new relatively uncharted lands in ecologically theorizing life and death through an ethnographic lens rather than a strictly biological one. In their comprehensive review of the anthropology of life and death, Kaufman and Morgan argue that anthropological accounts in this area mainly fall under one (or more) of three themes: firstly, the transformations in cultural practice among science, the clinic, and state in shaping birth, death, life; secondly, the biomedical techniques and economic structures legitimating life and prolonging death; thirdly, the increasing biopolitical vulnerability of many populations (Kaufman & Morgan, 2005, p.332). This chapter fits within none of these themes, perhaps only touching so minimally upon the third. My aim is rather largely social in trying to explore the sustenance and making of life and making death, but also how the codes of life and death are cracked, through the circulation, regeneration, and decomposition of flesh in varying political and economic conditions.
the suffering just by being there, open to the shared vulnerability of being-with the rabbit as it aches in pain.

Wafaa fell asleep, while Mostafa came home a few hours later. Malak shared what happened and asked him if they can both go up – along with Samir, Mostafa’s younger brother – to check on the mother rabbit and give her the needed injection. Together, they went up to check on the rabbit with the prepared injection. A bit expectedly, the rabbit was found staying still. She had a little new born rabbit, stuck with one half inside the mother’s belly and the other half in the outside world. Samir rushed and touched the mother rabbit but found her limbs stiff and hard. In those few hours between Wafaa’s visit and now, the mother rabbit actually froze from the cold weather and during the pain-stricken attempt to deliver her child. The newborn rabbit was still alive, however, so they all worked on pulling it out safely without having to spare yet another life. They successfully did and helped put her back with the rest of the rabbits for more warmth and company.

In this event, the three musketeers somehow all forgot about their individual lives that they led down there, now only exercising a “disciplined presence” with the lost mom and the newborn rabbit (Dave, 2014, p.440). All that now mattered was saving the newborn, and attempting to find a solace in the lost life of the delivering mother. Here, the act of witnessing was manifested as “a radical interpenetration of life and death: to exercise a disciplined presence to violence that opens up a death that then compels a new kind of responsible life in a previously unimaginable skin” (Dave, 2014, p.442). They collectively decided to take the mother’s corpse and dispose of it in the nearest garbage pile. Malak went down and got a plastic bag that they placed the dead rabbit in, and Mostafa quickly took it away. They decided that Malak is the one who is going to share the news with Wafaa the next day. While having breakfast and waiting for Mostafa to show up, Wafaa rushed-ly asked Malak what happened with the rabbit the previous night. Malak then told Wafaa so sorrowfully yet
quickly, in a rush of eating and reaching out for a cup of water, that they all went up at night yesterday and found the mother rabbit dead.

Wafaa, again quite expectedly, teared up and began crying. She was angry at the three of them because they did not give her the chance to see the mother rabbit for one last time. She kept asking how they disposed of the body, where they left it, and how they buried it. She only wanted one last glance, one last exchange of gazes – albeit one-sidedly, one last intimate proximity. Wafaa later told me that what made her feel that horrible was a feeling of haunting responsibility, and that there must have been something that she could have done to spare this rabbit from dying. The incident took place months ago, and back then nothing worked except when she went up to the rooftop a few hours later and found the newborn beautifully and energetically growing next to all the other rabbits. Only then did she come back down more hopeful, less grieving, and more ready to forgive Malak, Mostafa, and Samir as the only culprits there is.

Since that moment onwards, I knew through Malak that Wafaa gives this newborn extra attention, love, and proximity. She spent a good deal of time feeling inadequate, irresponsible, and incompetent. In excessively loving and caring for the newborn rabbit as some kind of compensation, and as Povinelli beautifully argues in the context of those suffering lice and sores intimately entangled with their bodies and affecting their social relations, in my case the deceased mother rabbit’s flesh is already stretched along her newborn, through the laborious acts of pregnancy, holding the child, and dying-while-delivering it (Povinelli, 2014, p.46). The mother rabbit, then, in this case persisted living or endured through shedding part of her skin in lethally bringing her baby rabbit to the world while only partly departing it herself, a “strangling of life from the inside out” (Lyons, 2016,

More on these insecurities and responsibilities vis-à-vis rooftop bounties in section titled “words making worlds: khyr, rizq, satr” in chapter 5.
p.60). In this instant, then, and in line with Deborah Bird-Rose, life unfolds as an extension of itself along generational lines – through the act of birthing the newborn rabbit while dying in process. Death, on the other hand, unfolds as a return through which the body returns through processes of again birthing, but also decomposing in the ecological lands of “waste” – through disposing the mother rabbit in the garbage pile, and the little brother in the garden (Bird-Rose, 2012, p.127). Quite tellingly, Maurice Bloch argues that in the case of New Guinea’s Orokaiva, it is mortality or death standing as the primary reason for multispecies intimacies with pigs and other animals reared inside the auspices of the house, except that in their case these are left under the house rather than above on rooftops. With the spatial difference aside, because they die (too often perhaps), domesticated pigs are comparable to humans. In Bloch’s words, “pigs are like humans because pigs die….the very place where pigs live, under the house, associates them with human death since this is where corpses are placed. All pigs, however lovable, are ultimately destined to be slaughtered…a declaration and an emphasis of the presence of death in everyday life” (1992, p.11).

**The Right to Death: On Turkeys, Sheep, and Heroin (Ab)use**

Sahar can speak volumes about the Abu Aly-s of the world. A name that cut across two homes of my fieldwork, Abu Aly is the shorthand name for turkeys. It happened twice during fieldwork that my interlocutors would so casually mention the name Abu Aly while calling a turkey on the rooftop. I initially thought this was just a coincidence, or at best a personal way of naming and claiming intimacy to rooftop turkeys. Yet I once decided to probe this further, and only then did I discover that Abu Aly is the name given to all turkeys. Somehow, all turkeys are believed to instantly become vigilant, awake, and even irritable upon hearing “Abu Aly.”

It all happened on a sunny day during summer when I was sitting in the salon with Nahed, Hana, and Hooda when Sahar suddenly came rushing from the kitchen, along with a
huge pile of white fatty flesh. She came in and asked me if I ever saw this bit from the
turkey’s buttocks. I looked at her while trying to keep myself intact and not look uninterested
or disgusted. I told her that indeed no, I have never seen an uncooked turkey’s buttocks. She
quickly told me that this is one of the tenderest parts of the turkeys body/flesh and that the
tastiest ever mahshy (rice-stuffed vegetables) can only be cooked with this turkey’s meat on
top of the mahshy as it slowly cooks. She told me that they are having this exceptionally
festive meal today because of an accident that took place a few days ago, with one of the Abu
Aly-s of the rooftop as the protagonist (now-turned-meat-for-mahshy). The turkey was hit a
by one of his fellow neighbors on the rooftop, and his leg got very swollen and bruised. Sahar
so eloquently and confidently told me that turkeys have very complex personalities, and very
huge egos. Once bruised, hit, or in any way harmed by another being, a turkey gets so angry
and upset. A few days later after the tragic incident takes place, a way more tragic one
unfolds. The sick turkey then takes his own life. Sahar theorizes this as a deliberate and
conscious act of claiming power over one's life-and-death but also sense of dignity. The
turkey takes its own life because it cannot live with feeling weak, injured, or defeated.

We are here time and again encountering the dilemma of whether we as humans can
ever fully understand or interpret the feelings of a turkey (or a nonhuman other). How can we
claim this is a loss of a sense of some feeling as complex and contextual as dignity? One can
argue that sharing a lifetime with turkeys somehow does give you the authority along with
the practical intimate knowledge of understanding perhaps only some of the feelings of
fellow multispecies beings. Yet this is not entirely novel to anthropology, since hunting
likewise includes similar relational rationalizations. As Ingold puts it, “herdsman do indeed
care for their animals, but it is care of a quite different kind from that extended by hunters.

30 Egos here used to denote the sense of self-confidence, and self-centeredness rather than the Freudian
strictly human understanding of the term. In Arabic, Sahar specifically said that turkeys “’izit nafsuhum ‘alya”,
refusing to be defeated or feeling broken.
For one thing, the animals are presumed to lack the capacity to reciprocate. In the world of the hunter, animals, too, are supposed to care, to the extent of laying down their lives for humans by allowing themselves to be taken” (2000, p.74). Here then, the multispecies relation unfold as inevitably based on an intricate level of communication, with efforts of interpretation and acting upon reactions and interactions, that feed into broader decisions of when, how, and why to slaughter. Yet we still need to remember that it is the human who decodes, interprets, and acts upon these feelings, rather than vice versa. But intentionally speaking, or at least in discourse, these human actions are only made sense through the basis of a genuine and intimate interspecies intimacy.

In this unique instant or encounter, Sahar feeling for a turkey’s wounded flesh arguably helps her stay more attuned with the intricacies of the other lines of life around her. After witnessing the incident of the bruised turkey, Sahar waited for one more day then decided that most probably the turkey is about to bring its life to an end. Had this taken place, the suicidal turkey would have not been halal to be eaten since it was not slaughtered according to Sharia laws and rather died in an unknown manner. So Sahar decided, after consulting with Nahed and Eman, to slaughter the injured turkey and spare it all the trouble. She did that, and here we are, witnessing the making of an otherwise festive meal of mahshy-and-turkey’s-buttocks on a very ordinary day. Sahar did grieve the death of this turkey after the accident took place, and she managed to slaughter and later eat it – never regarding those two sentiments as in any way contradictory. Quite dystopically yet realistically and on a neighboring wavelength, upon the death of any of their animals the Nuer aptly held that “the

31 A slaughtered turkey demands a festive meal/occasion since a turkey is one of the most monetarily valuable goodies. A ready-slaughtered turkey costs an average of EGP 500-700 and so it is only used and slaughtered in spectacular occasions like the beginning of the Holy month of Ramadan or some other celebration of any kind. Yet rules are never carved in stone, accidents and irregularities always interrupt seemingly continual rhythms.
eyes and the heart are sad, but the teeth and the stomach are glad…a man’s stomach prays to God, independently of his mind, for such gifts” (Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p.26)

Povinelli speaks of an “uneven distribution of flesh” in creating worlds of life, death, and rot, Sahar likewise here saw a distribution of Abu Aly-s flesh that is otherwise growing to a specific unevenness in which the turkey brings its life to an end and somehow changing the course of events or the turkey’s biography. Ecologically speaking, a turkey’s life transitions into the other world/s through being eaten by or, to borrow Povinelli’s term, enfleshing a human or another animal. For Sahar, a turkey taking its life is a disgraceful death. By intervening in this turkey’s biography, what Sahar does is that she re-orients the turkey back to where it is expected to belong, to directly enflesh other lives through the act of eating. Had the turkey taken its own life, it would have most probably been disposed of in an everyday garbage pile, a less expected and “prestigious” death. As Bloch similarly puts it, “instead of birth and growth leading to a successful existence, it is weakening and death that lead to a successful existence….Thus, by leaving this life, it is possible to see oneself and others as part of something permanent, therefore life-transcending” (1992, p.4). An otherwise-death, outside the halal slaughtering, according to Sahar, is a disgrace for a turkey.

One can indeed here still argue that this is a very typical case of a “white man [here woman, white denoting positionality vis-à-vis power] saving brown woman [here nonhuman animal, again brown denoting positionality, marginality vis-à-vis power]” in which the human intervenes so authoritatively and claims single-handed power over a turkey’s life and bringing it to a death – as per Chagani’s argument in “Can the Postcolonial Animal Speak” (Spivak, 1994; Chagani, 2016). Yet in my ethnographic worlds, this is a very hasty and

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32 I am here particularly using biography rather than life to highlight the documentation inherent in this sharing of the turkey’s life as a series of events. In intervening in the course of events, Sahar arguably consciously re-oriented a life back on track, only to be later exceptionally highlighted and narrated as a story to me during a fieldwork encounter. Had this turkey “just slaughtered” as any other one, he would not have made it to our conversation as an unusual story to be meditated upon, or rather a model of this relationship.
limited argument. Sahar’s stance is a multilayered one, very thickly formed through living with and sharing time and a lifetime with turkeys in a very loving and ecologically nurturing lifeworld. This arguably sharpens her claim as finely tuned through tens and dozens of turkeys that she has shared a life with.

In her work on the Colombian Amazon, Kristina Lyons eloquently argues for “the right to die well”, by which she specifically points to “modes of dying in which death is allowed to decompose into life, rather than being violently ripped from place, territory, soil…and home. This is a death that decomposes into life, just as leaves spill from branch to ground, turn over and slowly rot to germinate” (Lyons, 2016, p.76). This right to death is not a given or a human privilege that comes handy with some kind of speciesism, but a purely relational matter that takes place and can only be theorized through paying closer and slower attention to modes of interspecies relations that allow these variant modes of death, and the rights to practice them, to take a forefront. At Malak’s, we stayed and spoke about one particular incident with Wafaa that left me awe-stricken. Right after she got married, Wafaa tried to convince her husband to finish her university education so that she can have a Bachelor’s but he repeatedly disagreed. She grew into depression, and tried every other way to go back to studying without her husband knowing but she continued to fail in hiding it. Her mother suggested that the only way out is to fill her time, and busy herself with something that would somehow help make it seem less boring living with her in-laws in one house and absolutely doing nothing but cooking and waiting for her husband to come back home from work.

She agreed, quite quickly, and followed the mother’s advice to begin with rearing some sheep or chicken. The rooftop idea worked so perfectly because it would inevitably fill and busy Wafaa’s schedule and life, but also help sustain a healthier, more bountiful house through/in/with which Wafaa unfolds as a successful and competent housewife taking care of
and managing to upgrade her household. Here, “filling” Wafaa’s time (in Arabic *timla wa’taha*) in this particular form of interspecies relation goes well in line with what I suggested calling “worlding temporalities”, of which I speak more extendedly in chapter 5. Briefly, worlding temporality suggests looking at time as lived through relations that follow different lines of life. She thus began with only a couple of sheep that she loved so dearly and through which she wanted to prove to herself and everyone that she can also be competent in this unique craft of raising other lives and caring for them. Yet as the Arabic proverb goes, literally though, “*wa min al-ḥob ma qatal*” (and some of love kills). Because she loved those sheep so much, she overfed them. In a few weeks, one of the sheep began systematically moaning in a very depressive tone. To Wafaa’s naivety, this only meant that she was not feeding him enough, so she fed him more and more.

A few days elapsed and she went up and found him dead. Wafaa spent the three days following his death crying and feeling like such an absolute failure. For Wafaa’s mother, this first death of the sheep was the only way through which Wafaa could learn – albeit the hard way – how to live with and care for sheep. The game was easy for the mother, though; the code was already cracked. The deceased sheep moaned not because it wanted more food but because it was growing sicker by the minute and was asking for help. The cry for help was inevitably a request by the sheep to be slaughtered. In Wafaa’s words, quoting her mom, the moaning sheep “*ṭalab il-ḥalal*” (asked for the *halal* death/slaughter) but Wafaa never picked the cue. Wafaa’s mom carnally knew by body and heart that this is clearly a practice of this right to die well, a moment in which the sheep actually asked for his death, requested it from his fellow human, but this was too lost in translation.

Coinciding with the death of the injured turkey-turned-*mahshy* was another death, regarded as somehow less important or less worthy of conversation/debate. While sitting in the salon with Nahed and Hana as Sahar was cooking lunch I heard a very unusual loud
scream, followed by an echoing chorus of finely synchronized screams. It did not seem like a
cry for help but a very well-orchestrated performance of some kind. The first thing that came
to mind was death, and that those orchestrated yalahwy-s (angry/sorrowful screams of
mourning) were mourning the death of someone in the premises. I was a bit
surprised/shocked that Nahed did not comment on those screams, as if death is yet another
eyeryday reality to which we have largely been rendered insensitive. On the passing, after I
asked, she told me that it is a young 25-year old man who passed away a couple of days ago.
Quite anthropologically, Nahed went on to explain to me how his family are originally
Ghagars – gypsies – and that they have very elaborate and strange mourning rituals. The
women of the family, along with the men, must spend the largest share of the day outside
their apartments/homes for 40 consecutive days after the death takes place. They take their
clothes and camp right in front of the house, after carpets and some plastic-like removable
walls are constructed for them to stay in. During those 40 days, the family of the deceased is
not allowed to eat any “real” food – that is, cooked meat or proteins – but rather solely
depends on “dry” foods like bread and cheese.

I was again quite mesmerized at the fact that Nahed was more keen on sharing with
me those rituals and details of mourning rather than giving me more details on the actual

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33 After I asked for more clarification, Nahed told me that their area is also inhabited by Ghagars and ‘Arabs. The Ghagars, according to Nahed, are travelers who roam the world and whose family settings are as unconventional as for example featuring the married woman travelling alone pauper-ing in Saudi Arabia while leaving her husband behind here in Egypt. She comes back with incredible loads of money while he still stays there inside the house, jobless. She is the breadwinner, but usually and eventually continues on traveling and sometimes never coming back home. The ‘Arabs, on the other hand, are those who used to live in the desert for a long time and thus have a distinct set of traditions and customs. The question that remains, though, is who is deemed to be the original inhabitant of the district? Nahed repeatedly emphasized that Ghagars are anything but the original inhabitants and that they are inevitably going to be kicked out soon.

34 I am pretty unsure why this emphasis on “dry” and uncooked food but perhaps, à la Lévi-Strauss, cooked food denotes a more social/cultural stance vis-à-vis life; as he puts it: “not only does cooking marks the transition from nature to culture, but through it and by means of it, the human state can be defined with all its attributes, even those that, like mortality, might seem to be the most unquestionably natural” (Lévi-Strauss, 1970, p.164). By relying on “dry” uncooked foods, it might be that the deceased’s family tries to discipline themselves and stay less vicarious, more ascetic, and less attached to “the social”.
deceased man. After I asked about how the man died, Nahed told me that he was a heroin addict and died after overdosing on one gloomy day of his. He was simply found dead. I was scared of the story and began to show sympathy when Sahar quickly came and intervened telling me that the young man somehow asked for his own death. He did this to himself, she said. Nobody consumes heroin without knowing it is going to bring him/her to deathbed, she said. The end is known; death, she said.

I somehow felt that the deceased man’s death was to a great extent ungrievable\(^\text{35}\). He brought himself his own demise, and we can thus blame no one but him. A bit in line with the sheep demanding its own right to a specific mode of death, we here find a man whose right to death was wrongly and irresponsibly practiced. He consumed heroin, addicted it, and overdosed his life to an end. He was somehow deemed outside the responsible ecologies of life and death. A death is then mourned, but without solely relying on death as a fact – let alone supposedly an end. Rather, death-and-by-extension-life is seen is yet one node in an unfolding broader story. The man died, but he overdosed heroin. He died, because he overdosed heroin. He made himself die, because he overdosed heroin. The ungrievable death of the man here, quite notably, goes against an expected species-based hierarchy, in which a human “male” would commonsensically be worth more than a turkey, thus rendered more grievable. This might arguably coincide with the fact that the man is genealogically a gypsy – a rather inferior group/race in Egypt – and so his worth might be compromised as a consequence. Next to being a gypsy-man, his heroin addiction casted him as doubly

\(^{35}\) This is not to be generalized to all humans (or nonhuman animals in the aforementioned case of turkeys), however. What is direly and quite apologetically missing from my brief analysis here of life and death is perhaps the theological (in most cases Islamic) questions of life, the meanings of life, but also the souls/spirits which compose life into being – thanks to my friend Alaa Attiah for shrewdly pointing this out. Maurice Bloch, for example, argues that the Orokaiva distinguish between humans and nonhuman pigs mainly since the former carry spirits while the latter can never do (1992). I lack the eloquence and knowledge needed to deal with such a question, yet I hope I can take it further in future research endeavours. How is life understood in religious, theological, terms, and how does this relate to and affect the multispecies social worlds of rooftops through which life-and-death are enacted? Does life, spirit as ruḥ in Arabic, and death necessarily differentiate between a human and a nonhuman?
ungrievable, with the wounded and ego-stricken turkey’s life worth given more attention.

And the game continues, and the code changes with every birthing and dying.

Taking Life, Giving Life: Rituals of Decomposition – Slaughter and Sacrifice

The Chicken and the Child

“Hussein: ya’any kān ḍarury firākh?
Zeinab: Ḥiyh, ūmā Ahlam titnalīyys bi-īṭ? Dah il-‘ayiyyl yinzil min hina nuḥūṭ maṭraḥuh farkha min hina tīnīd qalbaḥa” (Farag & Salem, 1974).

With the change of codes of life (de)composing into other lives, how does the transition take place? The above opening quote, taken from a well-known Egyptian film called Al-hafyd narrates just one form of this transition, of one life decomposing/giving way to another. It is not just Al-hafyd that speaks to this particular ritual of the rather dense and intense relationship between chicken and women during their postpartum bleeding period, as this turns out to be more common than just a brilliant film’s hooking script. During my long inspiring chat with Um Muhammed, Wafaa’s neighbor, in Alexandria, she told me about how grateful she is for Warda, her daughter-in-law for being so obedient in spite of her troubling and sickening pregnancy. I very casually asked Warda when she is supposed to deliver the baby and she told me it should happen in just one month or so. Um Muhammed then very excitedly looked at both of us and said that her chicken is ready whenever she is. She explained that it is one of the rituals of delivery that whenever a mother delivers a child she must be fed with one full chicken, all on her own. The one chicken is just a start, the kicking

36 In Arabic: “حسين: يعني كان ضروري فرخ؟ زينب: اهيه، أومال أحلام تتنفس بابه؟ ده العيل ينزل من هنا نح مطروحه فرحة من هنا تسدق قلبها”. In this scene, the newly delivering woman’s mother is discussing with her husband the necessity of having chicken in a celebratory banquet for the new child. The mother explains that the chicken is a must, for otherwise how can the freshly delivering mom’s heart be held strongly in place?

37 More than just a script, however, the same saying seems to be a widely used colloquial Arabic idiom. The idiom complicates the ritual a bit further, though, since it includes a central gendered element, with a slight change in the actual food offered to the nafasah woman; “lamma qalaly walad isthahad dahray wi gabuly il-byd mqashhar wi ‘alyh il-samm maraq, lamma qalaly binayyah il-ḥyṭan mālit ‘alayyah wi gabuly il-byd bi qishruh wi bidāl il-samm mayyah” (when they told me [I delivered] a boy, my back was strengthened and they got me peeled eggs soaked in gee, when they told me [I delivered] a girl, the walls encroached on me and they got me unpeeled eggs with water instead of gee)
off of a dietary plan that majorly depends on boiled chicken for nafasah women – those in their postpartum bleeding phase.

It must be chicken, one full chicken at least for the just-delivered-mother. We went on that tangent (are there ever really tangents in fieldwork?) then Um Muhammed quickly told me that she has been growing and feeding one specific chicken just for Warda’s delivery. She knows which chicken is going to be slaughtered for that instant, for strengthening Warda, and the plan of growing it fit and nutritious thus unfolds accordingly. The same ritual continued to echo across my fieldwork encounters around Cairo and – briefly – Alexandria. In one of our conversations over lunch, while I confessed to Malak how much I love chicken and just chicken, she told me how chicken became way dearer to her after she conceived Salma as since then she was mainly fed chicken, boiled chicken with rice or freshly baked bread. On repeat since day zero of delivery till Salma was almost a month old. The delivery was very difficult, took almost 14 hours, and she was only 22 back then. Wafaa asked her to regard the mandatory plain boiled chicken course as medication, healing/strengthening her after the exhausting and draining delivery.

Fieldwork and the film’s script/idiom consistently laid bare the contours of a ritual in which the life of chicken decomposes/gives way to sustaining the life of a freshly delivering woman – and by extension, arguably, her child. Maurice Bloch speaks of rituals as transformations “of the material processes of life in plants and animals as well as humans”, thus usually a multispecies dialectic with a pretext of “one species provides food for another” (1992, p.4). This is most eloquently expressed through the loss, re-generation, and decomposition of vitality as a fundamental force through which life is sustained. Put differently,

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38 Anthropologically speaking, this phase of a labouring mother seems to be given extra attention – especially when it comes to food. In Amazonian villages, for example, whenever a woman enters into labour, the father goes hunting, not only to secure good food for the mother but also to pick a name of the expected child. The hunted – and eaten – animal determines the child’s name (De Castro, 1992, p.153).
as Lyons eloquently suggests, “the capacity to make live rests on the necessity to make die” (Lyons, 2016, p.61). In order for the mother to live, and again by extension make live and sustain the life of a growing child demanding food, some chickens need to die. Chickens here, then, assume a role that transcends its mere economic and nutritional attributes. As Evans-Pritchard rightly argued, with the Nuer’s cattle though, “this obsession…is due not only to the great economic value of cattle but also to the fact that they are links in numerous social relationships” (1940, p.19). Even if/when Nahed or Wafaa speak of their love to their chickens and the sustained care-world in which they both relationally unfold, the instant of the coming of life of their literal offspring – a human grandchild – marks the instant of the chicken’s life assumes a socially pivotal role, ritually decomposing into the child’s most reductively through his mother’s breast.

Arguably, what ritual does here is that it systematizes, regulates, organizes, and somehow normalizes the repeated patterned act of slaughtering chickens for newly delivering women. More interestingly, ritual here helps further entangle chicken as multispecies collaborators in strengthening social ties. In Hugh-Jones’ beautiful words, “ritual is essentially the art of the possible” (cited in De Castro, 1992, p.269). To dig deeper into this, ritual also plays on our conceptions of time. In the particular example of the chicken and the child now at hand, for instance, the ritualization of the act of slaughtering chicken upon women’s delivery brings together the sustained long duration of the raising of the chicken (with the pregnant woman in mind), the immediate moment of delivery, along with the unfolding days/weeks/months of the healthy growth of the mother and child – as neither discontinuous nor contradictory in any way. As Bloch rightly puts it, “in the world of ritual, existence is literally transcendent; it is a world ‘on the other side’” (1992, p.20). In blurring the boundaries between life and death, and through regarding the latter as anything but a finality or an end, ritual here re-introduces time to also include culture’s time/clock as a more
extended and less truncated temporality, in featuring the continuities of life histories, growth trajectories, and rites of passage of the coming of age and generations of an extended family.

To Hold or Not Hold the Knife

On one day in my early days of fieldwork (July 2017), mama told me that Karima, who helps clean my aunt’s house, knows someone who can help us with my rooftop exploration. Karima’s mother-in-law Nabila used to have a thriving rooftop but quitted a couple of months ago. She used to love her animals so incredibly, but she never slaughtered them herself. I got her mobile number and called her once, but we failed to meet as she said she did not want to talk about it anymore. The story briefly is that, after her son got married to Karima, Nabila had to do the slaughtering herself. After getting the īthn, she tried slaughtering a couple of ducks a number of times but failed to do so. After a few weeks, she decided to quit rooftopping altogether. She told me that when she came face to face with the bluntness of holding a knife and cutting the throat of her dear animals, she felt this was a cruel act of betrayal – in her words, khiyanah. She could not keep the animals and not end up eating them, and still could not commit the act of slaughtering herself. For Nabila, it was either love or cutting throat – nothing in between.

Rituals proliferate into more rituals, with our questions thus proliferating into further questions, sharper ones, or sometimes only shadows of answers. Malak once passingly told me that Wafaa never slaughters any rooftop animals. It only happened once; there was nobody at home except her and she had to slaughter a chicken to prepare the meal for that day’s banquet. She went up, got the sharp knife ready, and began positioning the chicken properly so that it can be slaughtered with minimal pain. Hours elapsed and Malak came back home and did not find Wafaa so she got a bit worried although she knew she was definitely on the rooftop. She went up after a few hours to find Wafaa unconsciously lying on the ground, and the chicken half slaughtered with the knife in the middle of her neck. Malak quickly called Mostafa who rushed back from his work and they both helped take Wafaa downstairs when she later came back to consciousness and narrated what happened.

39 To cut down the suspense, the chicken was safely slaughtered right afterwards when Mostafa came and Malak cooked it a few days afterwards.
Wafaa continued to try to slaughter it in spite of herself, and repeatedly failed. On that day, she was alone in the house and needed to have a chicken slaughtered to be cooked and prepared for the meal but her heart would not let her do it even in the case of emergency. I asked Malak why this is the case and she told me that Wafaa has a “soft” heart or a weak one⁴⁰, she cannot stand physically slaughtering an animal herself. This then prompted the more general question of who gets to hold the knife anyways? But also how? Malak so eloquently told me of what is called “il-īthn” which is the permission to slaughter a nonhuman animal. The permission is given to any adult after she/he is deemed strong enough and knowledgeable enough – in the how-s of Sharia slaughtering rules – to take up that responsibility. The person who takes the permission, then, needs to be an adult, a knowledgeable one when it comes to slaughtering and Sharia, but also a responsible one for not putting these lives in danger nor putting them in pain in the process – slaughtering in Sharia should take place quickly, and with minimal pain⁴¹.

That said, however, neither Wafaa nor Malak slaughter. Technically, however, and for the practical reasons of Wafaa being the female head of the household but also the sole responsible person for the rooftop, her husband granted her the īthn so that she can keep trying and perhaps once succeed. Rather beautifully, Maurice Bloch adds in speaking of rituals not as just another juncture of an ever-unfolding everyday, but rather as “familiar, constructed, dramatic re-presentations of life which attempt to escape an inescapable world” (1992, p.23). Goats, chickens, rabbits, and ducks repeatedly have to be killed, and someone

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⁴⁰ In Arabic, “qalbaha da’yf”

⁴¹ The intricacies and specificities of Islamic Sharia when it comes to slaughtering (but also dealing with/treating) nonhuman animals are spelled out in both Quran and Hadiths, with details ranging from prohibiting the slaughtering of an animal in front of another to similarly prohibiting sharpening the blade next to the to-be-slaughtered animals. For more details on how Islam empathetically regulates slaughtering, see Khan, Guo, Raza, Rahman, Ayaz, Linsen, 2018.
has to do the slaughtering, an inescapable state of rooftops, with ritual as the only plausible name of the game.

In the homes/worlds of Wafaa, Safaa, and Nahed, it was the male husband who granted the īthn to each of the women. I asked how specifically does the ritual of permitting slaughtering take place, and the three women invariably told me that it is just a direct immediate act of enunciating the word “‘thantilik” – in English, I permit you – to make it legal and religiously lawful. This goes for both women and men, and it is also not just men who can give the īthn. I asked Um Muhammed who granted her the īthn and she told me it was her mother very very long ago when Um Muhammed began growing up and hitting puberty. She added that the person who grants permission to slaughter needs to be someone old enough and knowledgeable enough with not just the know-how of slaughtering but also the hearts of people to be able to expect who has the capability to take up the responsibility and tolerate the sight of blood along with bringing a life to a partial end.\(^{42}\)

In some cases, especially if the person seeking an īthn is not yet married, it is the mother who bears best witness to the workings of the person’s personality, heart, strength, etc. In the case of marriage, or post-marital rooftop affairs, however, the case is a bit different. The mother is arguably no longer the closest person to the woman – while cases may indeed vary. It then becomes the husband who spends most time and experiences closeness/intimacy with the woman and can thus somehow practice this power of giving

\(^{42}\) Partial here is particularly inspired by the genealogy of Deborah Bird-Rose and Val Plumwood (later Thom Van Dooren too) and their theorizations on death in particular. As Van Dooren puts so briefly, “they remind us that death must be thought about not as a simple ending, but as completely central to the ongoing life of multispecies communities, in which we are all ultimately food for one another” (Van Dooren, 2014, p.48). In the words of Bird-Rose herself, “life, therefore, is an extension of itself into new generations and new species. And from an ecological point of view, death is a return. The body returns to bacteria, and bacteria returns the body to the living earth...Life in this broader context is a ‘network of cross-kingdom alliances’” (Bird-Rose, 2012, p.127). Plumwood, on a nearby wavelength, argues that “life is seen in circulation and where mortuary practices might affirm death as an opportunity for others in the ecological community” (Plumwood, 2008, p.323)
permission to slaughtering as he arguably knows if his wife would be able to take it up or not. What matters here, then, is the generational act of passing down īthn. A person granting an īthn must him/herself have it. Even if the person is no longer practicing slaughtering as frequently, or living on the rooftop for a long duration, the īthn can still be generationally passed down a bit akin to an inheritance.

In the case of Zahra, in the only Christian household I encountered during fieldwork, the makings of īthn operate quite differently. Zahra told me that it is only Michael and herself who have the īthn to slaughter. Zahra and Michael both told me once that they must go to the Church to seek the īthn since nobody, no matter how old or experienced, can grant it except a Priest well-versed in the Coptic Orthodox laws and rules of slaughtering. Here then, we have a male religious authority as the sole mediator for īthn. The family is no longer an agent here, no matter how intimate or close the bond is. When seeking īthn, Zahra told me that the Priest asked her to recite/repeat after him some relevant verses while then reminding her of the rules of religiously lawful slaughtering – when, how, why, etc. and the multispecies cosmology in the Coptic Orthodox tradition\textsuperscript{43}. She then immediately left and was ready to begin slaughtering animals when needed. That said, however, this is still only one household and so cannot ever be generalized to say anything about the “Christian modalities of īthn-giving”. Perhaps there are traditions/cases which permit the senior members of the family to play a more pivotal role in processes of granting īthn – and I wholeheartedly admit my ignorance in that.

Here, one may think of these conversations of rituals as a commentary on or theorization of the social. In other words, how does the social unfold vis-à-vis the processes of seeking īthn through a Priest, a husband, or a mother? What is the social made of if we pay

\textsuperscript{43} This indeed deserves a more elaborate meditation and research which I now, given time and space restriction, regretfully lack.
closer attention to those rites of passage taking a pregnant woman out of pregnancy and right into postpartum bleeding? In using the term lifeworld over merely life, Michael Jackson theorizes the social as a “potential space”, replete with ambiguities, uncertainties, and struggle. This conception of the social highlights the centrality of relations over fixed already-existing entities; “a space in which human intentions, desires, or dispositions are realized in relation to many possible others, objects, and goals” (Jackson, 2013, p.164). A chicken is thus sometimes raised with the open intention of being cared for and nurtured until it gives way to more chicken then perhaps eaten, or raised with a deliberate well-planned intention of being slaughtered upon the delivery of a newest member of the lineage. In both trajectories, the social is the – latent – potential inherent in all these multispecies relations; a chicken might be slaughtered upon delivery, she might also die before that, she might be eaten in a banquet, cooked over with some mahshy, or cooked so immediately upon the surprise visit of some distant family member44. Playing further on these inherent ambiguities and potentialities, the question then becomes: what comes after holding the knife?

Post-Knife Rationalizations: Sacrifice

This was an important feast repeated twice during fieldwork. I stepped into Safaa’s house, as usual a bit around noon, to find her looking exceptionally busy. I ask what is it and she tells me it is yet another day of a nadr45 (a vow) that her husband promised. She never told me what the vow was for, and never narrated the behind-the-scenes, but what I witnessed in both instants was a very busy Safaa, bowls and huge pots of fattah (Egyptian dish of cooked rice, tomato sauce, boiled-and-fried Baladi bread, and meat chunks on top) going out of the house to the warsha (car-mechanics workshop) to feed people, an exceptional vibrancy

44 It is not all that open, however. Do we ever, as humans, conceive of ourselves as potentially open to be ecologically killed? Eaten? This remains open, perhaps for a further meditation later in the thesis.
45 In Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), vow is written as nathr whereas in colloquial everyday usage it is spoken nadr. Out of fidelity and familiarity, I used the colloquial version since this is what my interlocutors always used.
around the house featuring young men helping transport the food, neighbors coming to check
that everything is going alright and if Safaa needs any help, and a predominant smell of garlic
and boiled meat – the former I love, the latter I wholeheartedly hate. As always, I stayed there
in the living room with Noor and Jana studying social studies and dictation, or watching the
latest Egyptian series on TV, or frankly both.

When this first happened, Safaa told me that Nagy has vowed that he was going to
slaughter two goats if a particular work deal goes well. The vow as *nadr* in Arabic is done
with God or in the Christian tradition sometimes with a Saint, but never with any people.
When the deal worked out well, Nagy had to go up on the rooftop on that same day, after
leaving work exceptionally early, and slaughter the two goats as vowed, costing him indeed a
considerable load of money. The vow was not just to slaughter, but to cook the meat properly
in a meal and distribute all of it to the needy around the neighborhood. Neither Safaa nor
Nagy nor anyone of the household can eat this meat, because Nagy’s vow specified that all
the meat is to be given away to those who cannot afford it. The act of slaughtering, then,
becomes quite different because Nagy slaughters the goats for God and not for himself\(^\text{46}\). In
other words, the slaughtering here taking the shape of sacrifice aims at establishing or
strengthening a “contact with the divine”, a perfect enunciation of crossing the profane world
of work and deals to the sacred world of God, His generosity, and our gratefulness (Bloch,
1992, p.23). Nagy then, and Safaa, do not feel that same burn of mourning in the case of the
loss of a goat or two – as will later be discussed – or the slaughtering of some goats for
banquets for example. In the case of sacrifice in *nadr*, the goats were slaughtered to satisfy
God’s order and to keep one’s oath with God, and so the goats are really winning at that for
a) meeting God, but also b) having their lives decomposed into plenty of lives craving meat

\(^{46}\) In this particular instant, as the novelist J.M Coetzee profoundly puts it, sacrifice might rightly be regarded as
an “elaborate ritual of blame-shifting” in which it was indeed God and not Nagy or any other human for whom
this animal was sacrificed and life decomposed into another (Coetzee, 1999, p.41)
but rarely affording it. The predominant sentiment is rather that of celebrating a strengthened bond with God, a fulfilled vow, and a ritual that keeps one religious, but also socially prestigious.

What we have here in the instants of _nadr_ are not mega-occasions sacrifices, like those taking place during _il-Adha_ feast for example or an extraordinary moment of a woman delivering a new child or someone passing away. Rather, the sacrifice here takes place as part of the everyday, in fact even as weaving the very everyday into being, soaked in the polyphony of work-relations, work deals, conversations with God, and vows, thereby crafting the very fabric of Nagy’s household reputation as a generous home, Nagy as a giver, Safaa as a hardworking woman, and the broader family as a graceful one. It is arguably the ordinariness, but also the repetition, of this particular act of sacrifice that makes it so central to the making of the subjects, homes, but also and yet again the multispecies attachments at the heart of all of these moments.

_Nadr_ here, however, operates on broader and more socially complex grounds than other sacrifice rituals/cosmologies. Maintaining a relationship with the divine is only one part of _nadr_, yet what is also consequential in this act is how _nadr_ plays out as an effort of redistribution. This takes place through the strict implementation of the meat having to entirely be distributed among those who cannot afford it otherwise. This yet again cogently pulls together the “sacred” and “profane” worlds starring every debate on ritual theory (Bell, 2009, p.91). On one hand, it is a redistribution of affinity and a strengthening bond with God by making it clear that He is always the first and foremost target of _nadr_, yet on the other more worldly hand it is about a corporeal redistribution of flesh/wealth through which one

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47 As Michael Jackson shows in the case of the Kuranko, the body of the sacrificial animal can sometimes be made “a surrogate for the social body”. The distribution of the flesh – unevenly with the family eating nothing of the flesh and the ‘social’ eating it all up – becomes an “expression of social solidarity and untroubled intersubjectivity” (Jackson, 1998, p.70).
gets to ascend in social reputation and prestige, but also warding off the infamous evil eye in a vicinity of mostly impoverished neighbors. The loss of the goats slaughtered for nadr is also a clear-cut economic loss, sacrificed or given meaning also through the social act of preventing a potentially more consequential loss of (other) assets if an evil eye attacks the household. Here, then, the sacrifice to God is an appreciation of His gifts and blessings – as will be later elaborated in chapter five – but also a prayer to protect the household, taking place through a ritualistic economically substantial exchange.

When I first visited Michael and Zahra I asked about the most recent slaughter they had. Zahra then told me that this was not so recent because they have been now fasting for a long while. Their fasting entailed eating no meat, and following a strict vegan diet as per the Coptic Orthodox tradition. Contrary to all the Muslim households that I have encountered, here we have a full abstaining from meat consumption. Zahra told me that during fasting they mostly just consume eggs to feed their little children who have not yet begun fasting. They very rarely slaughter any chicken or goats, if at all, except when really needed. This then provides yet another example of a proliferating, varied, multilayered temporality in which time unfolds vis-à-vis life cycles and religious practices that theorize the world – but also life and death – quite differently, yet another example of “worlding temporalities”, in which time is more carnally attached to multiple lines of life, fleshy relations, and fleshy temporalities that depend on the growth and proliferation of other nonhuman beings of the rooftop.

At this point, I sensed the coming of a ritual to again help “reset culture’s time” so I asked if they for example gift some of the rooftop goodies to family relatives or friends for example (Povinelli, 2006, p.122). Michael quickly explained to me that like “us Muslims” during il-Adha feast, Christians also have rituals of sacrifice. Especially during fasting periods, Michael told me that they usually pay visits to one central monastery in which they pray and speak with the Priest but also take with them a few goats and perhaps some
chickens/pigeons/ducks/whatever is reared on rooftop to be sacrificed. As donors, however, Michael and his family never witness these sacrificed animals slaughtered. The life-and-death axes here thus do not stay stagnant during fasting, even if we initially think of fasting as absolute abstinence from holding the knife or slaughtering for that purpose. The knife is held, though not directly theirs.

**Liv(ing), L(y)ing, D(ying): Conclusion**

“No life is sufficient unto itself. A person is singular only in the sense in which astronomers use the term: a relative point in space and time where invisible forces become fleetingly visible. Our lives belong to others as well as to ourselves. Just as the stars at night are set in imperceptible galaxies, so our lives flicker and fail in the dark streams of history, fate, and genealogy...second is our existence in the hearts and minds of others – a life that precedes the moment of our birth and extends beyond our death for as long as we are remembered” (Morton, 2016, p.137).

As Timothy Morton brilliantly illustrates through his astrology-inspired analogy, but also and more concretely through the multispecies-infused lives of Wafaa, Zahra, Safaa, Michael, and Um Muhammed, life and death are wholeheartedly collaborative projects, or rather strategies of surviving, carrying on, and lying/laying bare in a world of utter fragility and impermanence. These dual forces, as illustrated through these snippets from ever flowing lives, are continually made and re-made through a creative play of rituals, practices, and everyday encounters with rabbits, goats, chickens, and children. This can never mean that life and death are never enunciated as antonyms, for a bit disagreeing-ly with Kristin Lyons, my interlocutors did sometimes speak of life and death as bifurcated binaries – however connected in a myriad ways (Lyons, 2016, p.65). What anthropology teaches us, though, is to constantly explore the discontinuities and inconsistencies between what we say and what we do – how we abstractly theorize the world versus how we bring theory to everyday practices that might sometimes prove otherwise or at least a more layered, less uniform version of the same-wise.
Rather than beginning with abstractions, this chapter tried to begin with the flesh of home and the very multispecies fabric of its making\textsuperscript{48}. I attempted to trace and theorize life and death from and through the everyday acts of slaughtering, mourning, and sacrifice through which “the creation of lifeworlds... [becomes]...a key way in which autology, genealogy, and their intimacies are felt, known, and expressed.” (Povinelli, 2006, p.8). The closer look into the everyday allows us to appreciate life-and-death in the very minutiae of corners of rooftops; to “see the world in a grain of sand, and heaven in a wild flower”, as William Blake timelessly advises (quoted in Jackson, 2013, p.277)\textsuperscript{49}. What I tried to argue throughout this chapter is that theorizations on life-and-death can only practically be made through following bodies, fleshes, selves, and ecologies through which these concepts are enacted, made, and circulated.

Life and death thus unfold as carnal processes of giving life, lying life, and dying through the exchange and decomposition of flesh and the endless ways in which beings are carried on beyond physical (im)permanence; in short, as “the ability to visit many worlds” (de la Cadena, 2015, p.xxiii). Along with living and dying is lying: lying with a goat, a sick rabbit, a poisoned dog, a newborn child, a pregnant woman, or an openness in which all these inhabit the world as beings but also as potentials – whether realized or not. My interest in this chapter has been in the way my interlocutors banal-y sink themselves right into the very fleshed realities of their conditions, perhaps seeking to change them but only through using and reusing all that they are ever offered. As Lyons yet again beautifully reminds us of what

\textsuperscript{48} I use fabric here quite consciously, as inspired by Tim Ingold’s treatise on life “not as a fan of dotted lines – as in Darwin’s diagram – but as a manifold woven from the countless threads spun by beings of all sorts, both human and nonhuman, as they find their ways through the tangle of relationships in which they are enmeshed” (Ingold, 2007, p.3). This was later also built on by Thom Van Dooren to regard similar efforts as attempts to “weave tales that add flesh to the bones of the dead and dying, that give them some vitality, presence, perhaps ‘thickness’ on the page and in the minds and lives of readers” (Van Dooren, 2014, p.8)

\textsuperscript{49} This deserves further exploration, but Jackson genealogically relates Blake’s quote to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of logos endiathetos as one of “carnality, emotionality, play, excess, and ecstasy that reason does not completely govern yet mediates everything we do, say, or think” (Jackson, 2013, p.277)
her brilliant work does, by asking “what these processes of decomposition and renewal may
tell us about trees, soils, plants, seeds, insects, chickens, microbes, and farmers – strive to
collectively change the conditions of their lives. They do so not by transcending these
conditions, but rather by sinking into them, slowly turning them over, aerating, and breathing
in new life that also potentiates different possibilities for and relations to death” (Lyons,
2016, p.65). In sinking and sinking, we are only left with the question of what/who sinks?
How can we now theorize what the relations unfold into? We thus move with a heavy
baggage of life-and-death, to explore questions of making of subjects, thus also worlds,
through everyday acts of multispecies collaborations. How do we relate to nonhuman rooftop
beings, but also what do these relations make of/to us and our broader worlds?
Interlude: Gastronomic Composts: Shitting, Macaruna Béchamel, & Firakh Panne

Raised in a hygienically disciplined household with a medical doctor-father, I was taught to never shit outside home except in real emergencies. Mama always had disposable plastic toilet seats in case I really needed to use the toilet when we are away from home. Quite similarly, and digestively, I was raised to never eat outside home, for how can we know how clean are other homes? Even in the old nursery days when we had just a red sauce pasta meal during the day, my parents always advised me not to eat it for hygienic precautions. Mama used to send with me a cheddar cheese sandwich, toasted in shamy bread. And ever since that moment, sandwich cheddar sayih (melted) fil/toaster melted as a family tradition - along with the fantasy of the nursery’s red sauce pasta that I was never allowed to taste. 

You see, fieldwork makes its way to childhood - and childhood likewise makes its way to fieldwork. If I were to provide a culinary inventory of fieldwork, this would largely be composed of deals and meals of macaruna béchamel (thick-white sauce baked penne pasta with minced meat) and firakh panne (fried chicken breasts). In accompanying me to every “first field visit” in each of my fieldwork homes, mama would always share a long rant on how tiring I am when it comes to food, and how much of a horribly picky and inconsistent eater I am. This was partly true (I am a horribly inconsistent, son-of-a-medical-doctor-who-eats-very-few-foods-from-the-world’s-kitchen) but also partly a strategic technique from mama’s side to spare my interlocutors the burden of cooking a meal for me each time I visit. She told them that Noha only eats chicken breasts, and eats nothing but pasta and rice. Gradually, it became more of a fieldwork manual/menu-for-noha to cook pasta and chicken breasts. And so, the forever-fanstactical red sauce pasta slowly yet surely made its way to my belly consistently and almost weekly for nine months.

My close friends and family who are aware of my food-complex-ridden-and-driven upbringing continued to ask me whether I ate these meals in/of fieldwork and was not repelled or disgusted. I was never disgusted of fieldwork meals. On the contrary, this was almost my only and first justified experiment to eat beyond the safety hygienic-s of the home. “I was in fieldwork and couldn’t turn them down -
saying no to your interlocutors’ hospitality is a no no in anthropology ya mama/baba”, I told them. It was a chance to eat and try and experiment with new foods, culinary routines, cuisines, and food worlds. And it was always amusing and delighting, even during the recurrent moments of taking out a hair from the macaruna béchamel or feeling the firakh panne a bit uncooked and taking too long to be fully chewed. It is a (gastronomic) coming of age, I guess.

And gradually, I was carnally and metaphorically made into macaruna béchamel and firakh panne. Nahed told me that whenever Hooa wakes up and finds his mama in the kitchen cooking macaruna béchamel he knows that the duktura (me? A doctor?) is visiting today. I ate, ate, and ate, but never brought myself to shit there. It usually happened that the meal is served right before I leave so I eat then pack and leave back home. So I usually didn’t get the urge to shit while I am there. And whenever it did, I held it till I go back home. I never used any of my interlocutors’ bathrooms except to wash my hands, and this says something about some of the boundaries, habits, upbringing complexes that we carry with us quite consciously or otherwise.

The intensely oily, starchy, carbohydrate-y fieldwork meal continued to compost my belly-being consistently for several months. It comes with a certain weightness, coupled with a pressing desire to unbelt oneself and run to sleep. It comes with a comfort, with a pinch of so irresistible laziness burdening even the typing of fieldnotes. It comes with a density and intensity of/in the belly throughout the ride back home. A bloated, three-month pregnant belly protruding from my pants in the metro back home is a fieldwork classic. I arrive home, drop my bag, wear my pajamas, and run to the bathroom, shitting, another fieldwork classic. And it goes on and on, compositions and decompositions of shitting, fieldworking, and eating my way through.
Figure 3: Nahed’s rooftop, photograph taken by the author
IV. Pulsating Collaborations to/of Resilience: Compositions of Bellies, Attachments, and Selves

Astonishment, Wislawa Szymborska – 1972

Why after all this one and not the rest?
Why this specific self, not in a nest,
But a house? Sewn up not in scales, but skin?
Not topped off by a leaf, but by a face?
Why on earth now, on Tuesday of all days,
And why on earth, pinned down by this star’s pin?
What made me fill myself with me so squarely?
Why am I staring now into the dark
And muttering this unending monologue
Just like the growling thing we call a dog?
Vignette B: Incubating Men

Yet another sunny day at Nahed’s. We sat there as it approached sunset, while drinking coffee, speaking about chicken, and the prospects of new recipes for eggs. Nahed navigated on a long, seemingly amusing, silence. She came back in a few minutes and with such unparalleled storytelling talent, Nahed began narrating:

“About ten years ago, I used to go on frequent visits to downtown Cairo for shopping. This was my chance to see the world as it unfolds, with people going about their lives, off and unto their work, mothers hurryingly pulling their children back from school, couples eating ice cream and enjoying a quick chat and an exchange of romantic gazes in the absence of families. And then, it was me and Mohsen once passing by an area in which gigantic stoves and heaters are used. This is usually where ful (fava beans) is prepared in large quantities to be later distributed and sold in various districts. We saw an incredible amount of eggs being transported inside, in huge quantities. I had no clue what this might be. I asked Mohsen and he told me that this is where men incubate eggs. I was shocked and thought he was joking, till I found hordes of sweaty young adolescent men in galabiyyas coming out and running out of this egg-ful place. He told me that some business mogul specializing in selling chicks and chickens has bought this place and filled it with heaters, and rents jobless rural young men to come and incubate the eggs. The eggs are left there under a thick warm sheet of cloth, over the heaters, and then these young men come and squat over the eggs for a few hours per day – in shifts – for two weeks or so until the eggs hatch. To my utmost surprise, it does work and the eggs do hatch quicker and without the need of actual mother chickens – who by that time are already being sold on the market. Needless to say, these young rural men are paid so poorly for such a laborious and unusual job.”

For a moment, I could not believe what Nahed shared. My anthropological sensibilities rushed quicker than anything else and asked if this man is still alive, if this practice is still happening, or if I can follow this in any way. Nahed and Eman assured me that the man quitted this years ago and nobody knows anything about him. These heaters now are only used to cook ful and nothing more. The eggs business is no longer there. I was still shocked, young rural men incubating eggs. Not women, men. Not chicken, humans. A rather strange unfolding of intimacy. Quite unexpected, very unfamiliar. A human-egg violently forced collaboration to hatching. What a world?

Fieldnotes, July 29, 2017

With eggs and incubating men in the background, this chapter begins by, pays tribute to, and is inspired by Ivan Illich’s remarkable definition of anthropology as a “tool for conviviality” (quoted in Jackson, 1998, p.193). Further guided by Haraway’s recognition of
anthropology as the study of “relations with relations, that puts relations at risk with other relations, from unexpected other worlds”, I hereby ask what happens when two beings, souls, bodies, worlds come together (Haraway, 2016, p.12)? The above vignette opens up the world of a specific relation-ship, a distinctive, unusual, unfamiliar one to most of our sensibilities. I regard this as an example of a collaboration, bringing together young men and eggs to each in the process be different; the men as perhaps close to mother-chickens, and the eggs as hatching chicks. Yet this is far from a romantic image, as I still need to recognize how uncanny, cruel, and un-dignifying this forced collaboration is. This took place in an overarching aggressive capitalist context, in which the mighty businessman was exploiting young rural men for almost no money in an absolutely inhumane task that is both disgraceful for the men but also denying of the eggs their very basic right of a motherly chicken incubation. With this rather horrid background in mind, I again ask: what came of the young men, the hatching eggs, and the growing chicks through and after this enforced warming-though-heart-wrenching intimacy? The ethnographic examples to follow are hopefully less dark, gruesome, and depressing, yet echoing a parallel provoking line of thought.

This smoothly, or not so much so, opens this chapter as an inquiry into collaborations, makings, and projects of relations that take us elsewhere – or at least force us to imagine one. By incubating and picking on these collaborations, I hope we can more closely drop into the making of subjects/subjectivities. Collaborations always entail “we-s” that work through and make these into being; I here thus ask who are these “we-s” that come to being through these collaborations, but also what are these collaborations to begin with, and how are they made and sustained along multispecies lines? What are some of the recipes of relating to others that fieldwork teaches us? In her brilliant treatise on ecologies-as/of-practice, Marisol de la Cadena defines collaborations as “compositions emerging from multiple projects…once started, the collaborative process takes on a life of its own, summoning up new possibilities,
each of which creates new knots of translations – all with their collaborative frictions and concomitant new productions” (de la Cadena, 2015, p.226). I thus here try to peer into some of these multiple projects in which multiple species collaborate for a reason or another; I try to regard these multispecies projects as “alternative regularities” – a term I later mention again in chapter five – that unfold through the everyday practices of growing intimate, attaching, relating, loving, disciplining, and eating (Povinelli, 2006, p.85).

In speaking of attachments, love, discipline, and other forces of the world, I am here yet again taking a very ethnographic stance vis-à-vis these concepts and forces. In this regard, this chapter hopes to unfold as a kaleidoscopic collaborative biography of beings, relations, intimacies, and worldviews. In line with Elizabeth Povinelli, “love, intimacy, and sexuality are not about desire, pleasure, or sex per se, but about things like geography, history, culpability, [biography], and obligation; the extraction of wealth and the distribution of life and death; hope and despair; and the seemingly self-evident fact and value of freedom.” (Povinelli, 2006, p.10). I thus begin with exploring the “carnality” of these multispecies collaborations and I follow these processes of attachment, disciplining, eating, and waiting/making-with and explore the subjectivities made during and as those processes come to being – in short, how does one become a subject in the midst of these carnal attachments and relations (Povinelli, 2006, p.88)?

“Cherchez la Vache”$^{50}$, or Interspecies Ingredients Itinerary: Love, Nurturance, and a Pinch of Aspirin

Wafaa once asked me when I normally have breakfast, and when I said I rarely do she immediately asked me if mama knows this, and I nodded in embarrassment while recognizing

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$^{50}$ Pun/proverb so gratefully borrowed from Evans-Pritchard who in describing the Nuer’s intimacy with their cattle so eloquently coined cherchez la vache as “the best advice that can be given to those who desire to understand Nuer behaviour” (1940, p.16). With all the differences between the two modes of interspecies livelihoods aside, this particular section tries to explore the subtleties and codes of collaborative relating more
mama’s continual efforts to change this bad habit of mine. Wafaa then told me that breakfast here is a sacred corner of life – everyone must be breakfast-ed, including the rooftop inhabitants. Malak quickly jumped into the conversation, saying that Wafaa serves breakfast to her rooftop “children” – wiladha in Arabic as she puts it – even before preparing her actual breakfast or her husband’s. She wakes up a bit after sunrise, cuts down the leftover vegetables, prepares all the existing food for her nonhuman children, and rushes up to feed and water them, stays for a bit less than an hour then goes back down to fix her own breakfast and that of her family. Malak teasingly told me that Wafaa cares for her rooftop children more than she cares about her own biological human children or her granddaughter Salma. She is always up there first, feeding them first, while everyone and everything else comes next. Maurice Bloch, on a neighboring wavelength, speaks of multispecies relations as expressed in kinship terms, in which little piglets are usually regarded as children. He attributes this mainly to the fact that these pigs are nurtured and reared inside – or rather in his case under – the houses, thus in a very close proximity to the family while sometimes even sharing the same food. This proximity engenders striking parallels, including for example a similarity between the newborn animals’ voices and that of newborn human babies – an experience that Malak repeatedly pointed out while speaking of Salma’s first days with her weak voice closer to a rabbit than a human (Bloch, 1992, p.11).

Wafaa was so proud as Malak told me that, then she added that it happened once that she woke up a bit late and had to wake Samir up for an appointment so she completely forgot

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51 In his work on motherhood and gardening, Descola likewise argued that “motherhood...extends to a woman’s relations with the plants she grows in her garden. She has, as it were, two sets of offspring, the plants in her garden and the children in her home” (cited in Ingold, 2000, p.82). More broadly, most existing literature on ecologies that include nonhuman animals do in fact use kinship terms in putting these interspecies relations in words, seeing these as indeed closer to reality than language of property for example that would then imply a specific alienation and functionality which do not seem to take dominance here, at least not in most instances (Blaser, 2013, p.14).
to go up on the rooftop and feed them. A few hours elapsed as she got so engrossed in preparing breakfast, setting everything ready, and cleaning around the house and she somehow falsely thought that indeed she had already served breakfast to her rooftop children. As it approached noon, she told me, she very apocalyptically felt her heart so pounding in pain as if one of her children is suffering. She realized that she did not serve breakfast and did not check up on her rooftop children so she so quickly prepared breakfast, water, and ran up. It was a very sunny day in July when the summer heat reached an unsurmountable peak, and everyone up there looked so emaciated. The rabbits were almost asleep in dehydration inside their little enclosed battery-like home, while the ducks and chickens looked at her so sickly.

She poured food and water to everyone and stayed up there next to them for one full hour, crying. She felt so cruel and heartless, especially knowing that she left them no food whatsoever up there to snack on for example until she comes again. In line with Naisargi Dave’s brilliant theorization on personhood vis-à-vis the various acts of multispecies witnessing, perhaps Wafaa began as a volitional subject, one who “could stop and start at will” yet as the multispecies collaborations of caring, rearing, and raising unfolded, the recipe of personhood likewise unfolded as more layered. At this moment of vulnerability when she forgot to go up and feed them, Wafaa was arguably created anew.52

In giving in to the rooftop worlds, and to being an active part of it, Wafaa then unfolded as the relational subject to the world. I quickly told her that I indeed agree with her sorrow and guilt, but that she should not have felt that guilty because she also had an unusual emergency with her child and she needed to be with him. She disagreed so poignantly and

52 I use vulnerability here to denote a specific relational entanglement borrowed from the geographer/philosopher Paul Harrison’s account on the inevitability of corporeal vulnerability in which he speaks of it as that “which cannot be willed, chosen, cultivated, or honed and neither, therefore, does it necessarily or even primarily denote a weakness of misfortune; rather, it describes the inherent and continuous susceptibility of corporeal life to the unchosen and the unforeseen – its inherent openness to what exceeds its abilities to contain and absorb” (Harrison, 2008, p.427).
told me that Samir could have managed alone and could have fixed himself anything to eat, but these little ones completely and solely rely on her to feed them. She has managed to raise Samir and Mostafa up this way; that they need to depend on themselves whenever Wafaa is absent. She is a housewife, but has another full-fledged chain of life proliferating up there that she singlehandedly takes care of and handles. That’s how the house is run. Everyone had to follow. That said, though, Wafaa still told me she never entirely forgave herself for this day and how she actively forgot them and allowed herself to be carried away in the busyness of her family affairs.

All it takes is onions, and some quicklime

The recipe/s for relating continued to extend and multiply during my fieldwork encounters. And I increasingly felt that love, while a pivotal and unnegotiable ingredient, cannot make up a good relating recipe on its own. Nurturance is key. More than just love, Nahed continued to instruct me that she gradually learnt the centrality of nurturance in the relation. It is not just about feeding them, but about how Nahed continues to tar’ahum in various shapes and forms. As rain proliferates in winter, and winds begin roaring, Nahed tells me that she begins waking up a little extra early every day, rushes to the kitchen, and

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53 The interspecies relationality thus here unfolds through a distinctive “earthly, material immanence” in which “to respond to other beings...to become responsible before them, is not necessarily expressed in a bill of rights” (De Castro, 2013, p.31).

54 In that, Wafaa did not resist or continue to hold herself as a righteous person whose multitasking more-than-human capabilities for once fell short of perfectly handling her worlds. Rather, she did give in to this moment of vulnerability and guilt and somehow knew that it is precisely this interplay of surrendering and persisting in the world that continue to contour her unfolding subjectivity. On a very similar axis, Michael Jackson quotes an interlocutor eloquently explaining: “say a hawk came out of the blue and seized one of your chickens. What can you do? You can’t get it back. The hawk has flown away. You have no means of hunting it down, or killing it. All you can do is accept, and go on with your life. But you don’t really forgive, you don’t really forget. You simply accept that there’s nothing you can do to change what happened” (Jackson, 2013, p.213).

55 Nurture in Arabic best translates to ri’aya, from which tar’ahum is derived, denoting more than just romantic love. I guess it here involves pointing to a more sustained effort of love, but also presence and cultivated wholehearted attention, and care for the other party.
prepares on average half a kilo of onions. She peels each onion, and cuts it down to very little cubes, and mixes all with the rest of the little ones’ breakfast.

Nahed also keeps some of these peeled and cut onions every couple of days for her household to eat with their salad. She teasingly looked at Hana and asked her whether she enjoys salad with those crispy onions or not, and whether she ever gets sick in winter like her friends at school. Hana of course laughed in embarrassment and said that it tastes better with the onions and that no, she very rarely catches a common cold in winter. We are here yet again forced to slowly move away from distinct subjects and more to projects of shared livelihoods and collaborations in which both humans and their nonhuman neighbors unfold as more resilient. Nahed read about onions and their function as an immunity magic potion once in a newspaper, and she decided to adopt it not just for the chickens and ducks but also for herself, children, and grandchildren. Michael Jackson’s intersubjectivity – as developed from and inspired by Hannah Arendt’s “the subjective in-between” – here provides a brilliant theoretical enunciation of these collaborative projects as it “shifts our emphasis away from notions of the person, the self, or the subject as having a stable character and abiding essence, and invites us to explore the subtle negotiations and alterations of subjective experience as we interact with one another” (Jackson, 2013, p.5).

While it might indeed be true that it is ultimately the human – in this case Nahed, and Wafaa in the previous example of feeding her rooftop “children” – who began exploring and knowing about the benefits of onions, as an upper-hand forcing these projects of collaboration a bit more hegemonically one-sided or hierarchical than hoped for, I still would like to hope and argue that it is not about the moment of beginning or who thinks about the

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56 As Ingold puts it, “the work of the farmer and the herdsman does not make crops or livestock, but rather serves to set up certain conditions of development within which plants and animals take on their particular forms and behavioral dispositions” (2000, p.77).
idea but rather about how these projects unfold and how Nahed rethought herself in presence of and relationship with ducks and chicken. While there is here an undeniable hierarchy in which the rooftop nonhumans completely likewise depend on Wafaa for food, her actions and guilt if she did not obey the rules still evoke this as a reciprocal relationship in which these rooftop “children” have power over Wafaa’s life and wellbeing. If she forgets to feed them, or care for their immunity, they might grow angry, sick, upset, spoiled, suicidal, or even dead, and here it is God who would then take revenge because of how irresponsible Wafaa or Nahed has been.

The recipe of the collaboration here involve on one side the human as a responsible, superior agent (in front of God) providing food, care, and nurturance, and on the other the nonhuman animals who in turn grant humans blessings, more importantly and directly provide eggs and later meat, a healthier happier household with a more successful housewife, and an overarching sense of wellbeing, both worldly and unworldly as a strengthened bond with God. In other words, the nonhuman animals can and do respond to the lack of care or ignorance in myriad ways, including through God’s intervention in the form of potentially withdrawing this blessing of rooftop livelihood (which is a more manageable subsistence), an evil eye, or any social ill of some kind. More straightforwardly, the very expected result of a lack of care on the side of the human, death, translates into a significant economic loss that only the human is left to suffer. Quite realistically, these nonhuman animals are reared to be eaten, sparing the household a financial burden of buying these animals from the market. If an animal then suffered a poor treatment, it would then quickly die – not necessarily “agentially” – and the human suffers thereafter.

As yet another complementary ingredient falling under nurturance, Nahed also told me about her use of gyr – burnt quicklime – during winter. She buys this from a nearby store and crushes it so finely to be then applied on the muddy grounds of the rooftop. From the not-
always-so-pleasant memories of my science class in school, I recalled quicklime to be a dangerous chemical that must be handled with care so I asked Nahed whether the ducks or chicken can mistakenly eat bits of it while having breakfast or lunch. She happily told me that they indeed sometimes do, and that this is why she adds it in the first place, as a source of calcium for her rooftop animals.

Here, yet again, what we have before us is a distinctive mastery of nurturing rooftop inhabitants, with ingredients and recipes that by all means transcend food and drink. This is not just about following schedules of feeding or providing enough food or water. It is about having a practical, hands-on, tacit knowledge of the workings of the universe inside the bodies of ducks, goats, rabbits, chickens, and humans – and treating those as somehow operating on proximate wavelengths\textsuperscript{57}. This knowledge demands and is conditioned upon the deployment of existing, everyday and banal, resources of life in the service of nurturing the proliferating lives – human, nonhuman, and collaboratively otherwise.

Oh, and a pinch of Aspirin when needed

Upon coming down from the rooftop at Nahed’s, I once heard a quack of a chicken. I looked behind me to check if some chicken roamed while we walked down on the stairs but found none. The quacking continued and I then asked Eman where this came from as she pointed to a plastic box in which a little emaciated chicken stayed. I asked what is wrong with her and Eman told me that her leg is bruised and she now cannot even walk so Nahed will take her tonight and do all the necessary first-aids so that she can healthily walk again. For me this sounded very utopic and hopeful, the chicken looked closer to death than anything else.

\textsuperscript{57}This is a bit similar to indigenous knowledges or what has recently became known as “traditional ecological knowledge” which is that accrued through practice, hands-on experience on an ecological ground. For more on indigenous knowledges and the current debates around this area, see Nadasdy, 1999.
We got inside the salon where I always sat and I had to nudge this a bit further so I asked Nahed about this little chicken and she told me that this is a usual occurrence in which a chicken or a duck gets injured and Nahed does the necessary healing procedures. Eman laughed and told me that Nahed is almost a veterinarian by practice and experience. She has more than once fixed broken legs of chickens and ducks; she homemade-ly makes them a splint – after taking the specific dimensions of the limb – and applies it. She keeps the injured chicken or duck alone in a box inside her apartment to prevent the other rooftop neighbors from teasing the injured little one. She keeps following up so closely with the injured limb and provides the chicken with all the necessary extra care, love, food, but also intimate presence and proximity until she gets better and healthier, she then takes it off, and takes the chicken back up to her rooftop home. Eman then continued to tell me about the countless other moments when Nahed rescued and healed some of her rooftop children. She even with time learnt to give shots or injections of needed medications when the case requires. Nahed then told me that she never expected herself giving a shot to a goat, or preparing and making a splint for a chicken’s tiny limb. But once she encountered in the situation and proximately and intimately “witnessed” – à la Naisargi Dave – the pain of one dear goat or chicken to whom she is attached, she had to do all what it takes to bring her back to normalcy and healthiness. As Stengers beautifully puts out, genealogically borrowed from Bruno Latour, “attachment and autonomy rather go together. Attachments are what cause people, including all of us, to feel and think, to be able or to become able” (Stengers, 2005a, p.191)\(^58\).

On the passing, Nahed once told me that she was crushing some Aspirin and mixing it with the chicken’s breakfast the other day. I asked how would she use it – or more rudely but not vocally, how could she think that “our” Aspirin might work on chicken? She told me that

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\(^{58}\) Hence this chapter’s focus is on subjectivities through attachments and relations, “addressing people as they belong” rather than as alien stars in nomadic skies (Stengers, 2005a, p.190).
she has been doing this for ages; she crushes Aspirin with food and puts it out for them and that it works like magic. Usually in summer whenever Hana or Hooda get sick or catch a flu, Eman buys the flu medication and then once she notices that one of the goats or chicken also caught the flu, she crushes a couple of tablets and adds them to the food for all those up there. And the entire house, quite literally, is then on the same medication.

Nahed then philosophically asked me how else it could be done. These goats, chickens, rabbits, and ducks live amongst them in one bigger pulsating home. They literally share a living, through a “gappy circuit of connections” or as the otherwise overlapping pulsations of their hearts as they come together in intimacy and/or proximity (de la Cadena, 2015, p.xxvii). If one of them grows sick, then, how can they heal him/her? The presence of Eman at home has made the visits to medical doctors almost nonexistent and unneeded so they similarly never thought of paying any visits to veterinarians – let alone that the practice itself is uncommon amongst their neighbors and in the premises. So what do they do? They sink in their conditions, and make do with what they have, guided by a carnal and corporeal awareness that we share a pulsating chain of life, one whose effects and changes echo in all forms and shapes. I grow sick, you grow sicker. I buy an antibiotic, you take some. I feel healthier, and so do you – supposedly⁵⁹.

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⁵⁹ This gets a bit problematic here, though, because there is arguably a lot of research done on the rather harmful and sometimes even lethal effects of “human” medications on animals and specifically cattle. The brilliant Thom Van Dooren more closely examines the case of using Diclofenac for cattle and vultures in India – in a very similar multispecies context to our rooftops here – and how on the long term the drug was later found to be one of the main causes of the overall collapse of the vulture population in India (Van Dooren, 2014, p.53). As for Nahed and Eman, they do it purely out of love and attachment yet with an overarching technical lack of knowledge when it comes to the effects and consequences of multispecies usage of drugs – caused by also a broader lack of transparency from the pharmaceutical industry, although they would not normally be expected to elongate their brochures even more to include the side effects of their drugs on cattle – but also and most importantly the lack of access and financial capability to take a sick turkey, chicken, or goat to a veterinarian and get proper medication.
Discipline and Punish\textsuperscript{60} – Multispecies Edition

While we stood there on the rooftop next to the rabbits’ “battery”, Wafaa pointed to one stern-looking rabbit. She said she calls him the naughty one, because of how spoiled and unrestrained he is\textsuperscript{61}. She once had the food prepared for all the rabbits and went up to serve it to her rooftop children. He looked at the food, looked at her, then looked elsewhere, very uninterested-ly. She guessed that he did not really like the food so he so decided to abstain. She was so angered by this sentiment and got so furious, but thought he might just be upset about something or so. The next day, the same thing happened again. Looking at the food so apathetically, then at her equally apathetically, then looking elsewhere.

Wafaa decided that some action was needed. She took him a bit far from the others, made sure he stayed there completely on his own, and offered him no food. She did this for two consecutive days. On the first day, he stayed apathetic and very uninterested, but growingly hungry indeed. On the second day, her heart grew a bit fonder but she still gave him no food, only water. He was beginning to look so fatigued, and his eyes as she described were growing weaker and less spoiled than ever. A third day was needed, she assured me. She still offered him no food, only water. By mid-day, she took him back to the rest of the gang in the battery. Once he was back there and found the food he rushed right at it and ate as much as he could. Since then, he never ever said no to food, never ever dared to look at her with that strange entitlement and spoiled attitude. She looked at me and asked, would not you

\textsuperscript{60} Title indeed unsurprisingly adapted from Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Foucault, 1995). No matter how many times you read (bits of) it or try not to, it keeps haunting you. Multispecies worlds do too. And for a moment, growing up and wondering about my future parenting skills, techniques, and belief-system, some of the encounters mentioned in this section will always haunt me. Yet endlessly, the boundaries between the child/animal/human/self are thrown out of the window. Dedicating this section to my future child-ren.

\textsuperscript{61} This naughty rabbit, however, does not have a name. She just calls him the naughty rabbit, no anthropomorphism required (more on this previously discussed in chapter 1).
do the same with your children, Noha? I acquiesced in silence, although I have no clue if I
would have the heart to do it. Time brings lessons, no?

On her rooftop, Safaa also had strict precautions in place. All the male goats on the
rooftop once tried to tease/impregnate/abuse one pregnant emaciated female. Upon noticing
that, Safaa had to think of a way of preventing this from happening or else the female goat
would die. After plenty of thought and planning, Safaa installed a loud bell tied to a
rope/necklace around the neck of each of the male goats. She made them all stay in a closed
room on their own, away from the female goat who stayed outside the room roaming around
as she wants if she could. Once the male goats moved more violently than expected, their
necks would move too, and so the bells would so loudly ring. Upon hearing that, Safaa would
immediately come up and distance the males again. Discipline was indeed in place.

Nahed told me that rearing goats, chicken, rabbits, or any other being is just like
rearing children. You put in effort, lots of time, and lots of balancing sentiments. Give love,
but also discipline. Make food, but also schedules. Allow fun, but also prevent spoiling. But
for Nahed, like for an aspiring anthropologists, you can only learn it by doing it. She said that
with time, she learnt that it is best to standardize or familiarize meals’ times for each of her
children. On the rooftop, each species knows when they are going to get their food, and they
wait for it. And it happens by order, so Nahed goes up each day at around seven am, she first
offers food to goats, then chickens and ducks, then finally rabbits. Chickens cannot hop on
goats’ food or fight over it. If and when this happens, Nahed takes the delinquents and again
puts them for a more or less solitary confinement. In that, then, knowledge of a person can
never be detached from the surrounding environment, oikos makes ethos as the Greeks would
have it or as Isabelle Stengers more familiarly and poetically puts it in what she calls the
etho-ecological perspective, “affirming the inseparability of ethos, the way of behaving
peculiar to a being, and oikos, the habitat of that being and the way in which that habitat
satisfies or opposes the demands associated with the ethos or affords opportunities for an original ethos to risk itself” (Stengers, 2005b, p.997).

A bit different from the previous recipes on love and nurturance, here Nahed and Wafaa unfold as much more in control, knowledge, and authority over the rooftop children – children used both literally and metaphorically. Both women unfold in and through the interspecies relations of discipline and punish, as more powerful, decisive, knowledgeable, and in control of their surroundings. What I here then found most useful is Strathern’s and Haraway’s profound line of thought on partial connections and relations (Strathern, 2004). Strathern geometrically situates these relations as fractals rather than the commonly used image of multiples and multiplicities in which both or all parties unfold and create a unit or an ecology somehow “bigger than themselves.” What Strathern however argues is that “the mathematical image congenial to partial connections is that of fractals: they offer the possibility of describing irregular bodies that escape Euclidean geometrical measurements because their borders allow other bodies in – without, however, touching each other everywhere”62 (quoted in de la Cadena, 2015, p.32; emphasis added).

Nahed and Wafaa both learnt through doing, and through the cultivated sustained interspecies intimacy of being with and growing in proximity to goats and chickens. Yet they still regard themselves as somehow the ones in control, the ones setting schedules, applying discipline, instilling order, keeping it all in sync. It is relational, but only to an extent. In multispecies proximity and intimacy, then, as Haraway so unforgottably puts it, “one is too few, but two are too many” (quoted in de la Cadena, 2015, p.31). Nahed indeed becomes

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62 This concern with partiality, a repeatedly expressed one throughout this thesis, has to do with a dissatisfaction with posthumanist literature as discussed in the introduction. I am using partiality and partial connections to make a case for the fact that as a human I can never fully comprehend or gain access to a world of nonhuman animals. No matter how well-versed in living with animals I become, I still believe that the relationship will inevitably stay partial, with plenty lost in translation. Hence, the relationship will always be transformative and generative, but will never flatten out the differences between humans and nonhuman rooftop animals in my case here let alone give us a full knowledge of what it is like to be a chicken or a goat.
“more” than herself, through the alternative regularities of feeding, disciplining, punishing, and loving those multispecies children of hers, but she does not become simply the addition of another being over her own, since there will always be feelings and things she cannot understand when it comes to the other species she deals with. There is a lot in between the oneness of herself and the plurality of all the rooftop beings added over each other, because wholeness does not take place merely through addition. On rooftops, as seen, the roles are clear and distinct, with goats and chickens close enough as loving companions but never comparable to a human mother or aunt for example, at least I have not witnessed this yet.

More importantly, the ingredients of love, nurturance, and discipline embark upon only a specific component of the wider recipes for multispecies relating, which unsurprisingly include slaughtering and eating. Throughout the previous instances, nonhuman animals consistently provide a non-transcendental relational vitality to their human companions – through these very collaborations of love, discipline, and nurturance. The multispecies intimacies are here rewarding in a very intimate, quite utopic and Platonic, sense. Yet again, this is only one part of these recipes of relating. Another part, as Bloch beautifully illustrates and as will be witnessed in the following section, includes eating as a more dystopic part of the recipes. In his words, “in the rituals [of love, nurturing, serving meals, disciplining, etc.] these animals initially evoke non-transcendental vitality in humans…once the animal has been killed, its significance in the ritual can be transformed so..."
that the very same animal now merely represents an external vitality, which is consumed by
participants as food, though this is regarded as extremely special and strength-giving food”
(1992, p.66).

The Devouring Anthropologist65: Eating my Interlocutors

“The end of every beast is, in fact, the pot” (Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p.28)

I was raised up with a very strange diet in place. My father never liked red meat, so
mama never cooked meat although she loves red meat way more than chicken or fish. My
father never liked fish, so mama never cooked fish. So I never witnessed red meat or fish at
home and so I grew so repelled from them. I only ate chicken, since then and till this very
moment. Whenever mama would cook meat at home, I would shut my door’s room because
of the intense meat odors. She gradually made it a rule that no red meat is ever going to be
cooked while I am at home.

Approaching fieldwork, then, was always for me a question of establishing proper
intimacy but also distance so as not to be forced to eat a meat cutlet or a piece of fish. Since
day one, then, I made it so clear to my interlocutors that I only eat chicken and that I
absolutely hate red meat and fish. But somehow nothing stays in place; fieldwork continues
to throw us off with the wildest of surprises. And in this case, I was left with my belly to
suffer. So much is learnt from fieldwork through talk, walk, and intimacy, but so much is also
learnt viscerally, through our very veins, wounds, arteries, noses, and ears – the very bodies
we carry and that carry us in return. So much is left in me that transcends the encounter and
the timeliness of its unfolding. So much is left inside me to disentangle, and wonder if it can
ever be erased. Most surely not. Bellies are now stained, bodies marked, and souls eternally

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65 A title so infamously, un-ironically, yet very proudly given to me by my dear mentor Hanan Sabea, to whom
this section is dedicated with love, food, confusions, inconsistencies, and intensities from the field as she keeps
reminding us in and out of class of all the ambiguities that fieldwork brings forward.
touched. Anthropologists frequently speak of levels of sexual intimacy, broached friendships, sustained encounters, and otherwise rude dealings with interlocutors that are somehow disciplinarily shunned upon. It is now quite established that interlocutors – rather than objects of research – can never be entirely demarcated as “others”, for the million and one things we share and for the fact that we anthropologists are, too, others. Yet how intimate is intimate? What about devouring? Out of love perhaps? Out of force may be? Out of anthropological hospitality and courtesy? What about an aspiring anthropologist eating her very interlocutors?

It was one sunny fieldwork day at Nahed’s in late September. Sahar was out there with Hooda doing some grocery shopping. Mohsen was also out doing some work, while Eman had not come back from work yet. I came in to find Nahed sitting there in the middle of the living room, preparing some mumbar – cattle’s intestines stuffed with rice to somewhat resemble maḥshy. She was sitting there with a huge bowl of rice, another one filled with these raw intestines in water, and yet another with the ones she already stuffed. I stepped in there and the smell was absolutely poignant. Raw meat, rice, tomato sauce, everything just invited a quick but extended session of vomiting. When I first came in, I had to greet Nahed who invited me to sit with her instead of just going in and sitting in the salon completely alone and lonely. So I stepped in, went closer, and kissed her on the cheeks while trying all my best to control my nostrils and close them so as not to let the vicious odors of raw mumbar in. I stayed on the other couch, while she resumed preparing it. She then told me that she remembered that I once said I eat mumbar, so when I called yesterday to say I am coming she decided to surprise me with it. I did say I eat mumbar, which I do but only when mama cooks it. Now I do not know how will it taste here? May be it is going to feel so meaty which would then completely throw me to a vomiting tantrum. Nahed told me we will have it together for lunch today. At that moment, I was ready to make up any wild scenario and say I have to leave now.
I then felt this would be too childish of me, and that I need to grow a bit more maturely and experiment with this. Once I made this decision, I had to sit there and bear with all the smells, viscosities, and intensities lying ahead of me. This marked the first time ever to witness making *mumbar* closely and slowly. Nahed would so meticulously pick one strand of *mumbar*, clean it off the draining water by pulling water out of its cylindrical viscosity, then grab some rice and push it inside with her fingers until it is absolutely full to its brim. The elasticity of the intestines made it a somewhat easy process, yet for me quite disgusting. The finished, fried, and cooked *mumbar* somehow hides the process as it looks like it has it together. But witnessing the unfolding story as the intestines are stuffed and prepared is an entirely different, more graphic, intense, and visceral story. Lucky me though, the uncooked *mumbar* was already cleaned so I missed the worst chapter in which all the earthliness and wildness of the *mumbar* is erased and distilled to a more civilized, socialized, and sanitized version of itself for its other life.

Silence took center stage so I felt like I needed to find something to ask in spite of the multisensorial intensities in place. I asked Nahed where she got the intestines from, when she then told me that these are the intestines of the brown-chocolatey goat that I loved on the rooftop. She was getting so old and her meat was about to be too dry to be eaten so they decided to slaughter it now better than later, and in process also prepare me the long-awaited and supposedly desired *mumbar*. I smiled and thanked her yet could not for a second believe that what lies ahead are the intestines of one of my favorite goats-interlocutors. She used to be a vibrant, loving, female goat with charming eyes. I used to feed her whenever I went up, and see her as she breastfeeds her little goats. I did not feel it was appropriate for me to express the grief or in any way blame her for cooking me this or thinking about me that sweetly. For Nahed, this was yet another celebratory moment in which the interspecies relationality is carried further; in eating the goat you loved, you allow her to nurture you –
reciprocating all that you have put in her and with her. The act of eating, then, contributes to a wider chain of life or the wider ecology that both humans and here goats are part of. We eat the goat, and she benefits our flesh and bodies, and we are better able to work through life and the ecologies in which we are brought to being.

I sat there for an hour or so, when Hana came back along with Hooda and Sahar. Hana opened her school backpack and so excitedly showed me her great grades and the teacher’s comments. Because we were sitting so close to Nahed and her endless bowls of rice and intestines, it gradually became such a frequent occurrence that we find some flying rice landing on my pants as Nahed waves at me while talking, or I step over again a bit of rice as I walked across the room. Hooda walked there playing with some chairs that role-played as cars while he drove them so thrillingly right next to the smelly and graphic bowls of the mumbar. Nahed started being a bit irritable as Hooda played around because he might pull off something and mess up the place. At one point while he was “driving” to the other room, he brought down the bowl which had all the precious stuffed mumbar ready to be cooked. Nahed screamed for Sahar to come and see what her child has done, and she quickly came and spanked him while shouting that they did warn him of this already. He apologized then took his chairs and ran to the other room to play alone there.

At this point I was loudly rejoicing inside, because now that the mumbar has all fallen on the ground most probably there will not be enough time for the other batch to be ready by the approaching lunch time. But right before the thought fermented in my head I found Eman on the ground with Hana picking up the fallen mumbar and putting it back in the bowl while telling Nahed that she will rinse it in water and have it ready quickly, while I sat there in absolute silence instead of giving them a hand. It was approaching sunset so I was getting ready to leave when Sahar came and so sincerely apologized that the mumbar has not been ready on time because she hardly had time to boil it first so that the rice can be cooked then
fry it. So she told me they planned to give me my share and mama’s while I walked home anyways so she prepared a huge plastic bag and filled it all with the stuffed boiled *mumbar*. She put that in yet another plastic bag to be cleaner for me to hold – but she touched this second “clean” bag with her *mumbar*-ful hands so it was not that clean and the smells still percolated. A huge white, somehow translucent, bag full of elastic membranes aka former interlocutors.

I took the plastic bag and carried it carefully so as not to be cut and walked down to the metro station. While I waited for the next metro to arrive I sat down and brought out some cleaning wipes and tried to somehow sanitize or un-odor-ize the bag, my hands, and my face. I held the bag and waited, while calling mama and telling her that I have some of my interlocutors for lunch today. She rejoiced and said she will only cook some pasta for the day since my interlocutors somehow saved her from cooking anything more. The ride back home takes a bit more than an hour, which I spent carrying the bag, looking at it in awe, and imagining myself in any other context when I would never ever agree to hold a bag of meat, touch anything that has to do with meat. And here I am now, carrying a soft bag of fresh interlocutors cooked with love.

I finally arrived back home, dropped the bag, and ran to my room to wear my pajamas and visit the bathroom. Mama told me to shut my room’s door as she will be beginning yet the other chapter of the *mumbar* crusades, giving it another boil and frying it for lunch. She said I will definitely eat, right? I was not sure at all. I shut down my room’s door, lit up a scented candle to try and undo all the odors that refused to leave my body and memory, opened my lap top and tried to write down some of these fieldnotes-intensities. In an hour or so, mama called saying that lunch is ready. I went out and took a look at the bronzed crispy *mumbar* that baba and my brother so happily devoured, but I could not bring myself near it. I could not erase the histories and memories of the goat as I knew it, the elongated session of...
preparing this to be what is now just another bowl of fried crispy goodies, the graphic scenery
of it falling down, and the stretched trip of the metro with me carrying it over to home.

Mama said I can still eat it tomorrow if I felt like it. I agreed because in thought and
principle, I did want the goat-me relation to continue, and to be carried on beyond the forces
of my memory and fieldnotes describing her and when I fed her. I thought eating might be a
rather cool, albeit strange and suspiciously cannibalistic, way of doing it. As Viveiros de
Castro puts it quite realistically, however, “to eat the other is certainly to exaggerate, to
commit a sacrificial excess. It establishes a maximal continuity with the victim, creating an
animal immanence between the devourer and the devoured” (1992, p.270). With that in
mind, I thought that in eating parts of the now dead goat, this becomes an ideal moment in
which we both unfold differently; as aforementioned by Haraway, definitely more than one
but also less than two (quoted in de la Cadena, 2014, p.31). For me, this was the only
“fleshy” and grounded way through which I could imagine a continuing relationship – to
carry her inside me, literally, to allow her to participate in the making of my unfolding self,
just as I hopefully did once by staying close, intimate, proximate. Pushing this even further, I
can perhaps argue that the act of eating can then be theorized as (auto)biographical in which
the person is to be remembered and historicized through all that s/he ate. A genealogy of a
person, a people, an ecology, or an extended family then becomes “the unexcavated version
of the full belly” (Strathern, 2004, p.67). Lauren Berlant beautifully gives an account a
rather literally and metaphorically “full” friendship through weaving together a collage of
eating-as-bonding and mere words scattered across Mary Gaitskill’s novel Two Girls, Fat

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66 These intricacies and contradictions of eating as a mode of relating, retaining, and carrying on are quite
undertheorized in this account. This is one research pocket or gap that I hope to explore further and at more
length and depth.

67 This is an argument that I wholeheartedly hope, wish, plan, fantasize-about to pursue further and bake
better, hoping to one day call it “the full belly thesis”. How can we write people as bellies? What can “a
culinary history” of someone’s life tell us (Berlant, 2011, p.135)?
and Thin. Somehow, the words Berlant uses—even though nothing but banal—transport us so graphically to a multisensorial world of friendship, eating, and filling. This deserves to be quoted at length:

“Separately and together the girls ‘snack’ constantly and ‘sagely’ (15; 37; 81; 93; 241). Their mouths and their eyes consume, in order of appearance: potatoes; ‘a brown-bagged carton of milk’; ‘rum-flavored marzipan candies, each wrapped in bright red tinfoil bearing a picture of a mysterious brown-haired lady in décolletage, bottled spring water’ (12); sweet and sour pork (30); egg rolls (36); cheese curls, diet soda, chocolate cake, cookies, sandwiches, coffee, Gruyere brioche, Mystic Mint cookies (15); dainty fried snacks (25); ‘tea…lumps of sugar and cream’, ‘boiled dumplings’ (28); ‘white bags of candy’ (44); ‘cream and eggs’ (45); chili, potatoes, beer, dry roasted peanuts (47); chili over spaghetti noodles, chocolate ice cream, ungnawable jawbreakers (48); cinnamon toast and hot chocolate (52); tuna sandwiches (55); mucusy eggs (56); gum (62); ‘old tea bags and carrot peels’ (66); ‘blazing Popsicles’ (66); Cream of Wheat (74); ‘apple cores, old potato chip bags’ (75); ‘ice cream and…chicken pot pie…Almond Joys, Mallomars, Mellomints, and licorice ropes’ (76); ‘cookies…gum’ (78); eggs (80); ‘crackers and peanut butter…candy bars, cake, ice cream…cake and ice cream’ (81); ‘orange and pink candy…Sloppy Joes…hot chocolate’ (84); ‘cookies and tea’ (86); cocoa (87); gum (91); ice cream (93); candy necklaces (94); eggs (98); ‘alcohol mixed with Coca Cola’ (105); ‘ice cream and vanilla wafers’ (107); ‘Choco Chunk bars and French fries’ (114); ‘meat…potatoes…iced tea’ (118); sugar (119); ‘salad…scalloped potatoes…orange corn curls’ (120); ‘potato chips and beer…bite-sized Heath Bars’ (123); ‘pork chops and green beans…boxed lemon chiffon pie’ (124); ‘carrots…potatoes’ (128); ‘lime sherbet’ (130); muffins (137); ‘gristle…milkshake’ (141); ‘coffee with three spoons of sugar’ (146); ‘a box of chocolates, some of which had ladies’ faces painted on them’ (154); ‘a chocolate…another chocolate’ (155); ice cream sandwiches (160); ‘a box of donuts and a bag of potato chips’ (161); ‘a bag of burgers, fries, and orange drink…French toast’ (168); ‘two chocolate donuts wrapped in cellophane’ (174); ‘mushroom fried rice with green peas and lurid red spare ribs’ (175); ‘lumpy potatoes’ (177); ‘cookies and coffee’ (179); ‘salads…water’ (185); ‘coffee…pizza…diet root beer’ (193); ‘take-out salad’ (195; 233); ‘cheese sandwich, potato chips, and candy…milkshake and double fries’ (205); ‘lemon meringue pie’ (206); ‘malted and potato chips, jelly beans and roast beef sandwiches dripping gravy’ (211); French toast (214); ‘can of soup…bread’ (215); ‘wonderfully gooey apple pie’ (221); ‘champagne with our omelettes’ (225); ‘hot coffee and a bag of sugars, stirrers, and petroleum milk substitutes’ (229); ‘muffins…bag of cookies’ (232); ‘a bag of cashews, a bag of marzipan, and an apple’ (234); cookies (238); grilled cheese sandwich (241); misshapen bran muffin (242); ‘a bag of potato chips and a bag of candy’ (244); ‘a plate of jewel-like sushi and shiny purple seaweed…sake’ (248); cookies (258); ‘pasties and puddings’ (260); cakes (261); chocolate
Days passed and elapsed and a more graphic moment took place. I sat there, with an undesirable piece of camel meat right in front of me, with Sahar so eagerly waiting to know what I think about it. It was more like a bet that I will like it, and I stayed there very uncertain about questions of agency, authority of the anthropologist, and all these other excessively empowering-or-rather-paralyzing scripts of power. Let me share this a bit more slowly. On one day at Nahed’s, around the end of January, I was casually and familiarly sitting there with Nahed and Hana. Sahar came in from the kitchen so rushing-ly and opened the freezer to take a plate of burger-ed-like-meat. Hana looked at me and very hopefully asked if I like burgers. Without giving it much thought, consideration, or foreseeing the potential consequences, I affirmed that I do eat burgers – which I very precariously do, when mama cooks them at home, or very rarely sharing a bite with my brother when he orders burgers at home.

I waited there, with so much faith in and gratefulness to the typical menu that will at least save me from being alone with the camel meat. Needless to mention, I never tasted or even thought of trying camel meat. Sahar came a while later and so excitedly shared the story of these burgers. She goes even couple of weeks to il-madbah, a huge and most famous slaughterhouse/area/district where meat of all kinds and shapes is slaughtered and sold. Il-madbah is practically in the same neighborhood where Nahed lives so they have grown in and with its rather graphic proximity. So she goes there and stands by one of the butchers that

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68 Apologies for the graphicness and elaborateness of the rather long quotation but I hope it did communicate the layered-ness that eating and writing-eating can offer. This section of Cruel Optimism remains one of the closest ever to my heart (and the book as by far one of my ultimate favorites) and an eternal inspiration to hopefully be further pursued in one facet of (academic) life or another. Dedicating this bit to my so inspiring unforgettable mentor Kiven Strohm, for introducing me to Berlant and to many other fascinating worlds of academia and beyond.
she knows and has been dealing with for a long while. She gives him the camel meat that she buys earlier from another well-known butcher specializing in camel meat and she asks the butcher to prepare it for her as burgers. She witnesses him as he prepares the meat, minces it, and molds it in a huge burger-shaped mold. He finishes and packs it well and cleanly and so she has it ready, homemade burgers with a known and transparent genealogy to be proud of. Sahar shared this and I did not get any (more) excited, although just a tiny corner of myself wanted to know how bad can burgers be? I thought bread would always make it easier to swallow, and I just got a huge bottle of ketchup to Hooda so I was sure this was going to be made available too so I was not that worried, in theory.

Lunch time came and I found Sahar beginning with the typical plates of the firakh panne and macaruna béchamel and I was already so hungry by then so I began devouring them until she later got bread along with a couple of very dark burgers in a plate with a knife. Hana took the plate and grabbed one burger then cut it into two halves, added them in the long bread, added some vegetables beneath, and lots of ketchup on top, and began eating while moaning in so much happiness and orgasmic relief. Hana puppy-eye-d-ly told me that she will be really upset if I did not taste her absolutely favorite meal of all time. There was no way out. I gathered all my defenses, waited for a moment in which there was a heated conversation between Nahed, Sahar, and Hana – so they would not be focusing that much with me – took one burger and cut it half, added all the vegetables that I could, and added ketchup in the hope of hiding the taste. I took the first little bite and it tasted a bit strange, but so excessively salty which successfully did not allow me to feel all the feels of the meat. I took another bite and followed it with a sip of soda while everyone waited for me to react so I swallowed and told Sahar that it tastes really delicious, clean, and very much like the ones we eat in fast food chains. “White” lies, fieldwork chronicles.
I barely took a couple of more bites to successfully reach the first half of the burger/sandwich then left it right away and went back to my now favorite typical menu. I kept eating more and more chicken and pasta till Sahar noticed and told me that I must have not liked the burgers enough to eat them today or to eat more and I quickly said that it is just that I am now too full with my favorite pasta and chicken and that I would always choose them over every other meal no matter what it is. She said they knew this was going to happen so she will give me more raw burgers in a bag for mama to taste it. The frozen burgers were tightly put in two plastic bags that I equally neatly carried back home while observantly watching the expected tides and turnovers in my stomach. Till the end of the day, though, very unexpectedly, my stomach did no voices, no resurgences, no protesting moves. It was all so silent, very scarily and echoingly so. But it felt so dry and rock-like. I did not eat anything till the end of the day, except a couple of mint-intensive chewing gums to make sure I erase all that still remains. And I went out with my friends although I was deadly tired, but again could not sit alone with my camel-self wondering till I fall asleep.

It is true that I have not known the camel that became burgers, and I never knew how it looked or what it was like, but for me at this point everything was graphic-er than ever. I could visualize the camel, its slaughter, the choice of cutlet to be minced, the grinding of the meat, the preparation of burgers, the packing and putting down in plates and bags. Everything for a moment became too real. And my stomach replied with a stiffness that I did not comprehend. What growing closely with animals of various kinds throughout almost a year of fieldwork did, however, is that it unveiled and laid bare-r the life that comes before slaughter and eating. This process, by and large, has been obscure for me as a result of the deserted distance that I live from the bits of goats and chicken I eat.

I thankfully grew more attuned to the proximity of nonhuman animals, to their processes and seasons of growth, maturity, and coming of age, and some of the polyphonies,
realities, and ways of making sense of eating a dear animal. I carnally and viscerally learnt to regard my stomach as a more active agent in loving, grieving, and carrying on – as perhaps the protagonist in elongating life beyond the moment of immediate death. In some way, this growing intricate attunement with other cycles and flight ways of life helped me grow more aware of how partial we all are, and how eating helps place us – viscerally, literally, and metaphorically – in wider and broader entanglements with/of life. We then unfold into nothing but relational beings; eternally questioning, excavating, and exploring the weavings of this “we” through which we feel and are alive. We could possibly think of this quite historically, as the words of Chakrabarty guide us through, “who is the we? We humans never experience ourselves as a species. We can only intellectually comprehend or infer the existence of the human species but never experience it as such. There could be no phenomenology of us as a species. Even if we are to emotionally identify with a word like mankind, we would not know what being a species is, for, in species history, humans are only an instance of the concept species as indeed would by any other life form. But one never experiences being a concept” (Chakrabarty, 2000, p.220). As we now stand, we can only theorize ourselves in relation, in conviviality, in potentiа.

Of Pigeons and Men69: Gender in/of relating, more-than-human in the making

In sitting with Nagiyya – Michael’s mom – along with Zahra, I asked for how long they have been breeding pigeons and she said this is relatively new and it is mainly her husband Botros who decided to buy a couple of pigeons then it expanded to become one of his now absolutely favorite passions. On that day, luckily enough, Botros appeared for the first time. He smiled and told me how important the rooftop is for him. I excitedly asked him right away what he does there, and what he enjoys the most. Nagiyya laughed teasingly and

69 Title indeed so inspiringly adapted from Zora Neale Hurtson’s Mules and Men, of which I only read excerpts and that has nevertheless left me mesmerized. This section tries to pay some tribute to Zora, in title and in sentiment – hopefully in content too (Hurtson, 1990).
told me that he does nothing. He looked at me and very commonsensically said that he has no
time to feed chickens or goats, and that Zahra does it perfectly all the time anyways.

He paused for a moment then told me that he actually goes up every night and spends
with them no less than two or three hours. He sits there on his own, checks on the goats,
chickens, and turkeys but then goes to his pigeons/sweethearts – *habayby*, as he puts it – to
spend the night with them. He gets in their room and grabs a chair on which he sits, or takes a
nap in their company as he puts it. Every single day, same visit, same nap, same chat, same
silence, same proximity, same intimacy. A repetition but never perfectly verbatim, something
new is added/changes every night indeed. They both grow, and worlds accordingly flow.

I tried to trace the habit a bit genealogically, and Botros so nostalgically shared bits of
the enchanting story. Once upon a night, he had a very unusual and detailed dream. Two
pigeons visited him, each sitting on one of his shoulders like an angel. He describes them to
be perfectly white, without even the slightest hinge of un-white, greyish, beige-ish, or black-
ish feather. Perfectly white, unstained, pure, unworldly. He woke up and shared the lovely
dream with Nagiyyah, who foresaw some good luck coming his way. It was Friday so they
together went to the Friday *suq* – local market – to buy some needed items, and there the
miracle happened. Botros saw one man selling pigeons, and in a separate cage were the exact
couple of pigeons that Botros dreamt of the previous night. Without almost any thought,
Nagiyyah immediately told him to buy the pigeons, even though he had no idea how to grow
pigeons, what to feed them, how to care for them, let alone why keep them in the first place.
But it was an obvious sign and he felt their visiting in the dream required him to follow the
thread and so to buy them. He obeyed and followed the signs, bought the couple of pigeons,
and took them back home. Sign read, challenge accepted.
He kept asking around to know how caring for pigeons works, what he needs to buy, how often they eat, what kind of environment they need to have ready for them to healthily grow. Botros never intimately engaged with any of the rooftop animals except when urgently needed. He said he grew very differently and changed-ly since these two pigeons landed home. He felt like any harm they might experience will directly mean that he has failed the test God put him in, and could not take up the challenge. He would spend hours and hours next to the pigeons, feeding them, waiting to see if they need more food, managing quantities but also timings, and experimenting with new techniques of love and attachment along with discipline. With the elapse of time, Botros told me that he grew in so many mastery of pigeons. He began to know everything about them, bought more couples who began reproducing, and the room gradually began to proliferate with more life.

A while later when the pigeons got too many to be handled alone, he decided to begin selling some of them, while endlessly persistent on keeping those dreaming couple that he perceived as indeed more than just pigeons. In their proximity, he perceives himself as mostly vulnerable and on a mission to be their caregiver and the one who sustains their life on this earth. In this terrain, I believe we are charting the exciting lands of what Isabelle Stengers beautifully calls the cosmopolitical. In witnessing Botros in the presence and intimate company of the pigeons, a cosmopolitics is pushed to a forefront. Stengers speaks of cosmopolitics to refer to a “cosmos [referring to]…the unknown constituted by these multiple, divergent worlds and to the articulations of which they could eventually be capable” (Stengers 2005b, p.995). Within cosmopolitics, questions of ontology come to enjoy supreme primacy70. We thus ask, what/who are Botros and the pigeons? How are they made to being?

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70 A brief conceptual genealogy of what we mean by ontology might here be needed. In a rather brilliant chapter in Lesley Green's edited volume Contested Ecologies, Mario Blaser illustrates that ontology works on three registers. Firstly, the dictionary definition function which necessitates that “any way of understanding the world must make assumptions...about what kinds of things do or can exist, and what might be their conditions of existence, relations of dependency, and so on. Such an inventory of kinds of beings and relations
How do they matter? How does Botros regard himself, the pigeons, their communion, and the broader world/s they collaboratively inhabit?

In his classic *Beyond Nature and Culture*, the prolific anthropologist Philippe Descola specifies four useful ontological pivots that can help us further unpack this rather layered and polyphonic togetherness. The first pivot, that this account since its very first moment of birth tried to work against, is naturalism or what Descola rightly calls the modern ontology. In this worldview, everything is distributed to fall under two large domains, nature and culture (quoted in Blaser, 2013, p.22; Descola, 2005). The second pivot, or second potential ontology through which worlds might operate and revolve, is animism. In this relational ontology, entities are regarded as “knots in a net”, emerging directly and endlessly from relations and intimacies (quoted in Blaser, 2013, p.22). This provides the closest conceptual framing to Botros and the pigeons coming together, but also perhaps extending to all my other interlocutors and how they polyphonically and intimately live with other beings. In that, their worlds unfold through the relations, opening a potential to regard ourselves and others as constantly in formation and relation to a broader ecological configuration of our worlds. As also previously mentioned, if we come to think of the entanglements of living beings as weaving together a “chain of life”, animism is the only option in Descola’s ontological treatise that speaks to these continuations and proliferations of life along the lines of vitality,
volatility, and fecundity (Descola, 2005, p.72). Descola’s third ontology is analogism, which refers to an originating dynamic repeating itself from the micro to the macro and through which the world is held together (quoted in Blaser, 2013, p.23). The last ontology that Descola specifies is totemism, a widely (ab)used classical cornerstone of anthropological theorization, in which a combination of humans and nonhumans fall within distinct groups yet still are somehow believed to have originated from a common ancestry (quoted in Blaser, 2013, p.23).

In this rather knotted theorization of Descola, we get a hopefully clearer view of how Botros’ coming together with his pigeons changed his world, and not just his way of life. He himself unfolded as a new caregiver, an attached lover, a responsible slave, and a loving friend – features that he might have never witnessed himself experiencing in simultaneity. Yet we still have the mystery of the everyday hovering in our minds; how does Botros manage staying for hours and hours with the pigeons without getting bored? Does he talk with them? Does he share problems? More importantly, does he ever get a reply or is it always a one-sided conversation?

As a nosey anthropologist, I purported to ask these questions to Botros and kept nagging on getting a more intimate and less abstract view of what keeps him up with them for a long time with some staring, white, sometimes grey, sometimes black, feathery heads? Botros told me that he goes up and shares what happens every day with the pigeons. He also keeps reciting some verses from the Bible and some taranyym (prayers) and he believes they somehow recite them with him and know how to do it with him as a multispecies beautifully and in-sync-ly orchestrated chorus. Their presence help him stay close and closer to God.

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71 As Descola beautifully puts it: “in a mode of subsistence based on hunting, fishing, and gathering, plants and animals are, understandably enough, the subject of very elaborate knowledge and also of the constant attention of those who live among them and depend upon them for their existence. It is important to know about them, for some are good to eat; moreover, they are all “good to think with”” (Descola, 2005, p.143).
With the dream-debut always in mind, Botros told me how he enjoys being alone yet collaboratively lightly with a loving company when he is around them\textsuperscript{72}. In their intimate proximity, magic happens.

As the conversation unfolded, Botros began loosening up even more, and sharing more details of how his day and night go when he spends more time with the pigeons. Botros quietly then told me that together he and the pigeons are able to bring a “\textit{khadim}” who is rather a supernatural spirit as I best understood it. Mama was sitting there and I could already see her eyes quickly rushing at me almost ordering me to change the subject, out of fear of this supernatural force to somehow possess us perhaps. I did not reciprocate the look/gaze and pretended to not have noticed her reaction. This could not be missed for mama’s worry and overprotection, sorry mom. I guess Botros sensed some fear in the room so he very quickly told me that the \textit{khadim} who comes is a good, kind, one who only does good to people and who can never be ordered to do any evil to anyone\textsuperscript{73}. So it is only with the help of the pigeons that Botros gains these more-than-human qualities to call forward the \textit{khadim} whom he asks for more information about people that he wants to know more about, as well as again doing “good” to help people out of crises.

\textsuperscript{72} As Ingold makes quite clear, “persons can be encountered not only in waking life but also, and equally palpably, in dreams and in the telling of myths. And most importantly, they can change their form” (Ingold, 2000, p.91)

\textsuperscript{73} There could be so many potential interpretations as to why Botros insisted on this kind-not-evil portrayal of the \textit{khadim}. One of these relates so strongly to how Botros since the very beginning has been so keen on reminding me that pigeons are peace-species (as he puts it, \textit{il-\textit{hamam} \textit{hamam salam}}), and that this was not named out of nonsense or sheer folklore/folk wisdom. He repeatedly spoke of how unworldly pigeons as a species are, and how pure they are “by nature.” When I asked him if he loves to raise any other animals, or at least spend time with them, he quickly said none. I tried to ask about rabbits, since for me these are the cutest and would make a perfect cuddly companion to anyone looking for some loving company like pigeons. He quickly frowned and said that he actually does not like rabbits at all, because he recently witnessed something that turned him off from the species altogether. Botros told me that he recently saw a menstruating female rabbit, with actual blood flowing from her body. He saw this scene and has practically disliked rabbits since then, because at that point they seemed so much like humans which he did not particularly like. He prefers pigeons, again, for being otherworldly, and for someone collaboratively granting him access to powers and worlds that absolutely stretch beyond his own sole human capacities. It is primarily here the assumed/suggested unworldliness and purity of pigeons that pushed Botros to so openly and lovingly go beyond himself and learn myriad ways of being-with that granted him access to other worlds.
Botros did not give me any more examples about these instances of superhuman collaboration in which the *khadim* is involved. He mentioned this then quickly changed the subject, and I felt that he did not want to speak more about that. Perhaps because of what he sensed of fear in the room, of mama I being practically very ignorant about what he is saying of *khadim*-s, or of wanting to keep it a personal matter that could not be shared with much disclosed detail to someone he does not know that well. For reasons of comfort more than anything else, I thought it is best not to inquire more about this, nor poke into it directly or indirectly.

Bringing this back to ontology, what Botros here so lively does is that he pushes us to an “unthinkable” terrain in which a human-pigeon world is woven to involve what is more than just the collaborative instances of love, nurturance, care, growth, and eating. Through bringing the *khadim* who he thinks grants him access to an otherworld, Botros arguably theorizes through practice what de la Cadena rather complexly calls “epistemic disconcertment” as borrowed from the science philosopher Helen Verran, which she understood to be those practices and beliefs that break the ontological order of what is believable, predictable, and expected through the modern politics of science (de la Cadena, 2015, p.276). So yes indeed it might be expected to raise animals, care for them, or eat some pigeons for a fancy dinner or every now and then, but tapping into an unknown terrain of calling other beings and peering into the lives of people? Anthropology always provides surprising answers. Evans-Pritchard similarly encountered, though very briefly described, the Nuer’s intimacy with their cattle as enchantingly expressed through establishing contact with “ghosts and spirits” (1940, p.18). In that, what the *khadim* does is that his presence and collaborative project allows the world to diverge as it unfolds; thinking about people, more details, foreseeing futures, tapping into unknowns, relating to an Almighty, etc. (de la Cadena, 2015, 279).
In witnessing the bits of Botros’s multispecies trajectory that he shared with me, I can only point out to the centrality of long-term, repetitive, almost redundant, banal, and sustained intimacy that weave this more-than-human-Botros into being. We witnessed his trajectory since the very beginning when he had no clue what was a pigeon, in terms of needs, cares, requirements, obligations, and life rhythms or temporalities. He has put in so much time, effort, persistence, and emotional/physical labor to actually “ascend” into someone else, one who is more finely attuned to the needs of the proximity and intimacy of pigeons. In terms of gender, I witnessed no men throughout my fieldwork except perhaps very occasionally taking active part in sustaining life and closely attuning to its proliferations through anything more than distant cold love or supporting the wider cause of “keeping animals on the rooftop.” Botros went against the grain for that matter, because of his own trajectory as inspired by this dream that he had and that he somehow interpreted as leading him somewhere unworldly – which it indeed eventually did.

What needs to be pointed out in this particularly fascinating trajectory, however, is that when a male decided to embark a multispecies journey of intimacy, he opted for an unworldly companion rather than a muddied and blooded rabbit, impure pregnant goat, or breast-feeding cow. In terms of tasks, labor, and responsibility, then, Botros only participated in rooftop chores when it involved his unworldly pigeons. For Botros, arguably, pigeons are an escape of an earthly and domestic world of humans, menstruation, and “classic” life cycles of reproduction, decomposition, and re-composition. Similar to the Orokaiva as André Iteanu

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74 This otherwise inspiring story of Botros might be read in tandem with the disturbing opening vignette of this chapter – as my irreplaceable mentor Reem Saad suggests. Both communicate very diverse instances of a multispecies relationship, sometimes too violently enforced and sometimes too dreamingly desired and manifested. In both cases, my concern with always be to push our sensibilities to see what makes these relationships (dreams, capitalism, exploitation, financial instability, sheer love), and what they make of their agents in process. How did these young men unfold after the incubating period in which they functioned as surrogates for chickens? How did Botros unfold after an hour or two everyday with the company of his dear pigeons? What recipes of relating are in place?
brilliantly illustrates, nonhuman creatures fall as either living beings “above” us such as birds or “beneath” us such as pigs, a separation altogether more apparent through the play of exchange and rituals (cited in Bloch, 1992, 13). Pigeons, in flying, lack of menstruation, and hatching, lie above our worlds of mud, blood, and tears, while goats, cows, rabbits, and even chickens are sturdily rooted in a similar muddied and wasteful world to that of humans which Botros wished and attempted to escape.

In speaking of biographies, one more encounter is worth mentioning. Elizabeth Povinelli speaks of (auto)biographies as inherently spiritual accounts of entanglements – hence rooted in collaborations of various kinds and cosmologies, one in which “even as the writing of the self becomes a material practice that leaves behind material, if at times ephemeral and transitory, objects” (Povinelli, 2006, p.98). While in Alexandria, Wafaa suggested that I meet Khaled, Samir’s very close friend, who has been so lovingly raising pigeons on his home’s rooftop for more than three years now. Wafaa has always felt that 23-year-old Khaled’s relationship with his pigeons is the most enchanting. “He would always choose to stay with his pigeons over going to the gym or spending more time with Samir and his other friends. They are his world. He is such a ghawy. On my last day before leaving back to Cairo, Malak insisted that we meet Khaled, who is always busy with his job in his father’s supermarket but agreed that we will pass by before his shift ends for a quick chat. And it so happened. I walked with Malak in a rush before sun sets and mama grows worrier, and stopped for a while in front of a little supermarket where a young, bright-eyed, hopeful man stood by himself.

Ghawy hammams (a potential literal translation would be passionate about pigeons, or loving pigeons) are very prevalent and charmingly so in Cairo and elsewhere around Egypt. These are mainly men who raise pigeons only out of passion. They might later include some selling, borrowing, exchanging of breeds but they mostly do it out of an unworldly love to pigeons and a passion for a sustained intimacy with pigeons of all shapes and forms. These men have a world of their own, deserving a separate account devoted to them too.
He so warmly welcomed me then told me to feel free to ask him whatever I wanted. I told him, as with every other fieldwork encounter throughout this inquiry, that I am interested in his stories and that I want him to feel free and just tell me how he relates to pigeons, how it all started, and what they mean to him. Very quickly, and without me asking, Khaled unlocked his phone and kept showing me some of his countless pictures with pigeons, holding them, caressing their feathers, looking at their horizons, staying next to them, and endless other pictures featuring the pigeons alone, sometimes looking at the camera, others not, while he starred as the anthropologist-cameraman fanboy ing over their colors and aura.

The genealogy is a predominantly male one, Khaled got it from his maternal uncle who used to raise pigeons on their family home’s rooftop. Upon reaching puberty or a bit afterwards, Khaled began to grow more tenderly and emotionally, and gradually began cultivating some care and attention to the pigeons up there. His uncle indeed supported the sentiment, and slowly fed Khaled’s passion with lessons, insights, and carnal knowledge translated to know-hows when it comes to living with pigeons. Days elapsed and Khaled’s uncle went through a major financial inconvenience the only way out of which was to sell the pigeons to alleviate the crisis. He did it, with so much sorrow and heartbreak.

The genealogy continues. The uncle tells Khaled who tells me that he has been heartbroken since that moment, and felt dead, and that something pivotal is direly missing. Khaled also grew a bit drier, and told me that he began saving so that he can buy his uncle a pair or two of pigeons to resuscitate the state of life in such a moment of economic death. He successfully did it, and life re-blossomed ever since. Khaled at this moment knew how central pigeons are to his life and self, and the uncle-Khaled-pigeon collaborative world again proliferated. Khaled would go up with his uncle and recite poetry, talk about their (failed) loves and breakups, discuss philosophical affairs of God and life, things he said they only discussed with the pigeons moaning and growling in the background, while they hold them
and cuddle for hours and hours. They experience this rooftop intimacy with pigeons at best as an impasse, a temporal suspension in which their roles as functioning, stiff, rational males are temporarily put to rest. 

Except for these fleeting yet viscerally bewildering encounters, gender dynamics have not really taken a forefront throughout my fieldwork. This is because, said more crudely and clearly, men have been obviously absent from my rooftop ecologies. Women dominate the field, feeding, caring, loving, sometimes slaughtering, cooking, gifting, making ready, while men are completely out of the view. They sometimes or rather rarely appeared as occasional frequenters of the rooftop, for a cup of coffee, a checkup, or some sort of inspection when needed or in emergencies. It is true that this chapter opened with a rather intense and graphic vignette featuring men, but not just any men. These are young males, from rural impoverished backgrounds in desperate need of money. Intersectionality here is key to their roles in the polyphonic multispecies egg-y worlding. It is then only pigeons here that composed polyphonic biographies of men in which both unfolded in proximate gentleness and vulnerability, shedding light on a rather invisible or rendered opaque subjectivity of males as inhabiting a shared space with a growing rooftop ecology. With pigeons involved, however, my male interlocutors are more-than-human, more-than-hegemonic-males, more-than-cash-providers, and indeed and as always more-than-finished-polished-selves. Always hyphenated, always in the collaborative making.

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76 The profound Lauren Berlant so beautifully defines impasse as “a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things, maintain one’s sea legs, and coordinate the standard melodramatic crises with those processes that have not yet found their genre of event” (Berlant, 2011, p.4)
Bellies, Dreams, Intestines: Conclusion

Whether through mumbar, khadims, or naughty rabbits, the ethnographic encounters that weave this chapter together always somehow exceeded, fell more than, or surplus-ed one or more humans. The condition to, or rather the connecting thread of the canvas at hand, is an intimate multispecies coming together that is inevitably also a pulsating one. Through the neighborliness of hatching eggs, aspirin-induced chickens, naughty rabbits, or praying pigeons, the recipes for all these collaborations always involves pulses of some kind – or more than one kind to be exact.

These pulsating collaborations can never be theorized on a grid, a table of contents, a bill of “rights and duties”, or a linear predicted trajectory (Green, 2013, p.31). The lives and biographies might begin with humans, but always extend to include eggs, dying rabbits, sick goats, plastic bag-ed intestines, or prophetic pigeons, and you find yourself always confused as to what becomes/remains of a human, a goat, or a pigeon, or rather only shape-shifting and world-altering forms and lives. You can then only know beings in practice, in proximity, in intersubjectivity, in intimacy, and always in collaborative pulsations, sometimes as stories of violent capitalism, sorrowful grieving, or dreaming unworldliness.

The terms we thus use to define ourselves and our carnal worlds, such as humans, goats, chickens, rooftops, do exist and with pivotal cultural and existential relevance but not strictly or with absolute fixity. These are rather terms we culturally deploy, openly and widely use, and fluidly grow, yet they can only be traced and understood along the axes of everyday practice and relations. These categories of thought leak into each other, which is precisely how resilience and life proliferates in, out, and through. And it is hopefully through growing closer to and trying to realize the centrality of some of these connective tissues of bellies and intestines that one is in a better place to realize and attune to these leakages and openings.
That said, then, if sufficiently fortunate, we can only witness leakages or surpluses as instances through which we feel what might be us or how a “we” can come to being. What those leakages do is speaking against master narratives such as species – but also in other instances rural/urban, human/nonhuman distinctions – and towards a closer world of relations, no matter how temporary or seemingly ephemeral. With all these attachments, alternative regularities, beings, and intestines, what other than species-as-we are formed? What nurtures these collaborations? Where do they take place, spatially/temporally, existentially? Can a foot ever be set, for safety and relief beyond all else, in the midst of a hyper-pulsating world? Along these itches of thought, our rooftops then continue to grow and extend, with up and coming an ethnographic attempt to situate and theorize an equally collaborative multispecies home that also flows, grows, pulsates, while enjoying some (permeable) closed-ness.
V. Homecologies: Entanglements of City-Making and World-Making

“...by now we were holding hands – had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing, with green furry leaves. Such an old country travelling tradition. Always carry a plant. Always stay rooted to somewhere.”
Vignette C: “I Just Want to Have a Child!”

I have been visiting Nahed for now over six months, but it seems that there are always matters that you do not know except only so serendipitously. It was just Sahar and myself, drinking coffee on the rooftop and enjoying a cool warm ray of sunlight. Out of nowhere, Sahar asked me if I knew that Eman and Amer might break up soon. She told me that a huge fight took place and that Amer sent his brother to tell Eman and her family that she has brought him bad luck since they got together and that he wants them to break up. They also knew on the same day that Amer is already married (for now three years) to another woman in France where he works. Amer and Eman have been together for now four years, and it is not just an engagement but a katb kitab, which religiously means that they would have to get a divorce if they were to break up. I never knew that Eman was with someone, let alone almost-married. I reacted as subtly as I could, expressing my surprise and grief to the potential bad news. She told me that it is not about Amer at all, and that all the pain Eman is now suffering is just because she wants to have a child. Eman is now 42, so her current chances of finding some other partner are low and lower than ever. Eman wants to get married just to have a child of her own, to pass down all her property to. She told me that the house they are living in now is Eman’s, and the apartment of New Damietta where they spend some of the summer vacation by the sea is also hers. If she dies, all her property goes to her cruel brother’s wife. She wants a child to keep the home intact, and only for that she needs a man.


In speaking of those 42 years of Eman inhabiting the world, Sahar spoke of ways of relating and proliferating that made Eman who she is. Sahar painted Eman as one of the central pivots of the neighborhood; she is the working nurse of the neighborhood, the one who gives injections, and supports her neighbors whenever anyone is in need of help. With this vignette in mind, I then ask what does it mean to have, or rather make, a home? In this context of multispecies collaborations, proximity, and intimacy, how can one theorize and conceive of the projects of home-making and world-making? For Eman, it is perhaps the physical apartment but also the need to feel and sustain a certain footing in the social world, a certain safety that comes from feeling connected, familiarly rooted, and protected. But how does this “cultural geometry” of home unfold through relations, intimacies, and encounters (Green, 2013, p.83)? In this chapter, I attempt to grapple with these questions through paying closer attention to everyday practices of home-making, world-making, and city-making, ones
whose entanglements are stretched to include multispecies enfleshments, varied temporal horizons, and enchanted epistemologies that further layer and complicate what we might mean by “home”.

**Sunnyside, Falling Fall, and Thriving Winter: A Worlding Temporality Manifesto**

Since day one of frequenting Nahed’s home, there has been an unexpected consistent focus on the sun, which is something I never fully fathomed or comprehended. Nahed once narrated me how her day unfolds as a “follow-the-sun” manual. Similarly, Elizabeth Povinelli brilliantly speaks of worlds of stranger sociality, in which one can best trace life through the unfolding threads of “alternative regularities” on which life, and here arguably home, is woven (Povinelli, 2006, p.85). Nahed wakes up a bit before sunrise, goes up on the rooftop to put the breakfast for all the beings up there, then comes down to fix her own breakfast, have her tea ready, her little veil on, and stay by the kitchen’s window where the sun is centered around seven am.

She then keeps following the sun, from one room to the other. She opens each room’s window just when the sun is centered on it. Sahar helps her out and they both tidy and clean each room then again rest in the presence of the sun. At noon, she goes up to the rooftop once again to spend some time with her goats, chickens, and rabbits, and the sun. She comes back down in an hour or two, which is when I also normally arrive. She stays in the little salon in her husband’s bedroom as this is where the sun is centered at this time of the day. She stays there until a bit before sunset, then goes up once again for a final check, adds more food, and puts them all to sleep. She comes back down and has lunch together with everyone then takes a short nap and wakes up for more household chores, albeit in the absence of the sun. In its fascinating charm, this story of diurnal and nocturnal varying life rhythms, however, is not uncommon, as it beautifully echoes Viveiros de Castro’s description of one Amazonian
village; he illustrates: “during the day, nothing happened. Of course, there were the hunting trips, the Pantagruel-esque collective meals, the interminable conversations in the family patios at nightfall, the never-ending tasks revolving around maize, but everything was done in that particular manner at once agitated and apathetic, erratic and monotonous, cheerful and distracted” (1992, p.12-13). This also operates on a seasonal basis. For Nahed, especially in summer, the home is the sun. In spring, it is the sun – its light, warmth, and hope – but also the blossoming trees and flowers facing all the apartment’s windows.

The story unfolds a bit differently in fall and winter. It is usually falling in fall, especially for Eman. Everything is gloomy, the sun is almost always covered with clouds and rain, and the trees lose most of their leaves and vigor, and even the animals on the rooftop suffer illnesses and need special attention and care. The day begins a bit later, since the sun shines later – but also less brightly. Nahed still more or less follows the sun, but on gloomy days she prefers to spend most of the day in bed and hand over all the chores to Sahar. Eman, on the other hand, falls in fall and winter, as these are always seasons of depression and proliferating melancholia. All that upsets her echoes, and she always feels so overwhelmed and overpowered. Her only way out is that she wakes up on weekends near noon and fixes a cup of coffee then goes up on the rooftop to spend at least two or three straight hours. She sometimes speaks with the goats or chickens, sometimes speaks to herself, and sometimes stays absolutely silent. She just enjoys the vastness of the rooftop, il-barah, as she puts it. Somehow, the vastness in the coming/weaving together of the extended horizon of trees, the openness to the sky, and the proliferating lives of goats, chickens, rabbits, and turkeys leave her happier, more hopeful, or less burdened to say the least.

Not all lives suffer in winter, though. Some lives exceptionally proliferate. Nahed for example waits for fall and winter so that she can have the goats pregnant more often, with more little babies joining the rooftop and singing life along. For Nahed, then, that which
makes her feel lighter is rather an acceleration of life, with more and more babies whose
compny helps heal and lighten one’s sorrows. On the one hand it is a proliferation of life,
and on the other it is a more busied temporal rhythm of attending to more lives, caring for
more newborns, and keeping everything in check and in sync. Reminiscent of Evans-
Pritchard’s account of the Nuer, albeit here quite differently, “the daily timepiece is the cattle
clock, the round of pastoral tasks, and the time of day and the passage of time through a day
are to a Nuer primarily the succession of these tasks and their relation to one another” (1940,
p.101-102). Nahed thus throws herself so openly in the multiple temporalities of new lives
coming to being, gradually not forgetting but rather re-scaling her own as proximately
growing more hopeful – and more controlled by – along with other multiplying lines of life.

In her stimulating The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Elizabeth
Povinelli speaks of liberal capital’s temporality as similar to a temporality of diarrhea – slow,
debilitating, and blurred (2006, p.204). In the case of Nahed’s lifeworld, though, it is
anything but a diarrhea-ical temporality. First of all, we are here witnessing multiple
temporalities or temporal lines. Temporality unfolds along the lines of seasons, day-and-
night-variations, multispecies life histories and trajectories, along with of course the daily
clock rhythm and all that follows of jobs, schools, meals, and sleeping patterns. Woven
together in the lifeworlds of their inhabitants, these multiple temporalities – I argue – are best
understood as worlding temporalities, ones that are highly rooted in the very “carnal”
practices of attending to, being attuned with, and entangling with other lives that go beyond
the human and her/his capitalist temporality of work, eat, sleep⁷⁷. Worliding here opposes or

⁷⁷ Worliding temporality as I suggest it here is partly inspired by Kathleen Stewart’s still-quite-unbaked coinig
of the term (Stewart, 2010) but also partly by Deborah Bird-Rose’s embodied time that she sees as always
inherently a multispecies project (Bird-Rose, 2012, p.131), and finally Donna Haraway’s “wolrding time”
(Haraway, 2016, p.11). My use of the term differs from Bird-Rose in that she boils down embodied time to
multispecies projects of only a metabolic nature – decomposition through eating. Mine is also different from
Haraway’s in that she only mentions it on the passing, mainly as a conception of time that blurs the fictive
boundaries of past, present, and future, yet with no particular emphasis on the carnal and multispecies
exceeds the mechanical temporalities of weekdays/weekends, jobs, schools, and even the “official time of politics”, that which recognizes nothing outside submitted reports, meetings, and linear growths of governments and elected officials (Lyons, 2016, 73). The Nuer, for instance, held dear one of their conceptions of time, which Evans-Pritchard termed “oecological time”, as that which reflects their intimate relationship and entanglement with changing seasons, fluctuations of rains and droughts, but also growth and maturity life cycles of their nonhuman companions78 (1940, p.94-95).

These worlding temporalities help us push how we think of the various units of action and relations through which Nahed’s day is spent. Sahar always tried to convince me that Nahed is in fact “working” on the rooftop, in a very strict formal sense of labor. Even worse, she argues that Nahed can never join them whenever they go on vacations in summer, because she has to stay and feed the rooftop animals. She wakes up and her entire day, as made evident, is controlled by attending to their needs. She is then, according to Sahar, much worse than a formal employee, since she gets to work all day rather than during formal working hours with a weekend for example. While I agree that the analogy is indeed viable and quite valid, I think that worlding temporalities does not necessarily go in line with a banal capitalist sense of work, especially given that the “nature” of work is an intimate, processes – hence the processuality implied in the use of temporality rather than time – central to my project. Worlding temporality also follows the wonderful Anna Tsing’s emphasis on collaborations as time-making projects; in her words: “each living thing remakes the world through seasonal pulses of growth, lifetime reproductive patterns, and geographies of expansion. Within a given species, too, there are multiple time-making projects, as organisms enlist each other and coordinate in making landscapes” (Tsing, 2015, p.21).

78 As he brilliantly elaborates, “since activities are dependent on the movement of the heavenly bodies and since the movement of the heavenly bodies is significant only in relation to the activities one may often refer to either in indication of the time of an event...the movement of the heavenly bodies permit Nuer to select natural points that are significant in relation to activities” (Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p.102). I depart from this particular use of the term, however, in that oecological time is an extendedly stretched temporality, with a year-long cycle, whereas worlding temporality speaks more to both long-term intimacies and growth cycles but also everyday intimacies with and attachments to renewing cycles of sunrise, sunset, and feeding schedules. Also in the beautiful words of the children’s literature author Maurice Sendak, lives/words here unfold as “boats that bring seasonal bounties and weathers, and which are mastered by spirit-shaman-animal creatures” (Green, 2013, p.71)
multispecies, but also unpaid one – with the “return” quite evidently more social than material; a nutritional diet, a healthy household, and an accomplished housewife. That said, however, I can still never deny the banality and striking similarity between the control, systematization, monotony, and consistency of rooftop labor, as also strictly gendered and coded as domestic hence spared for the women – as previously witnessed with Botros and his pigeons.

What I found most helpful in pushing for a somewhat different conception of work is Tim Ingold’s *The Perception of the Environment*. He succinctly argued that labor is restricted to work measured out in units of “clock-time calibrated to an astronomical standard”, thus rendering the very particulars of what work is composed of rather elusive (2000, p.195). The focus is almost always on an abstract fetishism of work as something that we do and have, but rarely as something that we are. What he rather suggests is breaking down work into a set of tasks, which he beautifully defines as “any practical operation, carried out by a skilled agent in an environment, as part of his or her normal business of life” (2000, p.195). The emphasis on environment, and the “normal” business of life are both indeed of utmost centrality to rooftop ecologies. Strikingly relieving, Ingold holds that the temporality of this taskscape is essential social, “because people, in the performance of their tasks, also attend to one another [and other species]” (2000, p.195). I then prefer to regard rooftop labor as a series of tasks, sometimes boring, too exciting, too heart-wrenching, too loving, too monotonous, or too obligatory, but always uniquely embedded in an awareness of and a relation with broader species, environments, and temporalities.

To push this just a bit further and bring it back to the gendered division of labor/tasks on rooftop, I regard Sherry Ortner’s meditation on female/male and nature/culture as a significant encounter. She sharply argued that “woman’s body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life; the male, on the other hand, lacking natural creative functions, must (or
has the opportunity to) assert his creativity externally, ‘artificially’, through the medium of technology and symbols” (1972, p.14). As has been made apparent time and time again, women are exclusively and solely ascribed the responsibility of reproducing life on rooftops – a series of tasks always made comparable to raising children. Men, on the other hand, are left to “labor”, in a mechanical, artificial, and technologically advanced ways beyond the wonders of nature and nonhuman lower animals. If a man decides to take up a rooftop task, as Botros (rather than forced to, as in the case of men-incubating-eggs), he chooses one that transports him beyond the modern world of labor, let alone the domestic nexus of reproducing life. He adopts that which “flies” him to an elsewhere in which he is capable of more than a laboring man’s capacities of apprehending the world.

**Words Make Worlds: Khyr, Satr, Rizq**

Yael Navaro-Yashin rightly argues that most of our conceptual toolboxes are largely Western in their crafting and that, consequently, as social scientists of (rather than in) the Middle East, we perhaps need to theorize from the field and to ground our conceptual trajectories in our ethnographic explorations (2017). In this section, I proceed to a more linguistic layer of analysis to explore how these worlding temporalities are expressed and conceptualized in “the field”. Especially given how this thesis is mostly formatted in English, I here take Donna Haraway’s inspiring advice seriously, “go outside English and the world multiplies”, and so I begin by grappling with my fieldwork linguistic repositories on a cosmological but also conceptual level\(^{79}\) (Haraway, 2016, p.103). I therefore ask, what

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\(^{79}\) It is here important to note, however, that this preference of Arabic also has to do with the always partial and dissatisfactory labors of translations and what is lost in the process. More crudely and honestly, perhaps this arguable fetishization of Arabic language likewise dates back to an Orientalist tradition exoticing “the Orient” and their language/s as altogether different from English language for example. With this in mind, I try as much as I can to balance this interest vis-à-vis my personal upbringing and eloquence in spoken Arabic more but also my disciplinary (anthropological) upbringing which might have theoretically at times fetishized the Orient (through relying on “western” canons and theories) with an age-old anthropological interest in exploring linguistic variations (Abu-Lughod, 1989, p.279).
vocabulary do my interlocutors use in describing and theorizing/living home, not literally but epistemologically?

In speaking of those proliferating life forms on the rooftop, Nahed almost always used *khyr*, which is best translated into bounty. In winter then, there is more *khyr* on the rooftop. Thus, whenever I would ask Nahed what would she feel if at one point there was not a single life up there on the rooftop she would immediately tell me that she feels so dead and lonely, an echoing melancholic solitude that she can never tolerate. Even in times of financial crisis, she would always insist that at least a pair of chicken or geese remain up there. For Nahed, a house without animals is a dead house – here in a very final sense of an inability to even imagine death as decomposition or potentially regenerating into other forms of life. Other lives next to Nahed’s always make her feel lighter. *Khyr* here then theorizes the home again as more of a living pulsating unit rather than a fixed entity in space and time. It is here indeed about the use or economic value of goats, chickens, or rabbits, but also about the very pulses that make their being.

*Khyr* as bounty also operates on another more intimate or cosmological level. It is here that *khyr* is entangled with the very technicalities and intimacies of the multispecies relations, that none of these animals could ever turn out to be “evil” or “cunning”. All these animals, then, are regarded as souls and lives that somehow purify, make-good, and re-create home as a spatiotemporal nexus of goodness and proliferating *khyr*, thus preventing evil from entering or having any effect on the home. During my brief three-day visit to Wafaa, she

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80 Linguistically, *khyr* is literally translated into goodness or flourishing, yet here it is much more complicated. And as always in the Arabic language, the word always bears more translations than the most commonly used. Bounty is a case in point – a not-so-famous translation of *khyr* that here fits most conveniently to the meaning in use in which the reference is to that which is uncalculated and rewarded from God rather than man-made, thus also relating to *rizq* of which I speak more shortly.

81 Reem Saad translates *khyr* to be more related to flourishing wellbeing, one that is rooted in the nutritional value of these animals (2002, p.204). While this is largely true, I guess her translation in my case is more in line with *sotr* – as will later be made clear – than with *khyr* as used in this instance.
took me once to meet her 60-year old neighbor *Um* Muhammed, who lives with her son and his wife, along with a couple of ducks and one chicken in the hallway.

What *Um* Muhammed shared with me is that *khyr* comes with responsibility; you cannot grow any animal or plant if you are not sure that you will be responsible enough to sustain this life and allow it to grow with *khyr*. Not caring for an animal or plant that one raises, then, can backfire and become a curse – making home hellish and turning one's life into a series of unfortunate events of illnesses and disasters. *Um* Muhammed used herself as an example, and told me that since she could not secure a rooftop to her ducks and chicken, she had to exert an extra effort in sustaining a livable home for these companions. She then had to build a *khunn*, which I only knew of as a hiding space. The *khunn* here, she so brilliantly explained to me, is like a little room or protruding body of clay hand-built along one of the house walls. With a direct absence of the star of all stars, the sun, *Um* Muhammed takes her ducks and chicken out in front of the home every day after their breakfast to enjoy some sunlight, and perhaps even wander a bit to enjoy some more space beyond the *khunn* and the gloomy lamp-lit hallway of the home. What is *khyr* sustained for, however? What if a home ends up without *khyr*, dead?

As we drank our coffee, *Um* Muhammed told me that the presence of any life form beyond the human at home pertains not just to *khyr* but also and more importantly to *satr*. In its literal translation, *satr* is best understood as veiling or hiding. Yet here it is veiling as protecting and not necessarily as an effort to hide. *Um* Muhammed elaborated by telling me a story of a woman who once came to visit her a while ago when she used to raise geese, one of whom just had twelve little newborn bright green geese, all of which were beautifully next to each other in a box near the *khunn*. *Um* Muhammed did not like the woman’s entrance, as if there was something about her energy or intention that did not seem promising. The woman only looked at the box where the little newborn geese stayed and admired them so much,
saying how amazing and lovely they were. She did not say anything like mash’Allah to prevent the evil eye, Um Muhammed told me. It only took a couple of days after the visit for the little geese to abstain from eating and to all die one after the other. For Um Muhammed, the woman obviously had an evil eye that brought the geese to death. But more importantly, it is as if that the geese here were sacrificed to protect the humans from being targeted by the same evil eye of the woman. It is true that Um Muhammed cried her heart out on those twelve little babies that she loved so intensely, but she told herself that the geese here are only substitutes for her sons who could have caught the evil eye and passed away instead82.

As such, the presence of other life forms at home protects it through satr, these plants and nonhuman animals veil the humans from centrality. By acting as the very first skin surface of the home, these nonhuman life forms as a manifestation of satr catch the evil eye or any evil first and thus protect the home from entirely collapsing. Sacrifice here then, whether deliberate as previously mentioned or accidental as with Um Muhammed’s geese, serves yet another protective function. Maurice Bloch points to the Dinka carrying out sacrifice primarily when an individual or a group “feels penetrated by an outside force” such as here most repeatedly an evil eye (1992, p.31). That said, then, satr helps us theorize the absence of a proliferation of life forms as not just entailing death but vulnerability. A home without non-proliferating nonhuman life forms is vulnerable to catching the slightest bit of evil.

Another encounter with satr helps make this even clearer. When once visiting Safaa I noticed an ill-looking goat. Safaa told me that this goat is pregnant and is about to deliver her baby goat, but that she has been very sick and inert for the past couple of days. In a few days

82 The evil eye is indeed no novel addition to anthropological accounts as it dates back to the earliest days of anthropology. Yet it is also particularly prevalent when it comes to rearing animals, as shown in the case of farm animals in Naveeda Khan’s brilliant account on Muslim ecological thought (Khan, 2014, p.257).
I called Toto to ask if the goat is okay and she went silent then told me they will tell me about it when I come next. I went the next time and they spent the entire day telling me about her. Safaa told me that the mother goat did deliver two beautiful golden goats but that she was very emaciated afterwards and refused to feed them. Two days elapsed and she grew weaker and weaker then they went up on the third day to find her lying on the rooftop, dead. On the fifth day, one of the newborns passed away, followed by her sister on the sixth. These were three very significant economic and social losses, four months after my routine visits.

I felt very insecure because may be they thought it was my evil eye that made the three goats all die that quickly. I remembered the mother brown goat so vividly, with my attempts to protect her from all the other male goats who bullied her as she was sickly lying on the floor this last time I came. I purposefully put her more food than all the rest, and stood right next to her while she ate so that no other goat would approach her. Whenever anyone approached, I would clap and move a bit forward with all my body till they change direction. As a gesture of grief, I decided not to go up on the rooftop on that day. I stayed all day in the living room with Safaa and the children, chatting and sharing stories and studying for the little children. Time elapsed but this growing insecurity did not. Since then, which was October 2017, I never went up on this rooftop again. Whenever I subtly ask if we are going up, Toto would tell me that the stairs will tire me and that it is cold and unclean up there. Gradually, I stopped asking if I should go up and entirely depended on the stories of the rooftop shared with me from the living room. I was not allowed to go up ever again since this happened, even though I was very much allowed to sit down and spend five or six hours chatting with the family about the rooftop but from the living room and anywhere else, except the rooftop. *Satr* is protection, but still requires active and sustained efforts of preserving this shield from collapsing.
Satr as protection is not just about the cosmological worlds of evil eye and shielding houses, however. Another central layer of the making of satr pertains to more everyday necessities of eating and hospitality. Um Muhammed told me that whenever someone visits out of nowhere, without previously informing her, she safely prepares one of the ducks or chickens to be eaten along with some broth, rice, and/or vegetables. In the current dire conditions of livelihood and financial difficulties, Um Muhammed explained that she almost always runs out of money. There is sometimes nothing in the home but bread. Yet as a family home, the house must be bountiful. The ducks literally protect or even save her from suffering the embarrassment and shame of having a guest suddenly visiting without having anything to serve her/him but plain tea and bread. In this particular instant, then, the multispecies relationship unfolds as more symbiotic than ever; both animals and their nonhuman rooftop companions “sustain life by their reciprocal services to one another. In this intimate symbiotic relationship men and beasts [or birds] form a single community of the closest kind” (Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p.36).

Striking a similar chord, Nahed, Wafaa, and Um Muhammed always spoke of rooftop inhabitants as rizq which I would translate into God’s blessing or provision. In this worldview, rizq is indeed God-given, with almost no interference from the human side. Upon speaking of the rooftop, Safaa once told me that she sometimes feels too burdened with all that it takes to keep the rooftop intact. I then asked her why does not she just quit the activity and stop rearing any life up there but she immediately refused and told me this can never happen, how can she reject God-given rizq? For Safaa, this rooftop life is a rizq, one that she never expected. As such, Safaa never asked for a rooftop but God bestowed it as a reward or a bounty for her household, so the least she can do in return is to keep intact and again be responsible for this rizq.
For Safaa, sustaining a lively rooftop also meant that she would be derided as a successful housewife whose skills in making a home and sustaining a proper living extend beyond cleaning, ironing, and washing clothes. To be responsible or thankful for a *rizq*, one would then need to take good care of these God-given rewards, look after the animals for example, feed them well, treat them with love, provide medication when needed, and be well attuned to all their needs and demands. *Rizq* entangles our conception of home with the divine forces, with that which exists somehow before and beyond the human efforts to sustain and enjoy the proliferation of life in the home. In this, home is anything but bounded, for here the flows of life and *rizq* extend beyond the human capacities of expecting and working for worlding and home-making practices. A home is always in the making since God’s *rizq* is always a potentiality. Out of nowhere and without any prior notice, God might bestow upon you a novel form of life, a rooftop, a couple of goats, or a guarding dog to help you survive and proliferate your home and worlding beyond anything you previously had. A bit different from an unreciprocated gift, however, *rizq* must be received with appreciation but also with an unparalleled responsibility to doing all that it takes to prove to God that one is indeed fit for carrying this responsibility and accepting the unexpected gift.  

These three concepts together, interlocking into a tree or a cloud of some kind with significant conceptual overlaps, help us recognize the cosmological and the social as ever more dependent, relational, symbiotic. For God-given *rizq* to continually sustain itself as *khyr* but also fulfill its utmost potential as *satr*, a person/family needs to stay responsible and thankful in keeping the blessing bountiful, intact, and securing one’s home and being. God, His gifts, the desire of His acceptance and generosity consistently converse with and take

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83 I refuse to use the Maussian analogy of the gift here because if we follow it and regard *rizq* as an unreciprocated gift, a Maussian reading of it would then entail that humans are declining or rejecting a bond/relationship with God – which is far from true. Humans continue to try to reciprocate, by thanking God but more importantly by taking up the responsibility properly of taking care of this bestowed *rizq* (Mauss, 2000, p.13).
shape through social reciprocal exchanges, socially intricate strategic ways of conceiving of birds and rooftop animals, and managing to ritualistically ward off evil and protect one’s home through using and relating these other species with which we share a livelihood. This smoothly operates on the multiple scales of words, cosmologies, ontologies, and everyday rituals – ever again rendering it almost impossible to neatly differentiate between a social, a cosmological, a religious, or an ecological. The question now becomes: how were these multispecies intimacies entangled with God’s otherworldly affairs expressed in the ethnographic everyday and practical worldings?

As Old as Grandpa: The Tree-Home’s Life History

“Nobody lives everywhere; everybody lives somewhere. Nothing is connected to everything; everything is connected to something” (Haraway, 2016, p.31).

While sitting with Hana and Nahed one day before sunset, Hana pointed at the tree right in front of the salon’s window and excitedly shouted: “do you know that this tree is as old as grandpa?” Nahed added that Farid was born right when this tree was planted, and they both somehow grew together. The tree now looked so emaciated though, very dry and with almost no green leaves whatsoever (figure 4). Nahed told me that this is the first spring that the tree does not blossom in with bountiful flowers. She kept remembering how she used to be the happiest whenever she opens this room’s window when she first got married because she would feel like she is living inside the tree, with all its red and orange little flowers breezing against her face. But now it has apparently grown so old to blossom, which is very worrying as it might mean that the tree is dying soon – and consequently, what this would mean for Farid.

I ignorantly told Nahed that it might just be a matter of a lack of water or care – that the tree just now needs more attention than ever, since it is growing exceptionally older. She told me that they do water it and care for it with so much love and attention as always, and
that everyone in the street does so, because all the trees of the street were planted when the
now grownups were little children – more or less – so everyone has such a strong relationship
with all the surrounding trees of the street.

Just a few hours later, on the same day, Eman came back from work so I told her
about what Nahed and Hana told me about the tree so she excitedly asked me if Nahed told
me about the tree’s “life story” or “qiṣit ḥayathat” and I surprisingly said they did not. She
asked Nahed to tell me, since she knows it better and more eloquently. Eman so harmonically
told me that the tree narrated: Inside the tree live crows and snakes, who in turn eat the mice
on the ground but who also sometimes climb the tree. The mice climb the tree to gain better
access to Nahed’s other window where she rears her pigeons. Mice, in turn, eat little baby
pigeons called zaghalyl. We, as humans, also eat pigeons. Dogs, on the rooftop like Jack but
also on the streets, as well as turkeys up there on the rooftop, both in turn scare crows and
snakes, and the cycle goes on and on84. The human here, then, has a very specific role in the
cycle; that is, eating the pigeons. No more, no less.

In this tree-story, I sensed a certain suggested normativity or rather romanticism as to
this “living with” all animals who co-inhabit the same space of life so I asked Eman if they
ever killed a mouse. Nahed told me that yes they sometimes do, in specific cases only. Nahed
was once taking a shower while home-alone, and she heard strange squeaks near the basin. In
the middle of her shower, she took a look at the basin to find a huge brown mouse fighting

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84 To take this back to homes and home-making, Von Uexhull tries to look at trees as also potential homes,
comparable to “human homes”; in other words: “for the form of the tree is no more given, as an immutable
fact of nature, than is the form of the house an imposition of the human mind. Recall the many inhabitants of
the tree: the fox, the owl...among countless others. All, through their various activities of dwelling, have played
their part in creating the conditions under which the tree, over the centuries, has grown to assume its
particular form and proportions. And so, too, have human beings, in tending the tree’s surroundings...but the
house also has many and diverse animal inhabitants...and all, in various ways, contribute to its evolving form,
as do the house’s human inhabitants in keeping it under repair, decorating it, or making structural alterations
in response to their changing domestic circumstances. Thus the distinction between the house and the tree is
not an absolute but a relative one – relative, that is, to the scope of human involvement in the form-
generating process” (cited in Ingold, 2000, p.187).
with a thin weasel. She came out of the shower and kept hitting them inside the basin with the shower faucet till they both died. She left their corpses in the basin till she was done then asked Hana to take them out and leave them in the garbage pile downstairs on the street. For Eman and Nahed, the acts of killing or putting a mouse’s life to an end take place in specific cases when she could not stand their presence and more importantly had no way to get them out of the apartment alive, with also keeping in mind that neither a mouse nor a weasel straightforwardly influences Nahed’s household like a chicken would for example. When all else fails, then, the human has to practice some authority and power over the life of other beings – after rationally calculating the loss. Yet in every other case, the proliferating and regenerating chain of life/being allows the human to only exist as part of the working chain – no less or more important than any of the other forms of life sustaining the world around her/him. None of my interlocutors ever held themselves in practice as the ultimate center of the world or the broader chain of life. As Philippe Descola beautifully uses the term, chain of life/being entails an understanding of life in which “vitality, energy, and fecundity all circulate constantly between organisms thanks to the capture, exchange, and consumption of different kinds of flesh” (Descola, 2013, p.72). Similarly, my interlocutors are all absolutely aware of the forces outside them, the forces inside them, and the world beyond their existence and centrality. As Timothy Morton puts so eloquently: “closing the circle is impossible. Even a circle is a circling, a circulation that implies an inherent movement, a constant deviation from the integral (pi, impossible to compute completely, yet thinkable). A circle is thinkable yet impossible to execute…even a circle is twisted. Attempts to straighten things are violent; they never work perfectly because they are doomed” (Morton, 2016, p.57).

With all that has been said so far, home here arguably unfolds as an ecology, or as part of wider ecologies of relating, attaching, entangling, and being. What a homecology does is that it undermines, or makes thicker and weirder, the question of an inside and an outside
(Morton, 2016, p.67). In all our previous entanglements with home, there is not a unitary unchanging inside/outside that demarcates the home. The home is the apartment, but it is also the rooftop, the horizon beyond the rooftop, the vastness of the rooftop-and-beyond, the proliferating lifeworlds it inhabits, the tree-home-as-old-as-grandpa, the city, the waiting for a husband to secure offspring for inheritance, the working chains of life of mice, dogs, turkeys, and pigeons.

**Smelly Fish, Costly Dowries: Ecologies of Exchange**

In almost every visit to Nahed’s house, once the clock ticks 3 pm or a bit afterwards, a distinct, strong, very sharp smell of frying fish penetrates from the window – the same window overlooking the tree-as-old-as-Farid. I hate the smell of fish, in all its shapes and forms. I feel my stomach gradually and quietly beginning to ache, even though it is usually practically empty at that time of the day during fieldwork. If this was at home, I would so unashamed-ly bring a veil or a perfumed tissue paper and cover up my nose till the smell fades away. But in fieldwork this did not feel like a viable option. I had to depend on my nostrils to adapt to the smell till I feel better, but I do not think I ever fully adapted.

I once asked Nahed where all the food on the rooftop comes from; do the goats and chicken solely depend on the house’s leftovers and the green leaves/fodder or is there any other source of food? She then told me that there is a very complex neighborhood-based network that provides food for each rooftop. Nahed has agreed with the smelly fish store right in front of their house to give her the daily waste that he accumulates. By waste she meant here the vegetables leftovers that the store uses to cook the fish with. In addition to the fish store, Nahed has also agreed with a *ful* and *ta‘amiyya* (fava beans) store nearby to give them its daily leftovers again of preparing the beans and vegetables that they would otherwise throw away. Other houses with rooftops have likewise agreed with other shops that sell sandwiches, meals, vegetables, or again beans, to hand them over their daily leftovers. This
exchange ritual/practice, I argue, is a bit different from an alienated economic exchange. It is anything but a fully self-interested balanced exchange; one party gets to benefit clearly more than the other. The rooftops/homes are the primary winning party in this exchange, for they get to receive a daily huge amount of food for their animals every day. The shops, on the other hand, do not appear to receive something in return nor to directly benefit from this exchange – except perhaps if Nahed wants to buy fish on some day or some ful for breakfast, like any other expected or unexpected customer. Even if we assumed the exchange never happened, the shops would very easily dispose of their leftovers in any garbage dump or bin.

This remarkable exchange operates on levels that transcend pure cost and benefit, or balanced reciprocity for that matter. It is more of a rich socio-ecological exchange, one that takes into account the question of waste and the attention given to saving but also making the best use of any leftovers that would otherwise end up in the garbage dump. Here this is perhaps about preserving a less polluted neighborhood/city – since the leftovers would as always pile up and rot with time thus polluting the surroundings – but also supporting each other’s “homes” as ecological units whose benefit extends to protecting the environment through sparing it of excessive waste. Home, then, unfolds as an ecology of practices and relations, of which Isabelle Stengers writes: “approaching a practice [ecologically] then means approaching it as it diverges, that is, feelings its borders, experimenting with the questions which practitioners may accept as relevant” (Stengers, 2005, p.184). The fish and beans shops, then, along with all the other neighboring shops in the same networks of ecological exchange, function as nodes of what we can here argue to be “home.” Similar to

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85 As James Carrier makes clear, the basic foundation of a commodity economic exchange is that “commodity transactors are self-interested, independent individuals who exchange with people with whom they have no enduring links or obligations” (Carrier, 1991, p.121). Our ethnographic here is clearly different in that it is soaked in and affected by but also makes the social/ecological in which the exchange takes place, thus problematizing any neat imagination of gift/commodity as strict binaries or exchanges as ever purely alienated or commodified.
the tree-home story, by trying to limit the waste in the broader neighborhood, the shops very skillfully channel their leftovers into another part of this chain of life that can best use it to generate more life, less environmental disruption, and more ecological balance/connectivity.

On a different note, on one sunny day Safaa told me about their current predicament of preparing Toto for marriage. The pre-marriage phase included a very elaborate obligatory gift exchange ecology, albeit different from the previous one. Safaa told me that this whole ritual of exchanging gifts is rooted in their origins as ‘Arabs. She then made it so clear to me that her own lineage does not belong to ‘Arabs but her husband’s does, which is why Toto needs to give in to all those elaborate gift exchanges. With every occasion, such as the Islamic New Year’s, the Prophet’s birthday, ‘Ashura, mid-Shaaban, etc., the bride’s family must prepare a huge basket of goods to be delivered to the groom’s family. The groom’s family, in return, does gift back some goods but these are way fewer and less expensive. Interestingly, the groom’s family always gifts “dry” goods, such as rice, macaroni, fruits, or nuts and yamsh in Ramadan – all uncooked, while the bride’s family must gift both dry goods but also uncooked chicken, turkeys, and meat to add weight and value to the gift basket. This elaborate gifting ritual, then, is yet an added somehow obligatory burden. Here the rooftop helps sustain or rather take responsibility of this otherwise burdensome ritual of giving away goods. Had it not been for the rooftop and its beings, Safaa would have to resort to buying all these needed goods and meat in order to be gifted to the groom’s family, in

86 This can only uncannily remind us of Mauss’s discussion of potlatch gift-giving and horrific goods-destruction ceremonies which function to also make and sustain social status (Mauss, 2000, p.13-14). As Mauss puts it, “the extravagant consumption of wealth, particularly in the potlatch, always exaggerated and often purely destructive, in which goods long stored are all at once given away or destroyed, lends to these institutions the appearance of wasteful expenditure and child-like prodigality” (p.72). The difference here is that these goods in my fieldwork are actually consumed in eating, but are still quite socially over-coded. Why would a marriage entail all of these goods and gifts, systematically and ritualistically in exchange till and after the marriage take place?
exchange with rice and macaroni at best, in a strange unevenly reciprocated exchange so surreally reminiscent of anthropologically fetishized “marriage by capture” 87.

In gifting the groom dead and uncooked meat of different kinds, most uniquely and importantly here grown and reared on the rooftop, the bride’s family is gifting its time, effort, labor, and energy in sustaining these gifted chickens, rabbits, or goats. As anthropology further strikes, the Dinka similarly gift cattle in bridewealth in exchange for brides, a case in which “cattle thus signify both an abandonment of the natal internal female element of the lineage, in so far as they were obtained in exchange for daughters and sisters, and the promise of external women, who will be obtained as wives and who will thus become the means by which the lineage will legitimately reproduce its own vitality through its children” (1992, p.66). In the same vein, then, this gift-exchange from the bride’s family is indeed an economic burden yet arguably stands as an outward social statement of strength nonetheless. In giving off their bride Toto, the family is also bolstering their position vis-à-vis the groom’s through complementing this with uncooked meat uniquely and lovingly home- or rooftop-grown, rather than mediocremly and ignorantly bought from the market. The social exchange of meat itself, in this pre-marital labyrinths, is one of strengthening affine and relationship with another party, namely the groom’s family. In this particular case, then, strikingly similar to the exchange of pork with the Orokaiva, “pig meat thus comes to stand for strength in this world, which is believed to come not only from the nutritional effect of the meat, especially the fat, but also from strength-giving political and affinal exchange relationships which are created and maintained by the exchange of pork” (Bloch, 1992, p.16).

87 In this, “one side is represented as raiders capturing a woman, in some cases like a hunter capturing his quarry, while the other side is defeated and loses what the victors gain” with here the groom’s family “capturing” not only the bride but also some accompanying added “flesh” of nonhuman animals though not literally hunted (Bloch, 1992, p.73).
What the rooftop presence and sustenance does here then is that it not only keeps Safaa’s household intact, but also carnally, ecologically, and literally sustains an extension of the home – that is, Toto’s marital home-in-the-making. The two homes thus unfold in relation and in blurry boundaries; the rooftop makes the new extended home, while simultaneously keeping and protecting the “old” one from collapsing or financially suffering. Homeecology is then here again made to stretch not just spatially beyond the home to include smelly fish shops and ful leftovers, but also temporally to include those future homes that are yet to be built, loved, and made into being. The various moments and examples discussed here further problematize any suggested dichotomy between ecological and social worlds, previously hinted at in the introduction. What is perhaps uniquely specific to the rooftop ecologies at hand is that these social ecologies require an intricate awareness of, dependence on, and relating to the surrounding environments of trees and nonhuman animals that is largely distinctive. Rooftops then, force us to re-think the social and ecological experiences as collaborative and strikingly co-dependent, crafting a unique “eco-social” configuration worthy of exploration and meditation. The very terms of the “ecological” exchanges of leftovers, meat, chicken, or otherwise are in fact predominantly social, in the sense that they operate through and for sustaining widening social networks of affines, extended kin, neighbors, and benign conviviality, albeit with environmental awareness and intimacy as a sine qua non.

Windows and Curtains: Pulling Out/Through

In this chapter, I attempted to extrapolate through ethnographic encounters the potential meanings, manifestations, and shapes through which home takes form. I tried to answer or rather grapple with the question of “how do different heritages of thought [and practice] conceptualize the ways in which different kinds of flow animate the world, its histories and possibilities?” (De Castro, 2013, p.53) And indeed home does take form, but
never a singular and never a regular one. The shapes home take are everything that can ever be imagined and those that cannot, including various “surfaces, skins, bodies, boundary, temporalities, presence, and intensivities” (Green, 2013, p.76). Like windows and curtains, perhaps, homes are always open(ings); into more potentials, more relations, and more varied temporalities and relations. In my specific fieldwork lifeworlds, home is better understood as a homecology; a unit that exists and is made through its pulsating presence in the midst of lively exchanges, relations, memories, futures, and fantasies.

What this discussion on home has hopefully left us with is a more attuned awareness of home as transcending spatiotemporal horizons. Yes indeed home includes space and time, but even these are not restricted or unchallenged. Memories of growing up, smelling blossoming flowers, chasing mice and cats, feeding and gifting beings, a repulsion from smelly fried fish, and waiting for marriage to have a child all go into the making of home. As Lesley Green eloquently puts it, “memory of space [and time] is never only visual: practices of spatial memory include memories of the sounds of a place, their smells, the ways people move in them, their seasonalities and weathers, their connectedness to other places, among many other sensory cues” (Green, 2013, p.70).

Yet what an ecology does is that it never allows for a full-fledged closure; the ethnographic bits and pieces work together to somehow help us compose or weave an ecological circular conception of a home resulting from a very “different worldmaking in which the very ideas of space, time, philosophy, and knowledge are different” (Green, 2013, p.83). It so happened that in my fieldwork here the bits together weave a different conception of home, yet a different lifeworld might lead us to a different composition. But these

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88 The stories then somehow make the home, or rather home becomes – as Jackson argues – “a word we use for this accumulating fund of personal stories and events that become synonymous with the places where they occur” (Jackson, 1998, p.175)
fieldwork bits and beings can always be woven to compose something different than a homeecology, perhaps a forest, may be a manifesto, or an awaited child of Eman.
VI. Conclusion: The Only Way Out is Through, Now What?

On the Fifth Day, Jane Hirshfield – 2017

The facts were told not to speak
And were taken away.
The facts, surprised to be taken, were silent.
Now it was only the rivers
That spoke of the rivers,
And only the wind that spoke of its bees,
While the unpausing factual buds of the fruit trees
Continued to move toward their fruit.
The silence spoke loudly of silence,
And the rivers kept speaking,
Of rivers, of boulders and air
(Popova 2017)
Vignette D: Right There, Under my Bed

In speaking about the sick chicken now living inside Nahed’s kitchen (only till she feels better to be taken back to the rooftop), Nahed also spoke of a past lost, but not so lost, moment of similar beyond-rooftop proximity. Nahed asked me if I ever heard of swine flu and avian flu – influenza il-khanazyr and influenza il-ṭuyur respectively. At that time the government was trying to prohibit any rooftop rearing of animals, and some of Nahed’s neighbors warned of complaining to the government that Nahed’s household is still housing some unpleasantly undesired dangerous nonhuman delinquents. Nahed had to dispose of some of the old animals. She ate some, slaughtered others, and gifted some others to her extended family. Yet as always, she could not bring herself to live in a “dead” home. She had to keep something alive.

She decided to very secretly keep just a couple of chickens and ducks, but there was no way they can stay on the rooftop – too exposed to be hidden, the quacks penetrate sound waves too. The first thing I thought of was the home’s doorway, but Nahed told me that this was never an option because it is too accessible to the street so the quacks can be so easily heard, and that Nahed’s sister-in-law living right on the ground floor also threatened to call the police if Nahed still kept any live chickens. After plenty of thought and rumination, Nahed decided to hide the chickens and ducks inside her very own bedroom, right under her bed. Under the bed was warm, cozy, and she prepared it with a few cardboard boxes with some fodder and food for the chickens. She kept them in there, so safe and sound, nearer than her dearest children. I asked if they were ever scared of keeping those chicken that close, given the threats of bird flu and its associated supposed lethal impact on humans. Nahed and Eman told me they never believed this whole bird flu business was real, and that Nahed somehow believed her chicken can never harm her. At worst, she told me, if they catch the flu and I catch it too, we will both find a drug to heal our diseases. But this was only a worst-case-scenario. Nahed and Eman believed that bird flu is yet another normal flu, and that all this state propaganda is only to scare people and that’s all. A few months later when the crackdown was over, all the chickens were taken on the rooftop once again, and lives proliferated as habituated.

Fieldnotes, August 14, 2017.

What do we do as anthropologists? This might be a far-fetched, philosophical, and existential question to begin a (final) chapter with, yet perhaps a useful and necessary one as to bring this thesis to an end. In my view, anthropologists relate. Anthropologists connect. At best, anthropologists translate (Asad, 1986, p.141). We relate, connect, and translate worlds, views, trajectories, stories, worldviews, life experiences, histories, and ways of making meaning out of living messes and complexes. We do so ethnographically, through attending
closely to, and as intimately as possible taking part in people’s lives and everyday
“imponderabilia” as Bronsilaw Malinowski puts it (Malinowski, 1922, p.14). Marilyn
Strathern pays closer attention to this role of anthropology as translation of worlds – into
words but also broader worlds – while eloquently advising us to explore what concepts we
use to think other concepts; in her words, as quoted by Haraway, “it matters what matters we
use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it
matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe
descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make
stories” (quoted in Haraway, 2016, p.12).

Till this very point of the making of this thesis-fetus, the ethnographic concepts and
stories I used translate into concepts and stories of multispecies intimacies, togetherness,
collaborations, life and death, among others. In this chapter, I attempt to bring those
multispecies discussions on a firmer, more dystopic, more grounded ground. This might thus
be regarded as an exercise in zooming out of those everyday intimacies and works of
collaborations or translating those into wider more cacophonous worlds of struggles,
conflicts, and push-and-pull with institutions, economic difficulties, and disciplinary
inconsistencies. I here hopefully push translation a bit further, asking not if translation of
worlds is necessary – for it indeed is – but rather what it could be and how it should be
undertaken (De Castro, 2014, p.86). I try to translate the multisensorial, viscerally intense
worlds of my interlocutors into myriad other worlds, experimenting with the horizons of
relevance and possibilities of what a multispecies worlding on Cairo’s rooftops can offer.
Now what? Other further translations.

89 This chapter has largely grown out of a series of very fruitful conversations on rooftops, urban agriculture,
and human-animal relations among a group of loving mentors in South Africa, as part of a research grant in
March 2018. I am greatly indebted to professors Nikiwe Solomon, Michelle Pressend, Francis Nyamnjoh, Frank
Matose, and the great support from the environmental humanities MA students and the wonderful PhD
multispecies witch Maya Marshak.
Who Let “the State” Out? Two Flus and a State

As the above vignette points at, my interlocutors’ rooftop lives were somehow woven into or stained with a not-so-distant vivid memory of a so-called epidemic or, better put, crisis that left their rooftops rather threatened and endangered. Cairo’s rooftops, and Egypt at large, experienced two main crises through which “the state” was called into action. I am here using the state as a mushroom, shadowing or housing myriad governmental institutions, state entities, and bodies of law and state power – mainly in a bureaucratic sense. The first crisis was the avian flu, also and more colloquially known as bird flu, taking place or reaching a peak between 2006-2007 and stretching to a resolution in 2009 (Leach and Tadros, 2013, p.242). With the announcement of the arrival of avian flu and its threat on migrating birds, local breeds, but also humans came a heightened state-sponsored hysteria of rearing any birds, but especially poultry, in the premises of one’s home.

The state of anticipation, suspense, fear, and emergency began echoing in the very intimacies of rooftops and homes of those rearing any kinds of animals or birds. And this was anything but accidental or faulty, for this wave of avian flu skillfully discoursed as a threatening lethal epidemic targeted a very particular audience-thrown-as-culprits, namely those whose rooftops had any living birds or animals. The Egyptian prime minister, for example, so eloquently declared that “the world is moving toward big farms because they can be controlled under veterinarian supervision… the time has come to get rid of the idea of breeding chickens on the roofs of the houses”, very timely after a senior FAO official stated that “the fight against bird flu must be waged in the backyard of the world’s poor” (quoted in Bingham and Hinchliffe, 2008, p.181). To this effect, Egypt witnessed a gigantic crackdown on lively rooftops, with calculated clear fines for those who keep their birds at home\footnote{Fines ranging from EGP 1000 and 5000 (Al-Shaab, 2007)} and supposed – though never clearly specified or arguably implemented (Al-Masry Al-Youm,
State officials including governors, ministers, and heads of municipalities began closely and strictly implementing a stretched extermination of all birds everywhere around Egypt, with a specific emphasis on rooftops and any small-scale homes inside cities. Within a few months, 30,000 chickens were either hanged or slaughtered and 209 shops rendered informal or unlicensed were shut down (Fathy, Mehanna, Gaaly, 2009). In response to this alarming situation, some people indeed acquiesced and handed in their poultry and birds whereas a myriad others resisted the entire wave of enforced alarming fear. Many people skillfully hid their poultry inside their very homes, which was indeed hazardous when it comes to a “dangerous” proximity with a potentially sick species while many others refused to cooperate with the state and disposed of their poultry on their own – through slaughtering or gifting whatever they have left (Akhbar Misr, 2009).

The state’s response to this large-scale resistance and persistence on keeping lively rooftops alive spanned along a rather wide spectrum. In a very “let them eat cake” inconsiderate fashion, Giza’s governor at the time announced the state’s support and sponsoring of rooftops mushroom-raising – let them eat mushrooms, not chickens – a campaign that by all means extended beyond Giza’s borders and boundaries (Akhbar Misr, 2008). On a very different note, a draft law was suggested and arguably proposed discussing the complete prohibition of the circulation and selling of live fresh poultry except in licensed shops and slaughterhouses, as well as specifying fines for those who will not abide by what the law spells out (Al-Shaab, 2007). That said, however, this specific article of the law – later numbered article 70 in the 2009 law – never got implemented, in spite of consistent discussions, negotiations, and debates on its terms in the Parliament and elsewhere until 2017 (Nagy, 2009; Salama, 2017). What might have taken place is that after the drafting of this
article of the law, with the sustained consistent resistances of rooftop worlds in view, it proved quite challenging if not impossible but also stupid to put a similar law in action.

The inconsistent, uncertain, and hence unpredictable stance of the state vis-à-vis rooftop ecologies continued till another crisis heightened the intensity, presence, and insecurity of the state when it comes to the circulation of any nonhuman animals, except for pets perhaps, within the bounds of the streets. During the period of 2009-2011, the “new epidemic” swine flu was announced, with an accompanying state of frenzied security and precautions. In a very similar narrative structure, discourse, and following measures to the avian flu crisis, the Egyptian government began its crackdown on the livelihoods of the most impoverished, precarious, and financially insecure pockets, including again those raising rooftop poultry – as the virus was believed to circulate among different species – but also and more centrally, the Christian zabaleen communities of Cairo who are garbage collectors making a living out of collecting urban waste/garbage, sorting it, turning it into crafts, and raising pigs as a corollary to be later sold and/or consumed to help cover their living expenses (Leach and Tadros, 2013, p.244). Gradually or not so much so, state-sponsored campaigns of culling any existing pigs became a “national security” affair, rescuing Egypt from an international lethal epidemic – a perfect instance for scapegoating or rather “scape-pigging” livelihoods that the state otherwise deems as illegal, unnecessary, or simply uncivil (Leach and Tadros, 2013, p.245).

With bulldozers, “pigs experts”, and medical masks, the Egyptian government began a full-fledged crackdown on any functioning pigs raised in backyards, lively rooftops, or any other “unlicensed” pork shops (Leach and Tadros, 2013, p.248). To add a bit of spice to this state of heightened emergency and anticipation, the government also installed a hotline specifically for people to inform the government of anyone they know or heard is raising/keeping any animals at home – whether pigs, poultry, or otherwise (Salama, 2009).
All the pigs found were either hung, slaughtered – debatable – or buried alive\textsuperscript{91}. The most efficient and indeed easiest way to get rid of hordes of thousands of pigs was to bury them alive, hoping this to silently go unnoticed. Yet quite expectedly, and ever again, people resisted the violence, inhumanity, and insensitivity through which this pigs – but also on a smaller-scale poultry, and any other nonhuman home-raised animals – genocide was implemented (Mahfouz, 2009c). International organizations, committees, and local groups began talking against the vulgarity of these measures, in which more than 350,000 pigs were killed by the very blood-stained hands of the state (Salama, 2009).

Even though the instant of swine flu might not be as so directly related to rooftops as that of the bird flu\textsuperscript{92}, two particular mushrooming eruptions – social and ecological ones – must be pointed out. As the pigs’ genocide took place, unexpected intimacies also unfolded. In telling me about her memories of the bird flu crisis, Eman also mentioned the twin-crisis of swine flu, as yet another moment in which the crackdown targeted the ones most dependent on these other animals for a living. She talked about it in a very sympathetic fashion, expressing how unjust and violent these measures were, while still nevertheless jokingly telling me how the pigs did smell horrible and by extensions those raising them smelled equally horribly. From their side, some Muslim butchers collectively and consciously refused to slaughter any pigs when ordered by the government – for around EGP 200 per “head” – arguing that it does not abide by the Islamic jurisprudence guidelines for

\textsuperscript{91} The decision on which way of killing is to take place was seemingly rationalized in the beginning, as the government claimed that the sick pigs would be hanged whereas the healthy ones slaughtered. Here the debate extended to debates on how compensations will take place – whether if the pigs are hanged and thus treated as total loss, or slaughtered and thus sold by the state without sharing the benefit with the actual pig-people (Mahfouz, 2009a). As quite cliché-ly expected, these rationalizations never actually took place as most pigs were inhumanely buried alive, while almost no compensations were given to any of those raising pigs – distracted by an endless debate on whether hung pigs require compensation (Mahfouz, 2009b) and justified through the ever-endlessly-cyclical diffusion of responsibility as to who is really responsible for paying the compensations to those implicated in the crisis (Al-Shorouk Al-Gadid, 2009).

\textsuperscript{92} As previously mentioned, rooftops of all kinds were indeed targeted as part of the crackdown on pigs but I cannot fully argue that rooftops were in any way the protagonists of that crisis.
slaughtering (Al-Masry Al-Youm, 2009a) but also out of a strict stance against again the inhumanity of the measures along with the broader violent crackdown on functioning multispecies livelihoods of people (Yassin, 2009).

This is not to paint this particular moment in multispecies history of Egypt as one of utopic effervescence or sectarian romance and erased boundaries, but to rather poke at potentializing intimacies and resistances that hold on to the right of life and death but also the right of authoring one’s own life and livelihood in moments of extreme instability and financial hardship. This is also not to say that with full certainty those two epidemics were just state-led propaganda and blindly following an international “emerging diseases worldview”, as the historian Nicholas King puts it93 (quoted in Bingham and Hinchliffe, 2008, p.176). Those crises were perhaps partly real, in at least having considerable effects on the health of implicated species of all kinds, with some deaths too, yet this does not give the state a full undivided right to crackdown on people’s livelihoods or lead a one-man-show spectacle in which it is only the state that knows how to deal with epidemics and diseases. In other words, who gave the government – which has largely and consistently been uninvolved in multispecies worldings altogether – the entitlement and right to provide precautions, measures, and violent plans without involving the actual people who are viscerally and lively knowledgeable about these threatened species? Why wasn’t it ever suggested to involve the implicated parties, namely the zabaleen or rooftop human inhabitants, in these dialogues and ways of managing the crisis? I only hope that all these previous chapters have made a strong case of those multispecies experts not only as stakeholders but also knowledgeable agents.

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93 In their brilliant account on biosecurity, Bingham and Hinchliffe trace the frenzy of these two flus back to an international conference on “emerging viruses” that took place in Washington in 1989, which is when and where collective anxieties on new infections such as HIV and Ebola were first expressed with an “action plan” in mind (2008, p.176).
with better skills, experiences, and life trajectories to manage “crises” and “epidemics” whenever these are bound to happen.

As for the ecological eruption/s, which is also undeniably social, this pertains more to waste than anything else. As briefly mentioned above, the zabbaleen make a living out of rearing pigs but also collecting waste, sorting, feeding their pigs the organic bits of it, and recycling the rest or what they can – quite organically sparing the state of its inefficiently handled role of disposing of the gigantic metropolis’s waste. When this crackdown-swine-flu took place, this proliferating organic system of waste-management was suspended as the zabbaleen refused it altogether as a gesture of resistance to the then-current state of affairs. As quite an expected result, waste began malignantly increasing in Cairo and Egypt more broadly, with the state’s inefficiency shamelessly unfolding in day-and-moonlight (Magdy, 2009). The culling of pigs then, along with the broader crackdown on rooftops indeed, can be regarded as an uncalculated conscious human intervention in wider proliferating ecologies. This intervention disrupted working lifecycles, chains of life but also food chains, and actual multispecies livelihoods, resulting in almost irreversible ecological, economic, political, and social consequences.

With this disruption at hand, what the state began propagating was an overarching image of the urban metropolises of Egypt as civil, modern, and anything but animal-friendly. At heart of the bird flu and swine flu crises was also a shameless imagination of Cairo as a modern city, “where one is more likely to find the final of the African Nations Cup than chickens in the streets” (Bingham and Hinchliffe, 2008, p.181). Very expectedly, then, the discourse on rooftops and pigs-raising extended to horrifically produce these practices as

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94 For a more comprehensive ethnographic account on Cairo’s Zabbaleen, see Furniss, 2012.
95 This is by no means new or special to the two flus crises. The repulsion of animals (except perhaps if found in zoos or inside homes as pets) dates as far back as Ottoman Egypt began taking form, as Alan Mikhail’s incomparable book brilliantly illustrates (Mikhail, 2014).
manifestations of “the ruralization of the city” in which Cairo is gradually unfolding into an uncivil, premodern village (Bingham and Hinchliffe, 2008, p.184).

With all these imaginations, statistics, and discourses of Cairo and Egypt in mind, no mention of “the urban” as a unit of analysis or a category of reference ever took place during my fieldwork, however, which is why I refused to engage with this category as a central analytical tool throughout my thesis. My interlocutors are indeed fully aware of how “urban” and “farming” might sound like a misnomer for some, and of these condescending discourses of the state on their rooftops, but for them it is arguably more of a hyphenated part of their being and livelihoods as urban inhabitants than anything pertaining to fantasies of states or cities\textsuperscript{96}. Living in Cairo for at least a good several generations back, all my interlocutors imagine and practice a very particular “Cairo” in mind, one that is completely divorced from the state’s imagined civil metropolis. My interlocutors’ Cairo have included rooftops, goats, and rabbits for as long as they ever survived or remembered, and anything but that for them is not just illogical but sheer fantasy. The city here, Cairo, thus emerges only as part of those extending ecologies spelled out throughout this thesis, hereby extending beyond trees and mice to also include cities and states. Cairo does not exist in vacuum for Nahed or Eman, but is rather only experienced organically through the interplay of keeping animals, raising goats, and puzzling actors together to manage to make a living in a currently worsening financial crisis.

In this ecological viewpoint, then, the state likewise shape-shifts as we move along. Throughout those previous chapters, we have witnessed the state as a provider of medicine, fertilizers, vets, seeds, vaccines, and chicks – operating as a functioning technical unit in fact facilitating the presence of rooftop animals and their survival. In this closing chapter,

\textsuperscript{96} Genealogically, all my interlocutors have been living in cities for at least two generations backwards.
however, we unravel a new arguably contradictory and schizophrenic “face” of the state best regarded as a bureaucratic entity of crisis management, issuing fines, and extending its axes of control in moments of crisis. This crisis-laden face of the state also brought to fore a specific imagination of the city that has largely been absent or at least not obviously vocalized. In its crackdown on rooftops, deeming them uncivil and rural, and culling pigs, the state forcibly marketed for Cairo as a global urban center immediately and sharply responding to crises, in line with international conferences and precautions, and as an indeed human-exclusive space of compliant citizens buying their food from markets and keeping animals as loving pets. In its multiple talents, faces and roles, then, we witness the state on one hand facilitating the growth of rooftop ecologies and on the other immediately cracking down on them whenever needed, leaving the multispecies livelihoods all the more uncertain, impermanent, and inevitably improvisatory.

Rooftop ecologies as such do not operate in vacuum or in divorce of broader socio-ecological realities. Quite dystopic-ally and realistically, my interlocutors live in more or less impoverished pockets of a country in which only about 3.5% of the land actually produces anything of an agricultural value, while more than half of the population lacks the purchasing power to access a proper nutritious diet (Gertel and Samir, 2010, p.210). From the side of the state, here as a provider of food and subsidies, until the late 1980s, three channels of food provisioning were available: firstly, government outlets selling mainly heavily subsidized bread; secondly, licensed retail shops distributing subsidized ration-card items including oil and rice; and lastly, government shops providing only partly subsidized goods like beans and frozen meat. Towards the mid-1990s, however, with the encroaching wave of privatization,

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97 The state as multiply faced is famously a conceptualization so aptly crafted by Navaro-Yashin (2002).
98 This particular brand of city imagined by the state is indeed a very specific one, unlike India, Mumbai, Istanbul, or Nepal for example which still include animals in some streets but rather as hygienic animal-less cities. For comparative examples of other cities hosting animals around its streets, see Grieve, 2004; Velten, 2013; Marchesini, 2016; Franck, Gardin, and Givre, 2016; Mashkour and Grisoni, 2016.
the governmental shops were partly privatized which in effect decreased the percentage of
subsidies on bread and other ration-card items, leaving the population with only the creativity
of excavating for ways through/out by literally and ever again sinking down and dirty in their
conditions (Gertel and Samir, 2010, p.214).

We here then have two particularly pivotal structures of power through which rooftop
ecologies are partly made available and brought to a forefront – each of which indeed
requires plenty of further research⁹⁹. The question of arable land available for use, or rather
its lack or exclusivity to the military (ab)use, along with the question of access to proper
balanced diet whose sources are transparently shared in an encroaching and ever increasing
economic deficit are in my view the main entrance points to this game of power and ecology.
Through sinking and thinking, according to a 2010 report, around 16% of Cairo households
thus resort to raising some kind of animals – mostly chickens, pigeons, and ducks, but also
sometimes cattle – on their rooftops as a way of making a living possible¹⁰⁰ (Gertel and Said,

To draw this together, then, for me as an anthropologist-in-the-making looking for
relations and (in)consistencies, it is precisely this constant boundary-blurring that rooftops
inherently do/are which makes it all the more potentializing, disruptive, and outwardly
important. The co-presence of cattle, birds, pigs, Cairo, and humans is what makes this recipe

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⁹⁹ All this takes place also in the hope of expanding and opening up the question of the political, and what we
might mean when we say political, or how questions of ecologies and interspecies are political (rather than if
they are political) or can make the political otherwise plenty (de la Bellacasa, 2017, p.29). The contribution of
rooftops to the political can stretch from Chakrabarty’s treatise on expanding politics to include heterogeneity
of temporality and the presence of the cosmological and metaphysical in people's livelihoods (two elements
directly pertaining to my fieldwork) and can stretch even further to reach very direct questions of state
involvement or lack thereof, and struggles over land, space, and right to food and proper dieting/multispecies
relating (Chakrabarty, 2000, p.104).

¹⁰⁰ The percentage given here is very tricky, though. The authors themselves made it clear that many of their
“subjects” refused to disclose any details about their rooftop animals, and some refused to even disclose
whether they have anything raised up there altogether. This has to do with a general insecurity vis-à-vis the
state given the time in which the report was published – this was right in the middle of or in the approaching
aftermaths of avian flu – or also out of fear of the evil eye as I have likewise experienced during fieldwork
ever more intriguing – an “otherwise-within” par excellence (de la Cadena, 2015, p.150). What this does is make this research ever more challenging, for it refuses and endlessly resists any attempt to be squeezed into any single analytical category – not the urban, rural, social, cultural, ecological, political, or multispecies per se. But what this simultaneously tells us is that these categories of thought are increasingly and ethnographically rendered limited, obsolete, or only a bit helpful. Rooftops are urban-rural, human-nonhuman, life-death, one-and-many. This again only proves the centrality of fieldwork as the cornerstone of anthropology, for it is only through getting off our books and on with life as it unfolds along multispecies lines that we are able to speak back to these books, speak against some of them, and endlessly add to their layers and nuances.

**Post-Relation Meditations: What after Connection?**

The struggle remains. Since day one, or perhaps day zero, I have found a great difficulty in making relevant my interest and topic to my interlocutors. “Did someone force this stupid topic on you? Can’t you ask for changing the topic?”, these are only fragmented yet patterned moments of my fieldnotes. But the process went both ways; through and not in spite of these questions and confusions, I came to understand what my topic really is and what is it that I am really interested in. Through practice and practice only, I was – perhaps only partly – able to translate my multispecies interest in less conceptually saturated jargon. I am interested in the lives of humans with nonhuman animals, and their environments, on rooftops.

What after connections and relations, though? What happens after realizing the centrality of connections and relations to the research at hand? Perhaps conversations of

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101 Even when it comes to the Egyptian government, there is an obvious undeniable diffusion of responsibility and confusion as to who is responsible for these rooftops or urban farming material – is it the governors, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health, the agricultural colleges, the recently founded institute for “animal research”, all or none (Gertel and Samir, 2010, p.223-224)?
various kinds and natures, like bits of the ones exposed in this chapter. More importantly, it is never going to be a question of going back, to our lonely and solitary heads. As my ethnographic encounters got muddied and composted with the questions of power exposed here, there is no going back to separate entities waiting to be researched or analyzed. For me now, posthumanism has almost no place where I stand – that is, Egypt of the 21st century, but also intellectually and conceptually. Its eco-centrism translates into a sustained and genuine scholastic and even poetic interest in multispecies worlds, yet one which is largely devoid of social and political realities beyond love, intimacy, and memoirs of pets.

What I have rather concluded through relations and environmental attachments is that rooftops relations are never (just) about petting, crudely loving, or selflessly giving. They are rather about wider, bigger, broader circles of relating to living; relating to living ecologically but living in the crudest sense of the word – making a living. I never entirely expected or wished for that prior to fieldwork, but my interlocutors would have never chosen to have rooftops of that scale and centrality had it not been for their precarious status vis-à-vis class, food (in)security, and financial impoverishment. The projects of rooftops usually begin with an undeniably human-centered interest in rearing animals to be later eaten. But they never stop at that, nor can be reduced to that. As these rooftops actually emerge and proliferate, I never entirely expected or wished for that prior to fieldwork, but my interlocutors would have never chosen to have rooftops of that scale and centrality had it not been for their precarious status vis-à-vis class, food (in)security, and financial impoverishment. The projects of rooftops usually begin with an undeniably human-centered interest in rearing animals to be later eaten. But they never stop at that, nor can be reduced to that. As these rooftops actually emerge and proliferate,

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102 One of the main critiques I have received is that rooftops are purely and crudely economic projects of subsistence, and no matter how we sugar-coat them with postmodern/posthumanist claims to love, intimacy, and world-making, they remain about economics, with the animals as just appendages for accessing or rather making good food. As this argument would rather have it, the nonhuman animals in this instant unfold only as “instruments of labor”, aiding in various ways in the making and sustaining of the domestic sphere but also beyond – a very Marxist take on rooftops indeed (cited in Ingold, 2000, p.307). What Ingold proposes in response to this critique is that to regard these animals as mere tools is to deny them any autonomous movement or capacities to “act back” which is something that I have, time and again, proven wrong and irrelevant in the case of rooftops and the worlds of rooftop ecologies as lived and narrated by my interlocutors. Yes, these animals help make proper food, and access to nutrients, but the relationship does not stop at that – even if/when our ethnographer’s mind wants to leave it at that, to make our worlds less burdensome, more easily decoded, or less complicated than they actually are. These animals act back, respond, and reciprocate in myriad ways – even if not consistently or straightforwardly. If my interlocutors do not regard their rooftops as mere projects for subsistence or making food, and I wholeheartedly decided to take them and their worlds seriously, do I have the right to make a similar argument?
the game changes. It becomes about eating and making a living but not just so. It becomes also about love, intimacies, and interspecies connections, but also the social worlds and relations of eating, gifting, and nurturing proper access to eating healthily in times of crisis. One does not cancel out the other, no need for neatness or binaries. Quite dystopic-ally, it is about love, but also eating. It is about otherworlds, but also this-worlds of not being able to afford clean sources of proteins. May be somewhere else in the world multispecies recipes for relating operate less strangely, or inconsistently, but as it stands here and now, the picture is as muddied as it can ever be. The worlds of my interlocutors, coupled with their social/class backgrounds, their occupations, their neighborhoods, and their conditions of life force them to reach out for surrounding resources of trees, rooftops as spaces for potential use, and nonhuman animals of various kinds to make and sustain a proper living for themselves, with relations that are sometimes utopic, sometimes dystopic, sometimes romantic, sometimes economic, sometimes banal, sometimes sickening, sometimes hopeful. These multispecies livelihoods gradually translate into a hands-on, sustained, intimate knowledge of surrounding life cycles of trees, snakes, bats, mice, seasons of blossom, growth of goats, hatching of eggs, and maturity of rabbits that help again stretch the possible ways through which “making a living” can be made possible, differently so.

For me, the question has accordingly become of not “an outside” of some kind – as the title of the chapter hopefully alludes – but rather a question of “through-s”, sinking ethnographically deep and dirty in the horrid conditions making Egypt at the current moment and breathing out fresh ways of survival and making through. As we have seen in chapter three, the multispecies relations of newborn animals, their growth cycles, and the different gradations of the rituals of slaughtering and sacrifice forced us to rethink life and death as dual forces that can sometimes be expressed as antonyms but that are nevertheless always connected through the creative play of following bodies, fleshes, and ecologies. The various
cycles of exchanging flesh in its widest manifestations pushed for a more ecological understanding of life-and-death, best seen as forces of composition, decomposition, and recomposition – ones that unfold in spite of physical impermanence.

In the fourth chapter, I have carried these overlapping permeability of life and death to a closer engagement with personhood and the making of selves – the different “we-s” that rooftop ecologies harmonically compose. These rooftop symphonies are only composed through collaborative pulsations rather than individually independent music notes. Through bringing together pulsations – or cycles of life – of goats, chickens, humans, instances of love, discipline, eating, and dreaming, new selves and entities are always brought to being. The definitions we can thus ever hold of humans, goats, or chickens are always shifting and permeably extending to include those organic collaborations through which life and its actors are stretched and created anew. In the fifth chapter, I aimed at a stop or a meditation on how “home” as a site of apparent rest or stillness can be theorized in the midst of these organic flows and multispecies collaborations. Quite expectedly, through attending to different temporalities of attaching to sun and moon cycles, growth patterns, trees life histories, and ritual pre-marital gift-exchanges, we made sense of home as only an equally extending, ever-growing, lively flowing homecology – soaked in an inevitable awareness of and dependence on surrounding environments and how we are implicated within these. The task now, in drawing this together for one creative finale, is to figure out new ways of bringing these conclusions to broader lives and audiences.

**Other Translations, Other Conversations: Stories, Fictions, Worlding Words**

“The fiction, then, would be anthropological, but the anthropology is not fictional” (de Castro, 2014, p.187)

The questions raised above are perhaps quite philosophical in outlook, theoretical in leaning, and conceptual in tone, yet they have indeed been fermented and baked in and
through those ethnographic encounters and fieldwork days and nights, fieldnotes typing and drawing that made me push myself for further questions. As I slowly bring myself to a finale for this thesis, I cannot but allow some echoing voices to simmer and shimmer. Talal Asad provides some solace, in assuring me that I am not alone with those haunting voices; “when anthropologists return to their countries [although this here not entirely applicable, at least not literally], they must write up ‘their people’, and they must do so in the conventions of representation already circumscribed (already ‘written around, ‘bounded’) by their discipline, institutional life, and wider society” (Asad, 1986, p.159). These voices/questions then pertain most to issues of accessibility, audience, and disposability. I do not want my thesis to be thrown into a drawer, fetishistically uploaded on a personal website marketing myself as a budding anthropologist, or forcibly read by a committee of loving mentors and a bunch of selfless friends. This thesis is an academic research, but cannot be reduced to that once and for all. It is a work of my heart, belly, soul, growing up (academically and otherwise), tending to my existential questions, taming my disciplinary curiosities, and all these cannot be boiled down to a thesis rarely picked up for a casual loving read.

Ways to “open” this work of research and expanding its boundaries are ideally plenty, but by being and upbringing, I am more inclined to explore some specific ones more than others103. I am particularly inspired by those works produced through conversations between anthropology and literature – each loosely defined. As descending from an anthropological genealogy, the particular oeuvre I am here pointing to is that of Zora Neale Hurston, Anand Pandian, and later Kathleen Stewart104. Beyond anthropology, I am particularly inspired by

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103 Also especially given time and space limitations, but also the “nature” of the topic and myself that do not allow me to for example go and volunteer in or start up an initiative fictively titled “society for protecting and loving rooftop ecologies – in the love of animals we shall thrive and survive”.
104 Each of these inspiring authors/anthropologists skillfully partakes this disciplinary borrowing and translating quite uniquely and differently; Zora and Pandian tend to take a more autoethnographic and personal angle when it comes to their disciplinary acrobatics (particularly the former’s *Mules and Men* and the latter’s *Ayya’s Accounts*), whereas Stewart – in my view – takes a more poststructuralist outlook that translates in a more
John Coetzee’s fantastic *The Lives of Animals* (1999), and Amos Tutola’s heart-wrenching *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) when it comes to again translating worlds into words differently, more openly, and less disciplinarily policed-ly. My challenge or rather critique to most of the scholarly works mentioned above is that they sometimes easily lack the grounded-ness and ethnographic realness that only anthropological sensibilities-turned-ethnography fully guarantee. With all the previous chapters now written, polished, and conceptually trained and baked to being, I hope I can now move to a less fixed writing experiment, more inspired by stories and worlds than burdened with the capacity to prove and approve their credibility and weight with dense theoretical baggage/s.

This experimental writing brief begins with Hana, who so lovingly shared with me some of her drawings, stories, and memories of her life with rooftop ecologies. 11-year old Hana is the one to whom I am writing this following bit, with whom I wrote it in idea and inspiration, and for whom I wish to publish this into an extended full-fledged young adults fiction written entirely in Arabic. This is only an experimentation with the idea and an entertainment of the thought, and a vow to invest every effort from my part to bring this to a real print illustrated book, co-authored with Hana or at least dedicated to her incredibly unbelievable wit, big heart, and mega mind. The following brief, then, carefully hovers the borders of “reality” and “fiction” – most stories are ethnographic, plot quite fictional, with the boundaries between both ever fuzzier.

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experimental style of ethnographic writing which is more stylistic than strictly autoethnographic – here I am particularly referring to her crazily inspiring and incomparable *Ordinary Affects* (Hurtson, 1935; Pandian and Mariappan, 2014; Stewart, 2007).

105 This is mainly because I believe the genre of (children’s) fiction can offer a fertile ground for engaging with the multiple, sometimes contradictory, layers through which multispecies rooftop worlds are lived and expressed.
I can’t use the toilet today, I just ate my two favorite rabbits\textsuperscript{106}.

I am Hana, 11-year old on paper, they say. In my head, though, they seem much much more. That scene of drawing the rabbits, that seems so far away in time. How stupid was I? Or may be too smart for my age?

Well, I was perhaps 5 or 7 years old back then. I just learnt the very basics of how to draw an animal. I came back home from the nursery to find two new adorable little baby rabbits. Their beauty was so indescribable. Fluffy, white, sparkling eyes, elusive bodies, soft hair, with a restful posture that seems so much at peace with the world, yet still alert enough for quick, small, sudden moves in case of danger.

I came back from the nursery on that day and decided that I will draw these rabbits. I went up to check on them, planning to convince them to stay a bit inert so that I can draw them as exactly as possible. They were staring at me so focusedly and intensely. I had my paper and pencil with me, but once I sat and began drawing, they ran away hiding. I tried calling them, running after them, searching for them, but they never showed up. I decided I go back to my room, and will draw them from my memory. My memory will never fail me, I am sure.

It took a bit longer than I expected, about two hours. I drew the two rabbits so beautifully, and they did look exactly like them. (Don’t you agree mom?) I colored them too, with their rosey light pink eyes glowing so glaringly in sunlight and moonlight. I hung the drawing in my room, right over my bed. I had them up there on the rooftop, and down there in my bedroom. They can’t escape my world.

I guess you know what’s coming next, no? Well, one day I came back from the nursery to find mama cooking some rabbits for lunch. I love rabbits with \textit{Molokheyya} so much, they taste like chicken but are less dry. They are so soft and lovely, a dream-meal. I ate and ate and ate, so much more than my belly could ever take. I really wonder where the extra food

\footnote{106 Greatest thanks to the children’s literature guru and my incredible mentor Yasmine Motawy for reviewing and reading this section. Your mentorship will always take me places.}
stays, especially when I don’t end up throwing up you know. Does the skin extend? Well I believe the different parts of the body fight over who takes the extra food. There must be such a heavy fight inside me now. Calm down, you little body, I really need to watch my food.

I so happily finished my meal, so unable to move that I couldn’t even walk back to my bedroom. I lied down on the couch in front of the TV till the fight inside gets settled. I overheard mama telling teta that she knows the rabbits tasted so delicious today because they were not so old so their bodies were still so soft and that’s why they tasted better. I know almost everything we eat somehow comes from our rooftop. Could it be what I am thinking about? But that’s a nightmare…

I went up, with my fighting body still unsettled on which parts take the rabbits inside me, and rushed to the kitchen where mama was talking to teta. I asked if what I just ate are the rabbits of my drawing, the tiny little rabbits of our rooftop. They both looked at each other and nodded in agreement, with some expected fear that I will run away and cry. I shouted and screamed, quite exaggeratingly I remember. I couldn’t believe it’s now just the drawing that I have left of my rabbits. Why do we have to eat them? Can’t they just stay there, as friends?

We had a strange conversation back then. I knew I love how rabbits taste, and I frankly wait for the day when mama cooks rabbits. And I never felt any shame about that. There must a way to bring them back. Should I take the drawing and put it up in the rooftop instead of inside my bedroom? I thought of throwing up, but my bodily fight was already beginning to settle. Wait, what? The rabbits are inside me now, well some of them. If I throw up, I lose them.

At least I now have them inside me. I would never preferred to have them dead, and I would have never eaten them had I known earlier that they were them served with rice and Molokheyya. But it so happened. This feels a bit too weird, but how can I do it otherwise? You know what, I will not pee or poop today, or else I might lose some of the rabbits. I will hold them all in.
I did not use the toilet for the entire day, and right before sleeping mama kept shouting at me for not peeing before sleep, warning me that I will have nightmares and will end up wetting my bed so bad that mice will come and eat. But I do not want mice to eat my rabbits, no. I brought mama and teta to my room, and told them so frankly about it. “I don’t want to pee or poop because I love the rabbits-now-dead-inside-my-body and do not want to waste them”.

They both looked at each other and burst into laughing. I got so furious and left the room, why are they being so mean? They rushed after me and told me that by now the rabbits are already digested and have somehow, magically, fused into my body. Excreting won’t undo the process, for it’s now too late. At the moment, the rabbits are me and I am the rabbit. The fight inside my body is over, the rabbit parts have been divided (fairly or not, we can’t really tell) on my body parts. Teta has this strange theory that food nurtures people differently. I am always jealous of my cousin Nada because her hair is just so long, thick, and shiny while mine is just so boring and light. Teta tells me that Nada’s hair dominates and settles all the food fights. Nada’s hair takes most of the food she eats. Nada’s thick hair is actually the chicken, the goats, the rabbits, and the ducks she has eaten since she was born. How wicked is this? Teta thinks my nails control most of the bodily food fights, they grow so quickly it’s actually annoying. Once my nails grow longer this time, then, I will feel more rabbit-y.

Now I am a rabbit-Hana. I will carry my favorite rabbits inside me, always. I hope I never ate these rabbits, but they were bound to die at one point right? The only way to keep them alive is my brilliant drawing, and providing them a stronger home. I am now their home, and I hope it’s a good one. I hope I also now look and act more like them. Does eating also include inheriting some features of the eaten? Can I have their glaring shiny eyes? Their soft hair? Their light and quick wit? I believe it happened.

I am writing this six years or so later. Teta passed away a couple of months ago. And no, there is no way to carry her inside me even if I refused to use the toilet or speak to people so as to keep her voice echoing inside my head. Until now, I still cannot find the way through which this works. I still remember all our talks, walks, rooftop visits, fights, forced food, long
tight braids, days of cooking and looking tired. The image of her sitting on the big armchair overlooking the open window of gedo’s bedroom, staring there so vastly and endlessly, will never fade from my head for even a split of a second.

But for some reason, it is not enough. I want more of her. That I have her in memory is not enough. Why isn’t she part of me, really? I know there are genes and these biology class matters but they do not feel enough, no. I cannot bring her back, and cannot go to her. I try to speak to her, and think what she would have said had she still been with us. All I got is mimicking. I try to mimic her actions, smiles, expressions, the words she uses, and the things she eats, perhaps then she stays alive and I gradually become more Hana-teta than ever.

It is so much easier with rabbits, and my rooftop family. It is more straightforward. I love them, they die, I eat them, they stay in my body and live with me. But with teta it is all very different. She died and left no remains, not even her hair or nails. We did not agree on her death. We did not speak about it. We did not plan for ways to defeat death and have her stay, even tiny bits of her. The ways through which she is still alive are little, inconsistent, and sometimes painful. I wish it was as easy as eating-keeping-alive. I wish I could hold my pee and have her stay alive.


This chapter begins with the basic and almost annoyingly silly question: “now what”? The question perhaps serves as a writing and a thinking prompt, but also a loud snoozing alarm after each section gives way to another and each chapter weaves itself into

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107 Title so aptly and beautifully used by my incredible mentors Reem Saad and Malak Rouchdy to describe their weekly Monday festive lunch gatherings (potlucks) on a campus in the middle of a now-metropolizing desert. Range of goodies includes rabbits, soups, pasta, rice, and always so much more. I here lovingly borrow the title in an attempt to provide a similar – through perhaps less edible – version of their manual.

108 The question is inspired by anthropologist Ian Glenn’s fieldwork advice and teachings, in which he passingly also describes himself as quite a nosey supervisor, almost always insisting on a final “so what” chapter in which the writers engage with the theoretical, practical, and possibly even existential implications of their research and topics (Green, 2013, p.240). Ian did not provide much information or details on how these chapters were structured, or even what they ever aimed for, which makes this largely a work of improvisation and interdisciplinary engagement.
further existential questions, conceptual complications, and philosophical debates. In asking “now what”, the answer might perhaps be nothing, everything, or whatever you can. As an undergraduate and graduate student in anthropology classes, the question always haunted me: now that we know the world is that horrible, or that complicated, or that contradicting, or that strangely familiar, or familiarly strange, now what do we do about it? Is being critical enough? Where do our knowledges take us, and what do they make of us? Scarily solitary intellectuals?

I tried to come up with distilled and brief “lessons from the field” manual which attempts to provide a more hands-on, practical, straightforward recipe for surviving but also perhaps emulating bits of what rooftop ecologies try to bring forward: a continuation and proliferation of life along multispecies lines, with a sustained awareness of and engagement with surrounding environments. This section tries to provide some answer to my eager readers who are “waiting to read about another mode of life and to manipulate the text [they] read according to established rules”, but also pushing this further to also “learn to live a new mode of life”, at least partly so (Asad, 1986, p.159; emphasis in original). In other words, what does this thesis offer? What does it leave you with, to know more about but also to do? Each of these notes was produced and created through revisiting each of the chapters’ main giveaways and trying to put these in less jargon-saturated, anthropologically coded conclusions as already explicated above.

1. **Understand your body, and the bodies around you – if found:** Get closer to how your body works, seek to know how your metabolism operates, how your body changes,

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109 I confess that this manual reads off as a bit too bourgeois, privileged, or fluffy. Yet what is interesting about this is that each of these pieces of advice have organically grown out of ethnographic conversations but also actual practices on which my interlocutors depend and of which they speak quite proudly.
and what your body needs. Experiment with different kinds of eating and exercising habits. Do not allow your body to stay opaque, unknowable, or inaccessible.

2. **Your Body is an organic, living, being:** Your body reacts, lives, grows, and somehow sometimes carves a life of its own. In being organic, your body is open and permeable. It takes life in, and sometimes expels it out. Pay closer attention to who and what gets inside your body, to all the lives you take in, those you suck in, and those that suck you out. Your body narrates and documents a more organic version of your life history.

3. **Know what you eat – and grow it if you can:** Try to know where your food comes from. Here is an exercise for one meal: identify the “source” of every ingredient of what you are eating. Try to grow anything of what you eat. Read about farms and their technical and legal statuses and debates, how food is transported from its source to its place of manufacture and transformation, and who works on these transportation linkages.

4. **Cook what you eat:** Take part in witnessing the process through which food is transformed from raw flesh to cooked styled meals. Try to buy uncleaned, skin-on, whole chicken. As much as you can (note to self and everyone: do not force yourself to more than what you can take. Whenever you feel disgusted or about to vomit, leave), take part in cleaning, cutting, de-blooding, purifying, and bringing your chicken to the cooking pot.

5. **Follow waste, where it goes, and how it grows:** Observe waste in your vicinity, and try to follow its trails. Where does waste go? Waste might also include home’s leftovers; how are these used and thrown away? Think of other ways of recycling your own waste. This can range from serving your leftovers to stray cats, or on your window for migrating, flying, wandering birds, or contacting a recycling initiative to dispose of your waste.

6. **Carve openings, holes, and terraces at home:** Keep your home as transparently open, partially, as possible. Don’t use blackouts, don’t use all opaque window glasses, or
opaque curtains. Don’t turn on the room lights except when darkness begins to reign.
Witness the change of daylight, nighttime, seasons, growth of moons, skies and clouds
forming and dissolving, storms, rain, thunder, birds appearing, fighting, disappearing,
trees falling and growing matters.

7. **Keep nonhuman animals in your vicinity/proximity:** If you can raise chickens,
goats, rabbits, or any other “farm” animals, do that. The question of whether you want to
end up slaughtering and eating them is absolutely for you to decide. At the very least,
cultivate an awareness of the stray animals living around you – or their lack.

8. **Know about the status of nonhuman animals in your country/city:** Check out
newspapers or social media networks that follow or write about nonhuman animals in
your country or city. Who talks about nonhuman animals? What are the animals allowed
where you live? All lives operate in collaborations, so if the status of animals somewhere
is destitute, miserable, seen as uncivil, then this also says something stark about how
different groups, cities, and villages are regarded and differentiated by state and society.

9. **Gather stories, always:** look for stories of relations, of all shapes and forms. Don’t
crave stories of grand events, extraordinary life-changing encounters, or spectacular
more-than-human transformations. Focus on the everyday acts of kindness, ambivalence,
even cruelty through which relations with nonhuman animals take place.

In writing about crises, state’s inconsistent presences/absences, potential fictions, and
everyday manuals of survival, I have attempted to take a distance from the rooftop worlds
explored here at length. I tried to pause, slow down, and rethink the worlds in which those
ecologies grow and exist. As Isabelle Stengers beautifully advises us, this is perhaps a
proposal to slow down, “intended not to say what is, or what ought to be, but to provoke
thought, a proposal that requires no other verification than the way in which it is able to ‘slow
down’ reasoning and create an opportunity to arouse a slightly different awareness of the problems and situations mobilizing us” (quoted in de la Cadena, 2015, p.280). Perhaps anthropologists eventually need to pause and try to achieve some distance from their ethnographic world/s – not to deny its occurrence, question its relevance, or render it meaningless. This is rather an exercise in stretching our topics and ethnographic worlds beyond the intimacies, zoomed in, banal, and everyday stitches and relations.

Again and endlessly, this is primarily a question of (ethnographic) translation, in which I have tried to push the boundaries of my anthropological training, ethnographic material, and interlocutors’ worlds to matter differently and to be made relevant in other ways and lives. While readers might have been waiting for a straightforward concluding brief pulling this thesis together, I attempted to do this as patiently and slowly as possible, through a final stretch of thought and scholastic acrobatics allowing rooftop ecologies a final existential breath.

In experimenting with other modes of writing, engaging with, and communicating rooftops to wider audiences, I also need to conclude by making it clear that this is not to collapse each and every mode of knowing through which layers of this thesis were expressed, theorized, and shared. The thesis begins with myself as a human, so ignorant with nonhuman life but trying to crawl my way through the help of fellow humans more well-versed through their multispecies rooftop ecologies. The differences between my interlocutors and myself confessionally were never entirely erased, cancelled out, or ever perfectly blurred. And this is perhaps exactly what anthropology is all about: we question boundaries and differences, but we never cancel them out. We seek relations and translations, not to flatten worlds but to multiply them; to imagine and actually prove that life is lived differently, in its simultaneous familiarity and strangeness. In the words of the inspiring Viveiros de Castro, as
anthropologists, “our business is to connect, period. We are metaphysical brokers” (quoted in Green, 2013, p.275).

Throughout this thesis, I began with multispecies relations as a way of cracking open our worlds, words, and categories of thought and practice. It has been an attempt to also crack codes or provide some recipes of rooftop relating with other species in an intimate proximity that is so hard to deny or reduce to friendship, kinship, pet-ing, or self-interested connection, but as rather best regarded as intimacies sometimes too dystopic, contradicting, and inconsistent to bear. As endlessly and redundantly expressed, I perceive this thesis as my baby, endlessly growing to places that I can neither fully expect nor control, but also as a genealogy of some kind, pulling me closer in time/thought/place to my corresponding (past but never dead) environment – my mother’s parental home with its rooftop, its garden, and their deceased little brother-maternal-uncle who I have never seen but always dreamt of witnessing. We can only know life through its proliferations, extensions, continuities, and ways of carrying on, and these only take place in relations and connections but never as individual enclosed projects. This is neither about romanticizing life nor radicalizing grief and their implicated worlds and people, but always about intimately attending to how people sink in their conditions, flow into life, make-do with what is available, making meaning out of these instants, and work through following and creating (multispecies) continuities with their surrounding environments even in the darkest moments of struggle and uncertainty. This is indeed the only way to survival, as collaborative (social-but-also-ecological) projects that are sometimes too dystopic, too metaphysical, too utopic, too inconsistent, too human-centered, too selfless, but always managing to stretch life and create it anew.

This is a work of the twenties of my life, a phase of consistent turbulence to put it so crudely. This is a labor of the mind, belly, heart, and soul, as my twenty fourth year of wandering the earth is giving way to my twenty fifth. I have called this thesis my “baby” since day zero, perhaps out of a desire to feel what it might feel like to have a baby, to try and saturate my maternal instincts, or to satiate a growing desire to imagine/carry myself as an adult. In the proposal-phase of this project, I kept reminding myself that babies as zygotes are always supposed to be vague, confusing, and scary, and that’s why I was feeling disoriented. As the project grew, I consistently tried to nurture it with all the love, care, consistent effort, discipline, and all that I believed would allow my “baby” to grow into a full-blown healthy body and soul. And it grew and is now coming to a delivery, with me ever again trying to carve a somewhat solid ground as to who I am going to be - as a mother, an anthropologist-in-the-making, and as anything else.
I am still largely clueless as to many things in life, among which is indeed who I am or who I am destined to become. I continually ask my mentors and professors about their life trajectories, I keep trying to compare mine to theirs; I keep overwhelming them with questions as childish and banal as, “when did you finish your Master’s degree?”, “when did you first fall in love?”, “when did you get married?”, “are you regretting (not) having kids?”, “do you feel academia makes you a boring lonely destitute?”, and the list goes on and on.

A confession: Well, I believe in shape-shifting, in a very specific and narrow sense of the word. I believe that at this point in time, also known as the crazily disturbing twenties of life (as the epitome of youth perhaps but also the epitome of disorientation), I have plenty of options - potentially - open. I can become many. I can be plenty. I am still not entirely “stuck” with anything. I currently do not have any permanent or long-term commitments, other than family perhaps. It is a cool liberating feeling sometimes, verging on the edge of aching solitude and loneliness at others, driving you mad at yet others. I keep thinking about all other potential selves/noha-s that might have been or could now be brought to being. What could I be but/with/other than a student? A performer perhaps? A singer? A teacher? A cook? A yogi? A traveller? What could I become? What other selves exist in me that I am not allowing to thrive and that are crying out for a chance to survive?

With that in mind, another clock is ticking. My time in the MA program is (hopefully) about to come to a finale, with the laborious yet life-ful delivery of this baby-thesis as its rite of passage. With this delivery I will also be thrown down and dirty into life, out of school for once for real. I am now already overwhelmed with questions about what I will now be doing, why, what I should be seeking, how I should be thinking, etc. And I have yet no idea where I stand when it comes to all those existential questions and decisions as to where I should be and who I am. The thesis is me - my baby but also by extension me. It is my time, my thinking, my labor, my crazy sleepless or sleep-ful nights, my 4 am black coffee in my rainy-sky-shaped mug, my reversed schedules, my 9 pm naps, my strange writing habits and routines breaking apart and re-composing anew, my abrupt digestive inconsistencies, my fears and insecurities, and my twenties coming to a scary half-life.
In the midst of these turbulences, I came to this thesis topic, through which I wished to remind myself of the inevitability of shape-shifting, of openness, and of other-worlds. This is not about fluffiness of hopefulness, optimism, or fetishizing the otherwise. This is rather about a very sincere and personal struggle to be allowed to grow, to remind myself that whatever I choose now is neither final nor irreversible, and that I am stuck with nothing but permeability, continuities, and discontinuities. I have been looking for where and how this openness and proliferation might take place, and rooftops emerged. I was particularly inspired to think about this whenever I read literature on multispecies relations, and when ruminating on mama’s trajectory as she moved from her parents’ home to her marital home with my father.

Standing there as always my soulmate, my role model, my genetic and intellectual heritage, and my first and top reason for being and staying what I am - sane at best, and maddening at most -, mama and our late-night conversations and chats are always where I begin. Her love of cooking manifested in over 200 handwritten full notebooks of recipes from all over the world; some seen on TV, some communicated through her friends and family, and some recently gathered through her recent embrace with social media. The notebooks and their recipes, together seen as her most precious gift and inheritance to myself are where the title came from. Her recipes and notebooks are who she is, in both its food for the bellies but also that for the thought. She always speaks of her parental byt il-Giza (Giza, district in Cairo, home) in terms of continuities, change, and extending life, mainly expressed through those continuous life cycles and ephemeral intimacies with rooftop goats, rabbits, and chickens. This might be largely nostalgic and romantic, for she will always long for these days of familial intimacy and a lighter view of life. Yet it is also very concretely about the rooftop and the gardens they had there, and how these affected how she grew there and related to other beings, and believed in life as continuing along various axes and that - above all - we will always remain plenty, growing, and potentially endless. We shape-shift as we move along. May the shape-shifting-twenties (and beyond) treat you well, and may this give you some faith in times of turbulence and uncertainty.

Noha Fikry, July 2018.
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Appendix: Geographical and Kinship Trees

Figure 7: Wafaa’s rooftop in Skyna, Alexandria
Figure 8: Cairo's districts and neighborhoods
Figure 9: Cairo’s districts and neighborhoods continued\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{110} Maps of figure 5 and 6 retrieved from http://www.cairo.gov.eg/New_Folder/Maps/Areas2.html