

*Master Peace:*  
**Techno-Moral Cosmopolitanisms and the  
Crisis of Critique**

Nikolas Kosmatopoulos

NOVEMBER 2020, PAPER NUMBER 66

©2020 Unpublished by Nikolas Kosmatopoulos

The Occasional Papers of the School of Social Science are versions of talks given at the School's weekly Seminar. At these seminars, Members present work-in-progress and then take questions. There is often lively conversation and debate, some of which will be included with the papers. We have chosen papers we thought would be of interest to a broad audience. Our aim is to capture some part of the cross-disciplinary conversations that are the mark of the School's programs. While Members are drawn from specific disciplines of the social sciences—anthropology, economics, sociology and political science—as well as history, philosophy, literature and law, the School encourages new approaches that arise from exposure to different forms of interpretation. The papers in this series differ widely in their topics, methods, and disciplines. Yet they concur in a broadly humanistic attempt to understand how, and under what conditions, the concepts that order experience in different cultures and societies are produced, and how they change.

Nikolas Kosmatopoulos is Assistant Professor of Politics and Anthropology at the American University of Beirut, navigator of the Floating Laboratory of Action and Theory at Sea and founding member of the Decolonize Hellas collective. His teaching and research interests are international affairs and political anthropology, violence and peace, expertise and knowledge, maritime capital and solidarity activism, cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitics. In 2020-2021 he is a Member at the Institute for Advanced Study, where he is working on the manuscript *Master Peace: Violence and Experts in Lebanon*. This Occasional Paper is based on his Social Science Seminar presentation.



## *Master Peace:* Techno-Moral Cosmopolitanisms and the Crisis of Critique

### Prologue

*Episode 1.* A few years ago, in Budapest I met a Western expert on his way to post-invasion Afghanistan to lead a constitutional law overhaul. His knowledge on Afghan law was zero, he said, but it will be a long enough flight to Kabul.

When the transnationally hypermobile clan of peacemakers fly across the globe, they carry standardized travel kits in their luggage. For experts involved in post-war Lebanon, the essential parts of the travel kit are, for example, the “ethnic conflict theory,” the “conflict resolution workshop,” and the “crisis report.” Developed in diverse expert labs, such as the university, the think tank, and the NGO, these technopolitical devices are inspired by, but also often abstracted away from, the particularities of violence in Lebanon, and other post-conflict environments in the postcolonial Global South.

These travel kits are extremely travel-light. They can be easily deployed anywhere without the need for translation into local vernaculars. They might not all belong to a nominally defined “peace industry,” but they feed into each other, resulting in a symphony of mutual validation. In my fieldwork, I observed how in workshops of conflict resolution, students often become acquainted with theories of ethnic conflict and vice versa.

The success of these devices lies mainly in their ability to span scales. They carry the universalism inherent in the peacemaking mission, while packaged in painstaking arrangements of space, time, and matter. The compact travel kits of the peace expert exercise a tremendous impact on how we perceive violence, influencing collective decisions on how to address the problem with violence in the world today.

Lebanon has been a strategic location for the emergence of an expert politics of peace at a universal stage. This was not solely due to the almost simultaneous ends of the Lebanese Civil War and the Cold War in 1990. The chronological coincidence allows the observing of the deployment of a new global politics of peace, freed from Cold War suspicions. Beginning with the so-called era of “peace dividend” in the post-Cold War years, then the “rise of civil society” in mid-1990’s onwards, and certainly the “war on terror” after 9/11, Lebanon constituted essential reference for each of these universal discourses. It had something local to offer for every turn of the global debate on violence. Sectarian groups in frequent conflict, a vivid civil society open to peacemaking projects, and last but not least, the existence of Hezbollah, a militant movement of political Islam; all these instances became celebrated subjects of post-violence, through scholarship, public policy, and global media.

### *Master Peace: Techno-Moral Cosmopolitanism in Lebanon*

*Master Peace* argues that the contemporary politics of peace features masters and subjects, entangled in global hierarchies of power and premised on the control of moral ends and

technical means. Techno-moralities form powerful twin forces that frame debates, design interventions, and largely define “the violence problem,” to paraphrase W.E.B. Du Bois.<sup>1</sup> Their influence is particularly strong when debates, interventions, and definitions are promoted as responses to the problem. *Master Peace* presents an ethnography of peace and crisis expertise that bridges the nascent anthropology of morality with critical research in materiality. My aim is to enhance our understanding of the role that experts play in governing political violence today.

The book explores the articulations of the “violence problem” and relevant solutions in post-war Lebanon, a prime location, as I mentioned earlier, for the theme under study. In the 30 years that followed the end of the civil war in 1989 this small country has witnessed diverse investments in the politics of post-violence and peacemaking. This politics was often marked by merged schemes of techno-morality.

This symbiosis of technics and morals came in diverse formats. Conflict resolution specialists re-educated refugee camps and rural villages, while crisis experts monitored recalcitrant groups. These seemingly distinct moral missions often transmogrify into specialized technical processes. Conflict and crisis experts rely equally on invocations of moral high grounds and innovations of technical skill-sets.

While philosophical inquiries into the morality of war have often taken into account the materiality of violence, the connection is rarely made in relation to the politics of peace. I wish to show how contemporary peace expertise encapsulates a politics of techno-moral power revolving around the formation of post-violence subjects.

I suggest the term “master peace” to highlight the significant influence that expert hierarchies bear upon the contemporary politics of peace. “Master” seeks to designate the power that these forces exercise upon debates, actions, and solutions duly put in place in order to address violence.

The limits of war, as Clausewitz, Schmitt, and Foucault taught us, are set by the power of politics; they are neither objective nor given. This book promotes a similar argument about the limits of peace. What we commonly understand as the violence problem and, by default, the possible solutions to it, is significantly subject to definitions and actions put forward by hegemonic forces that govern the global politics of peace today. My project offers a critical exploration of these forces.

Focusing on the post-violence subject allows for a crucial move away from normative assessments of the ability of peace experts to achieve peace. It reorients attention to the relationship of domination between experts and their subjects. Here, I explore how specific modes of inquiry about violence acquire the status of objectivity, and how this shift of status affects reality.

What happens for example when a particular mode of inquiry suggests causal relationships between violence and ethnicity? What kinds of subjects are produced through this epistemological manoeuvre? Which comparisons are enabled and which are silenced? Similarly, what are the effects of identifying violence and state failure as the result of non-existent inter-elite dialogue? What are the new subjects open to theorizing and moralizing about? Be it designing a diplomatic summit in the Swiss Alps for warring Lebanese leaders to get together, organizing a conflict resolution workshop to heal trauma among citizens, or producing a think tank report on suspect Islamists, experts promote specific perceptions of violence and subjects that must be monitored.

## Researching Cosmopolitan Peacemakers

Research for this project spanned many years of fieldwork in Beirut, four months in Geneva and several months in New York City. I also followed experts, their document trails and training traces in Berlin, Budapest, Cairo, Istanbul, Paris, Ramallah, and Zurich. I undertook archival research at the United Nations library, the Institute for Palestine Studies, and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies; conducted participant observation in conflict resolution workshops, U.N. conferences, mediation sessions, diplomatic meetings, and think tank events; and interviewed and talked to more than 100 individuals, among them diplomats, NGO workers, mediators, analysts, as well as journalists, politicians, ex-UN staff, academics, and activists.

While researching violence in Lebanon, I felt a strange affinity for my subject matter. Coming from Greece, the only European country to experience a civil war during the Cold War, I could relate to the haunting controversies over the historical narratives and counter-narratives of violence, in the long aftermath of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and the wars that followed (July War 2006, May Events 2008, Syrian Civil War 2011-today). Growing up in a country that took 40 years to adequately address the civil war experience helped me to better grasp the profound temporal and emotional horizons that necessarily structure these narratives.

The manuscript is tentatively divided into three parts. Part One, “Diagnostics,” explores the declarative rationality that experts mobilize to classify political violence, while attributing to the practice a sense of scientific objectivity and geographic comparability. Chapter one discusses how the concept of ethnic violence sought to present political violence as an evolutionary and moral handicap. Chapter two examines how the diagnosis of “state failure” became the epistemological ground for some experts to shape public perceptions on violence and for other experts to identify virtuous statesmanship as the necessary ingredient for peace.

Part Two, “Therapeutics,” shows how Lebanese society became a major operational site for experts seeking to produce a civil population through practices of moral and technical care of the self. Chapters three and four are twin parts of the same argument. They explore the emergence of peace professionalization through archival and ethnographic perspectives respectively, showing how political demands were effectively sidelined. Part Three, “Proleptics,” concentrates on the spread of the “emergency imaginary” among experts in post-violence and its effects on suspect subjects. In chapter five, the sole chapter of this part, I pursue this aim through an ethnographic analysis of the International Crisis Group, a global think tank of self-styled professionals in crisis analysis and resolution.

## Lebanonization and its Discontents

In March 1992 Lebanon was preparing to hold its first legislative elections after the official end of the civil war in 1989. The same month *The Atlantic* published Benjamin Barber’s essay titled “McWorld vs. Jihad.”<sup>2</sup> In the essay Lebanon’s violent past became an archetype for humanity’s bleak future. A “retribalisation of large swaths of humankind by war and bloodshed” loomed large if appropriate actions were not taken, wrote Barber. In the eyes of

the Cassandras alarming the world of its own impeding “Lebanonization,” the tiny Middle Eastern country assumed a place much larger than life. Barber’s text popularized Lebanonization, a discursive misnomer that would become shorthand for the moral panic unleashed by ethnic violence around the globe. Lebanonization featured the spectral figure of the “tribal warlord” often as the embodiment of an irrational, primordial violence.

Around the same period, Leonard Binder, expert on Middle East politics and professor of political science at UCLA, laid out the basic contours of Moralpolitik, “a morally grounded foreign policy,” calling it the new benchmark for global interventions. The new policy needed “not to be the product of international agreements nor based on Western legalistic thinking.” If politics could not secure the foundations of a functioning global system, the “moral foundation of international intervention” should. Rethinking the place of morals in politics, Binder’s policy papered together Aristotle, Confucius, the then recent war in Yugoslavia, and Lebanon’s past civil war, describing post-war Lebanon as “another example of anarchy and intervention.”<sup>3</sup>

Arguably, Barber and Binder crafted a complementary image of Lebanon against the background of an emerging hierarchy of humanity in violence. Barber’s moral panic of Lebanonization divided the world between the tribal and the rational. Binder’s Moralpolitik saluted the moral violence of Syrian tutelage over Lebanon. Together they suggest a novel reading for Lebanon’s violence, resembling the biblical trope of fall and redemption. “Bad” violence, as in tribal war, constitutes the reason for the fall. “Good” violence, as in the Syrian boot, is the necessary means for redemption.

Subsequent brandings of Lebanon’s complex civil war under the label of Lebanonization placed the country within imaginary geographies of ethnic violence. As an epistemological innovation, ethnic violence – applied to historical conflicts over land and belonging, like Lebanon, Palestine, South Africa, – silenced the legacy of settler colonialism through liberal frames of conflict between communities of equal ethnic rights and unequal cultures.

Within this outlook the emergent practice of conflict resolution in civil society could simultaneously move across scales. Scaled up, it could draw on the moral legitimacy from upholding the sanctity of the ethnic community as the undisputed container of political identity. Scaled down, it could organize secluded spaces for conflict resolution by bringing together groups that presumably represented larger entities fighting along cultural lines.

### **Qaleb: Molds of Virtuous Power in the Swiss Alps**

*Episode 2: Professor G., a Lebanese professor of engineering at Lausanne Polytechnic, had emailed me the details of his association’s General Assembly: Friday, 4:30pm, (a certain) Hotel, Geneva. The meeting sounded important. It was the first assembly after three rounds of talks between rival Lebanese politicians that the association facilitated in Switzerland. I arrived on time. In the hotel lobby an announcement board informed me that the association would convene in the salle Mont-Rose.*

“Bonjour Monsieur,” a man in his late thirties greeted me at the entrance. He handed me a blue envelope. It occurred to me that two out of the four agenda items had to do with finances. This coincided with Professor G.’s steady concern about securing funds, despite



the fact that Lebanese banks and the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs had bankrolled the dialogue project at the historic site of Mont Pèlerin.

The list of the meeting participants contained 30 names, but only ten showed up. The room was silent. Dialogue was not happening, contrary to the association's mission. As soon as I sat, a man in his forties asked me in French if he could sit next to me, promising "not to bite." His friendly and relaxed attitude contrasted with the heaviness of the air in the room. Without being prompted, he handed me his business card: J. H., Expert in Mediation and Facilitation, Directorate of Political Affairs DP, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA (...). "The main reason why I come to these meetings is the great pens that they give to the participants," he rushed to add, as if he had already guessed my question. He didn't say a word during the meeting. He kept sketching round figures and linear shapes, and left the meeting early. He took the pen with him. J. H. was a Swiss government's mediation expert with an active role in the Inter-Lebanese Dialogue project. He was an integral part of this story.

I found it an awkward meeting. There was hardly any mention of the progress of the project or of any content specifics. The only relatively animated session was the discussion about the setup of the "scientific committee" and the "fundraising committee." It made sense, I thought. Carefully selected by the association heads, the members, former and active ambassadors, senior university professors, and high-level journalists, were expected to secure cultural capital and open funding channels. Formally, the task of running the dialogue rounds was subcontracted to Swiss experts, such as J. H.

In our discussions, Professor G. was unwilling to give credit for the progress solely to the Swiss experts, whose approach he considered "too technical." Instead, he praised his self-devised method. Professor G. used the Arabic word *qaleb* (mold, cast) to describe how he proceeded to solve Lebanon's political crisis. Inspired by his engineering background, *qaleb* invokes a manufacturing process in metallurgy. Cold-setting metals are heated to a melting point, then poured into a mold, and allowed to solidify. The metallurgical metaphor evokes the power of the cast in shaping the outcome. In the case of the intra-Lebanese dialogue, the power of the mold, "the kick that was used to put people together," was made up of four elements: people, situation, timing, and location. All of these elements in the mix involved a carefully crafted combination of virtue and power. And all of them excluded democratic politics.

The most important point was "the selection of the right people." The selection process revolved around the principle of virtuous power. Professor G. chose politicians with a strategic position in their party hierarchy, but with an open-minded character and a clear commitment to the unity of Lebanon. He flew to Beirut with a mission to find "these people." First, through his good contacts, he identified the ideal candidates. Then, he did some research about them, "their roots, what they have done, how they think, (and) their aspirations." Finally, he approached them in person and invited them to participate in the dialogue project. "They were all very happy to come to Switzerland," he told me with a big smile.

The *qaleb* did not include party leaders at the top of the pyramid. "There's no way to put them together," Professor G. said, the implication being that the leader's strongman persona is incompatible with the desired figure of the virtuous and open-minded dialoguer. But excluded, too, were the party's rank-and-file, mostly due to their presumed lack of

independence and an uncritical attachment to the leader. “We cannot discuss at the (leader) level; nor at the lower level. Those people are the voices of their masters, some being more radical than others.” Due to their presumed uncritical capacities, the party masses were excluded from the dialogue that was meant to pacify Lebanon. Democracy, regarded here as a blind and radical loyalty, was the antithesis of and even an ominous threat to the virtuous dialogue at the top. Mass politics can be messy, risky, and even violent. In the opulent Swiss mountains, virtuous power was called upon to save Lebanon’s democracy from itself.

### Crisis, Colonial Nostalgias, and the Limits of Critique

*Episode 3: Robert’s recruitment as the ground researcher for an international crisis think tank begins at a Paris conference on Islamic movements. There, he presented his academic work, a sociological investigation of how a movement of political Islam in the Arab region relates to marketization. After his talk two ICG officers approached him. They asked if he would write a report on similar movements in France. The background to the study was a wider research project on political Islam in three European countries, France, Germany, and England. Although rather uncomfortable with the explicit focus on Islamist groups, he accepted. As he told me later, he regarded himself as a sociologist who explores general social trends. “I was never and still am not an expert on the Islamic groups. I don’t want to be,” he protested.*

Nonetheless, Robert decided to compose the report. “All went fine” with it and he was invited to join the organization, and “go wherever [he] wanted” in the Arab world. For family reasons he chose Lebanon, but he did not know where to start when he arrived in the country. The program managers told him they wanted him to focus on “Salafism, Jihadism, such things,” and so he did. He describes his sense of being a “little bit lost at the beginning.” His first compass in a largely unknown field was the North of Lebanon, in which Sunni groups were active. He began to work there for a month and a half, after securing the agreement of the program managers: “OK, Islamist groups in the North,” the manager responded.

The International Crisis Group was established in the 1990s. Today it maintains a wide network of on-the-ground analysts in the Global South and advocacy offices in the most important capitals of the Global North (Paris, London, D.C., Brussels). As a think tank dedicated to crisis and resolution, ICG links notions of crisis analysis with those of crisis management. It produces *Crisis Watch*, a monthly bulletin that offers brief overviews of the current state of affairs within geographies of crisis, accompanied with strategies for resolution. Crisis reports function as a sentinel, an early warning mechanism and a pocket tool-kit for crisis management.

Importantly, ICG complements the function of a stalwart sentinel with practices of surveillance on certain subjects. Gareth Evans, appearing in the ICG clip made for the occasion of its 10-year anniversary, claims that the group’s work in Southeast Asia in “penetrating and understanding the roots of terrorist violence” has been described by “some of the major intelligence agencies as gold standard.”<sup>4</sup> Other ICG researchers in the video

build further on that claim by alluding to the provision of crucial information to the Indonesian police, which led to the arrest and condemnation of ‘violent Islamists.’ (op.cit.)

Indeed, recognizable capacities to closely follow recalcitrant subjects play an influential role in the recruitment of ICG country analysts. Secure access to suspect subjects was a vital resource for ICG researchers I talked to in Beirut and New York. In the widely shared clip celebrating its tenth birthday, Evans boasts that ICG researchers “do not sit behind computers in Brussels or in Washington,” but have “dust in their boots.” (op.cit.) While Evans speaks these lines, the screen shows a tall, white, blond and clean-shaven man, dressed in neat safari clothes high-fiving kids in a hut village, as he walks among villagers in a hinterland largely defined as “Africa.” The short appearance of the ICG field researcher in the clip gives the spontaneous impression of Indiana Jones with a notebook, instead of the legendary whip.

These and other elements in the clip reveal a sense of colonial nostalgia, exacerbated through a visual representation of the researcher as an imperial bureaucrat at worst, or a caricatured anthropologist, at best. Colonial nostalgia often merges with muscular and masculine idioms. In the same clip, General Wesley Clark, former NATO Supreme Allied Commander and ICG board member, praises the group’s capacity to “penetrate” the field and the relevant sites “on the ground.” Often, the vocabulary applied is reminiscent of militarist jargon; researchers “embed” themselves and “extract” information successfully.

Adventurist depictions of the field can be understood within an expert mindset that sociologist Gil Eyal describes as a “colonial-type encounter.”<sup>5</sup> As with Eyal’s experts on Arab villages in the Israeli academy, ICG analysts have “every now and then, to prove their worth (...) leave their comfortable offices and patrol the internal boundary, make quick incursions to the other side, and come back with reports about what they had seen with their own eyes.”<sup>6</sup>

After all, this “para-ethnography” regards ICG as one of these contemporary institutions under the sign of the global symptom, about which we presume that we are dealing with counterparts rather than “others.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, to my ICG interlocutors, the proximity of their data collection method to ethnography produced creative reflections. For example, Robert often raised questions, “thinking about the borders,” between the different jobs in the unified field, such as academic, think tank analyst, diplomat, intelligence officer. He was concerned about the possible uses and abuses of the knowledge that he and his colleagues painstakingly produce and publicly share. Key was the concern for the appropriation of their expertise by state agencies for their own purposes. Once he introduced this discussion by stating his awareness that “many, if not all, the secret services read the ICG reports,” adding that for them it is fast information.

My discussions with Robert often ended with the articulation of pressing questions, without satisfactory answers. The mutual feeling was that of ineptitude to follow any of the routes into the highlighted grey zones. Overall, this para-ethnography of crisis experts manifests that entering into cultures of expertise can indeed help “create intellectual bridges with such *de facto* critical genres ‘inside.’” At the same time, one realises the limits of the critical genre inside – as in the appropriation of knowledge by states and other experts.

## Unhatching the Egg in Lebanon's 2019 Uprising

*Episode 4:* Lebanon's 2019 uprising broke out in October and went on for months. It succeeded in bringing down a government, but failed to forge a new political alliance among the country's civil society and realize an agenda of economic equality and democratization. In downtown Beirut, the epicenter of the protests, stands the so-called Egg, a 1960s brutalist-modernist cinema abandoned to snipers during Lebanon's civil war; the now derelict building became a brief stage for a political experiment in the early days of the uprising.

Turning the Egg into "Eggupation" – a non-violent reappropriation – caused quite a few passionate reactions among many in favor of popular politics: excitement, curiosity, but also outright rejection. I believe that the Eggupation story might reveal deeper insights about post-war politics in Lebanon's civil society. I am interested in relating the book's argument that a post-war model of expert-driven peace, which involves dividing the political society while devolving power into real-estate-investor prime ministers, crucially depends on the constant reproduction of techno-moral hierarchies.

The idea to hatch the Egg was born after the uprising began to settle into a permanent demonstration in downtown Beirut. The uprising's initial instigators, a mobile mass of young motorcyclists filled with popular anger, animated an otherwise soul-less bourgeois downtown; they had been slowly eclipsed by sedentary protestors. These lively representatives of the popular classes who roamed streets and blocked intersections, beeping and yelling, had yielded their place to an ever-growing geography of protest.

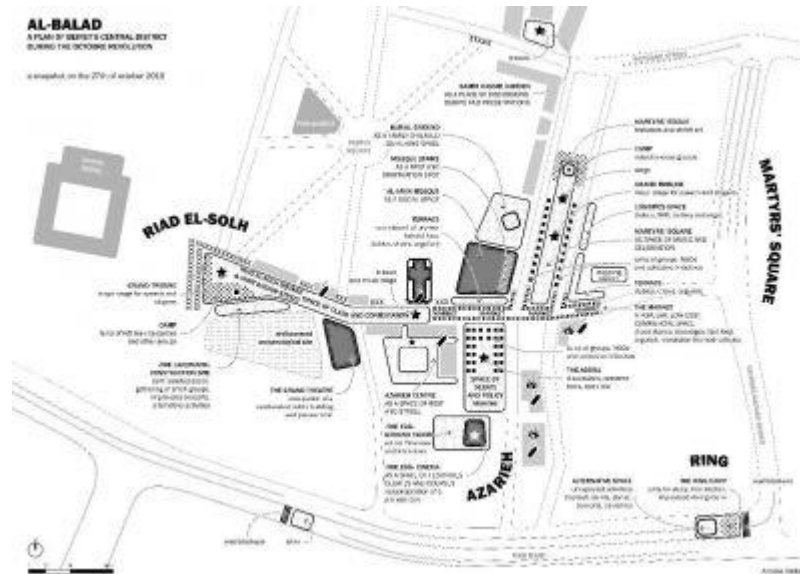


Figure 1. Al-Balad, a plan of Beirut's Central District during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising (By Antoine Atallah, reproduced with permission)

One could already discern masses of people oscillating between two geographically distinct poles. On the one hand, facing the seat of the government in the Ottoman Serai, now protected by barbed wire, the groups were obviously poorer, angrier, willing to engage in violence. The other pole consisted of a rather cheerful crowd in the Martyrs Square that

seemed content with celebrating the national uprising, along with more or less established parties and civil society initiatives.

This observation revived in my mind other protest geographies in which I had participated in, such as the “Aganaktismenoi Movement” in Athens, Greece between May and August 2011, as well as Occupy Wall Street in New York in September 2011. Each uprising revealed a different urban map of popular dissent. Now I could also observe a similar map being formed in Beirut.

In this geography, I could hardly overlook the haunting presence of the “Egg.” The stark contradiction between a long-gone modernist glory and the current abandonment reflected a creative tension between a silenced past and an unclaimed present. Echoes and shadows in the belly made up a *mélange* of melancholy and meaningfulness.

Together with a sociologist colleague, with whom I shared similar insights about the unfolding protest, but also a deep appreciation for direct action and experiences in similar projects, we discussed the prospect of the Egg to host debates and teach-ins, as for example a discussion about possible lessons from protest movements in Egypt, Greece, and elsewhere in the region.

University classes had been suspended, but the session in my Political Anthropology course that semester was conveniently titled “capitalism and crisis.” Thus, the series got a name! The first “teach-in” was packed and quickly turned into a discussion about radical pedagogy and experiences from uprisings in other countries. The Egg had finally hatched.

After this, we posted a brief text outlining aims, tools, and plans on the Eggupation Facebook page, which gathered more than two thousand members in two days. But the invitation to solicit and filter proposals seemed to have hit a nerve, especially among young professionals of cultural and academic milieus. “The revolution will not be curated” wrote an angry critic.

Then, the idea to invite a leader of a progressive, oppositional party and ex-Minister of Labor was met with strong criticism among university colleagues and activists. Critics were concerned about safeguarding some sort of purity border, questioning whether a former minister could be part of the protest movement pitted against the regime.

Yet, the purists-purgers neglected widely known facts about this minister’s ousting from the government because of his relentless defense of workers’ rights and against corruption. Other critics voiced concerns about the repercussions in “politicizing” the initiative with hosting a known party leader. The heated discussions that ensued revolved around the impossible desire of keeping a political platform pure from certain forms of politics perceived as “dirty.”

In the next days, the Eggupation support base was growing but puritan outcries grew louder. Our Facebook page had turned into an ugly theater of angry, visceral, and vile comments. We decided to shut down the comments, for which we received even more criticism. When the attacks turned threatening—some calling for physical confrontation—we decided to cancel the initiative altogether. The Egg had unhatched.

At the outset, I suggested that the story of the Egg might reveal deeper insights about the political society in contemporary Lebanon. I contend that the Egg, a war ruin, failed to create a “common space for political debates, proposals for direct action, teach-ins, suggestions for political transformation,” as the founding text of the Eggupation had hoped.

Instead, purity competitions and turf wars – much linked to the techno-moralization of the post-war civil society – rendered the politicization obsolete.

## Conclusion

In lieu of a conclusion, three brief aphorisms. First, I have attempted to demonstrate how peace as a “social question” has been transformed into a “techno-moral question” in post-Civil War Lebanon. I have alluded to some effects of this transformation, many of which revolve around the production of and domination over certain subjects.

From this follows my second point: any effort to re-socialize the problem of violence in Lebanon – and perhaps in the Middle East – should involve the attribution of political status to all subjects of violence as well as techno-political practices of peace. Borrowing from Isabel Strengers, one could state that only a cosmopolitical analytics of violence can facilitate a truly cosmopolitan peace.

The third point concerns the question of critique and the ethnographer’s position. Responding to Michael Walzer, Didier Fassin regards ethnographers as standing on the threshold of a cave (in the shadows of contingent and uncertain truths, as Walzer writes).<sup>8</sup> They step inside and outside, belonging partially to each world but entirely to none. As fieldworkers, they are in the cave, among the people with whom and about whom they conduct their research. As writers, they are outside the cave, among their colleagues with whom and against whom they lead their reflection. The idea of the threshold is crucial, further highlighted by the ethnographer’s debt towards those in the field, ideally matched by her gift, that is the ethnographic text, enhancing their comprehension of the world.

Yet, crossing thresholds might entail a variety of risks and rewards, as many border-crossers to Europe and the US know very well. Crossing the threshold between the field and the academy, as Robert’s story shows, entails the risk of surrendering the very possibility of critique. Moreover, the threshold presupposes the existence of two rather stable, well-guarded spaces, as in the cave and its outside, the field and the academy. But as my example of the Egg illustrates, these spaces are not always neatly separable, nor stable in their composition.

Today, our cave, the academy, is rather imbricated in a variety of forces, techno-moral domination (in the form of neoliberalism) being certainly major among them. In this sense, the so-called crisis of critique can be related to the risks involved in crossing the threshold between research and politics, between academy and the public. Perhaps a meaningful way to respond to this risk is to democratize, decolonize, pluralize the threshold. If we do so, the risk of crossing will very much determine the rehabilitation of critique as a much-needed gift to society.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 “How does it feel to be a problem?” asked W.E.B. Du Bois in a shrewd commentary on race in the United States. In “The Souls of Black folks,” composed in a time of racial unrest, Du Bois spoke for those whose integration into the nation-state was considered incompatible with the American project because of their cultural and racial features. He spoke on behalf of the *problem*, effectively substantiating the Black American community’s intellectual identity. But he also spoke against those who regarded widespread race inequality to be divine evidence of the moral and cultural failure of the community at hand. Du Bois first reflected on the racial hierarchies that play out in the politics of representation of violence in an earlier essay, “The Study of the Negro Problem” (Du Bois 1898). Implicating violence, moral difference, and the politics of representation – “the eyes of others” – Du Bois inspired my research into Lebanon’s “violence problem” from the perspective of *the critique of representation*.
- 2 Benjamin R. Barber, “Jihad vs. McWorld,” *The Atlantic*, March 1992, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1992/03/jihad-vs-mcworld/3882/>.
- 3 Leonard Binder, “The Moral Foundation of International Intervention” (Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, University of California, 1996).
- 4 International Crisis Group, Video on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, author’s archive
- 5 Gil Eyal, *The Disenchantment of the Orient: Expertise in Arab Affairs and the Israeli State* (Stanford University Press, 2006).
- 6 Ibid: 174.
- 7 D. R. Holmes and G. E. Marcus, “Fast Capitalism: Para-Ethnography and the Rise of the Symbolic Analyst,” in *Frontiers of Capital: Ethnographic Reflections on the New Economy*, ed. M. S. Fisher and G. Downey (Duke University Press, 2006), 33–57.
- 8 Didier Fassin, “The Endurance of Critique,” *Anthropological Theory* 17, no. 1 (March 2017): 4–29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499616688157>. Walzer, M. (2002 [1989]) *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Basic Books.