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Canine Life and Death: The Affective Politics of Stray Dog Management in Jordan

Abstract

In this article, I examine the affective politics surrounding the management of stray dogs in Jordan. I suggest that human-dog relations in Jordan, including how different actors talk about, interact with, and care for dog life, can be read as a commentary on what a good life, and in particular, a good future, means in Jordan. Drawing on material from ethnographic fieldwork in Amman, I examine how Jordanians use the issue of stray dog management to imagine different futures for their country, and to reflect upon various aspects of contemporary life, including Islamic belief and practice. I argue that competing affects surrounding stray dog life and death – namely, fear and violence; compassion and care; and response and responsibility – both create and reflect human-dog relations in Jordan.

Keywords: dogs, politics, affect, human-animal, futures

1. Introduction

In Jordan's capital city of Amman, stray dogs are common but not omnipresent: perhaps as a byproduct of their pariah status in Jordan, they stay mostly out of sight unless it is the early morning or dusk, when they emerge on the streets, sometimes alone and sometimes in packs, looking for food and staking out new territory. Dogs are generally viewed by Jordanians as circumspect, usually with a mixture of fear, disgust, and apathy; and even though, in general, they are believed to be deserving of compassion and care, as are all of God's creatures in Islamic theology (Tlili 2012), they are also thought by many Muslims to be impure, so that, depending on one's subscribed beliefs, to touch a dog's fur or saliva means having to perform ritual ablutions a certain number of times before being able to enter a mosque or to pray.

But though dogs are at most tolerated, the dogscape of Jordan is changing quickly, in large part because owning pedigreed dogs has, just in the past ten years or so, become a normative symbol of social status. This is particularly the case for breeds that very quickly and clearly perform a kind of foreignness (and thus eliteness) – Huskies, German Shepherds, Rottweilers, and Golden Retrievers – which are easily distinguished from the local Canaan street dogs, who are largely thought of as pests. As these shifts occur, debates about human-animal safety, compassion and care, and religious duty have become commonplace in local media outlets. But though more people are buying dogs as pets, walking a pet dog on the street is still a rare sight in most Ammani neighborhoods. One woman who runs a small dog rescue organization de-

scribed how people run to the other side of the street when they see her coming with her small dog on a leash: "It's like I'm walking a dinosaur!"

It is at this moment of Jordanian dog politics, when dogs – wanted and unwanted – are becoming more visible, that the prospects of dogs, people, and even Jordanian society are becoming more entangled and constitutive of one another. In many ways, this entanglement resonates with what anthropologist Naveeda Khan discusses in her work on the connection between climate change, dogs, and Muslim eschatology among the Bangladeshi *char* communities. In Bangladesh, dogs and humans are 'entwined' in 'their mutual-fatedness'[1]: they are in it together, as it were, as witnesses to the changes in *char* landscape and terrain wrought by climate change, even if climate change is not the framework through which such changes are perceived, but rather, as Khan puts it, 'the intensification of suffering in the present'[2] for dogs and humans alike. In this paper, I think through how dogs and humans are entwined in their mutual-fatedness in Jordan – not necessarily as they experience suffering together, and not through the lens of climate change, but rather as they are both implicated in the mutual construction of Jordan's present and future. This is more than simply noting that dogs and humans affect one another's worlds; instead, as I suggest, looking at particular flashpoints in dog politics reveals how dogs and humans actively and mutually construct each other's presents and futures.

Though there is much to say about these forms of interspecies entanglement and mutual-fatedness, here I focus primarily on how dogs both produce and reflect different understandings of what it means to live a good life and to strive for a better future, which in turn can tell us something about how state of Jordanian society is constructed by different sets of actors. Rather than read stray dog management through the lens of history or politics, I instead home in on the role that affect plays in shaping the meanings of human and dog life and death in Jordan. Affect, I suggest, is an important way through which different interspecies futures come to be imagined and enacted. The affective moods[3] and modes of interaction[4] that characterize interspecies relations have been a theoretical and ethnographic focal point in human-animal scholarship in anthropology and beyond. Affect, scholars have noted, both constitutes and is constituted by the ways in which humans interface with animals, whether through love and gentleness or violence and death. Building on this scholarship, I suggest that human-dog relations in Jordan, read through the affects that surround how people talk about, interact with, and manage stray dogs, are used to articulate different versions of what a good life means in Jordan, both for dogs and for humans.

My focus on these aspects of human-dog relations in Jordan is also an attempt to examine the place of dogs in the MENA region in a way that moves beyond the lens of Islam. Though, to be sure, Islam plays a large role in how Jordanians think about

1 Khan 2014, 262.
2 Ibid., 245.
3 For example, Singh and Dave 2015.
4 For example, Govindrajan 2018; Parreñas 2018.

and interact with dogs in their country, my focus on encounters with and discourses about dogs is in part a call to attend to the everyday negotiation of human-animal relations in the Middle East and in Islam as well. To this point, though I outline some of the negative attitudes towards dogs in Jordan, I do so without the intention of perpetuating a Western fascination with the supposed antipathy for dogs in Islam, or what animal studies scholar Sarra Tlili noted as 'a prevalent conviction in the West that Islam is inherently anti-dog'[5] – something that, as she notes, does not have textual basis and does not account for present and historical practices of dog companionship in the Islamic world[6]. My point instead is that religion is one of many factors that shape affective attunements to dogs in Jordan.

This article draws on ethnographic work conducted on human-animal relations in Jordan in 2014, 2017, and 2019.[7] I focus primarily on the three-year period of 2017–2020 that covers a series of changes to stray dog management tactics in and beyond Amman. The article is organized around three intersecting affective responses to stray dogs in Jordan: fear and violence; compassion and care; and response and responsibility. I connect these affects to different modes of imagining a good life, including through responsible governance, neoliberal hope, and religious cultivation. As I recount stories from my fieldwork, I try to capture the affect that accompanies how my interlocutors talk about and interact with dogs in an effort to elaborate upon the myriad ways in which human-animal futures form. In the conclusion, I think through ways in which human-dog relations in Jordan can contribute to the growing field of animal studies in the MENA region.

2. Violence, Death, and a Misconstrued Fatwa

In 2019, Dr. Rania, the head of the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM)'s animal welfare division, sat down with me in her office in a nondescript government building in Amman and, over several cups of hot tea and sweet biscuits, told me about her work.[8] Dr. Rania, an educated and enthusiastic woman in her early forties, is clearly well-respected around her office as someone dedicated to and skillful at her job. In a mixture of English and Arabic, she explained to me the work that her office does to

5 URL: https://oladiab.com/2018/03/27/the-status-of-humans-and-animals-in-islam-with-dr-sarra-tlili/

6 See also Berglund 2014; Hart 2019b; Mikhail 2014; Tlili 2012.

7 During fieldwork on human-animal relations in Jordan, I conducted interviews, participant observation, volunteer work, and site visits across the country. Much of my material on dog management comes from the capital city of Amman, but I am careful to not draw distinct lines between urban and rural; the human-dog issues I discuss here are fluid and involve coordination between the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) with the *baladiyyat* (rural governments) throughout the country. This is in part because dogs themselves do not respect urban-rural distinctions, but also because monitoring and dealing with stray dogs has become such a critical topic of debate across the country.

8 All names have been changed to protect the identities of my interlocutors.

address a host of animal welfare and pest management issues in and beyond Amman. We spoke particularly about dogs, as GAM's renewed 'ABC' (Animal Birth Control) program was in its second year and was poised to expand to neighborhoods beyond those chosen for its pilot program the year before.[9] But before delving into details about the ABC program, Dr. Rania began our conversation with a backstory involving a dog bite, a toddler, and a fatwa.

Municipalities and rural governments (*baladiyyat*) across the country, including Amman, for decades had controlled stray dog populations through routine dog culls, shooting and poisoning as many stray dogs as they could find. But things changed in early October 2017, when a two-year-old girl, Malak al-Qaraan, was bitten by a stray dog in northern Jordan and died shortly after. Though news outlets and social media posts immediately labeled the cause of her death as rabies,[10] several animal welfare workers I spoke with, including Dr. Rania, insisted that the girl died from an infected wound due to poor hygiene standards at the local hospital. Whatever the cause, the violence inflicted upon the girl by the dog was unmistakable in the graphic hospital pictures that circulated in news outlets, showing bloody and inflamed teeth marks covering her small face. Spurred by feelings of outrage and injustice, social media immediately seized on girl's death as an example of the danger and out-of-control nature of stray dog populations.

Al-Qaraan's death also immediately involved a response from Jordan's religious authorities about human-dog relations. Thus, shortly after the girl died, Jordan's Grand Mufti, Dr. Mohammad Al-Khalaileh, issued a fatwa (an Islamic ruling) that killing an aggressive stray dog is permissible if the dog is threatening to human life. Soon after, as the story of al-Qaraan's death continued to make headlines, the divisive but popular media personality, Mohammad al-Wakeel, interpreted the fatwa for his audience as permission to kill any stray dog they encountered.[11] As Dr. Rania explained to me: "During his [radio] program, he said you have to shoot, you have to kill! This program pushed the people to kill, kill, kill. The *baladiyyat* responded to this. So they made campaigns for killing and shooting the dogs." *Baladiyyat* across Jordan hired sharp shooters and used poisoned meat to kill what some estimate as thousands of dogs, publicizing the dog culls through social media and news articles as evidence of success against dangerous animals run amok. Here, the retributive justice of one dog's violence against a human was enacted tenfold through performances of violence against dogs across the country.

9 ABC is an alternative acronym for TNR (trap-neuter-release/return), which is the name more commonly used for stray/feral cat sterilization programs in the West. Interestingly, as I note later in the paper, Dr. Rania explains that this kind of sterilization program is religiously sanctioned for dogs in Jordan, but not for cats, ostensibly because cats do not pose the same kind of health risks for humans.

10 See, for example, https:/alghad.com/هذا-ما-فعله-كلب-ضال-بطفلة-في-إربد (accessed 29 October 2017).

11 URL: https://www.alwakeelnews.net/Section_24/256264-الضالة_-الكلاب-قتل-حكم-الوكيل-لـ-يبين-المملكة-الوكيل/مفتي-برنامج, (accessed 30 October 2017).

As gruesome images of the piles of dead street dogs began to circulate in international media, petitions, hashtags, and a torrent of articles referring to the "holy war" that Jordan was enacting on strays emerged, and calls for boycotts on all things Jordanian made their way around Twitter and Facebook.[12] Months later, in March, 2018, in an attempt to correct the narrative that had taken hold in the international press, Jordan's *Dār al-Iftaa'* (the Islamic legal advisory board) issued a commentary clarifying that previous statements made by the Grand Mufti about rabid dogs were made in reference to the specific dog that attacked the two-year-old girl, and that dogs may be killed if and only if they pose a threat to human life:

> Islam is the religion of kindness and mercy to all creatures. Therefore, it is impossible that the Iftaa' Department or the Grand Mufti would violate that, and whatever news was circulated by media concerning the Fatwa of putting down rabid dogs or waging a holy war against dogs in general is inaccurate and was based on a misinterpretation. This is because that particular Fatwa was about killing the rabid dog which bit the two-year-old girl, Malak al-Qaraan, causing her death. If the harm of such a dog couldn`t be warded off save by killing it then that is permissible. In addition, no Fatwa was issued permitting the killing of every stray dog.[13]

Though the corrective commentary was meant to set the story straight, Dr. Rania noted that the incident was felt by many as a public relations failure for Jordan, and served to polarize views on dog management even further. News articles about dog attacks, rabies, and dog overpopulation are still common in Jordan's leading newspapers and social media sites, and my interlocutors in Amman told me that *baladiyyat* continue to manage stray dog colonies through shooting and poisoning, though without as much fanfare as in the previous three years.[14]

What can this series of events tell us about how affect shapes how human-dog relations are envisioned and enacted in Jordan? As many anthropologists have shown, human-animal affective encounters are characterized as much by violence and death as they are by compassion and life[15]. Juno Parreñas, for instance, reminds us in her ethnography of human-orangutan relations, that 'the affect in affective relations should not be misread as 'affection' in the sense of tenderness'[16], but rather is characterized by an 'intensity between bodies'[17] that colors human-animal relationality. In

12 See, for instance, petitions from Euro-American animal activist NGOs Network for Animals (https://networkforanimals.org/news/jordan-is-killing-every-street-dog-in-the-country/) and In Defense of Animals (https://www.idausa.org/campaign/sustainable-activism/latest-news/stop-jordans-barbaric-war-on-dogs/). It is noteworthy that the international press sensationalized this story even further by drawing heavily on negative stereotypes about Islam and the Middle East to render these events 'barbaric' and a 'holy war' (Su 2017).

13 URL: https://www.aliftaa.jo/ArticleEn.aspx?ArticleId=398#.X7A2VhNKjOQ

14 For example, https://en.royanews.tv/news/15428/Al-Kura-District-orders-shooting-of-stray-dogs (accessed 10 October 2018).

15 Dave 2014; Govindrajan 2018; Ogden 2011.

16 Parreñas 2018, 68.

17 Ibid., 69.

the case of the girl's death in Jordan, affective intensity characterized the forceful response that spurred many dog deaths, and is palpable in the outrage of those who feel terrorized by street dogs.

But this affective response, I suggest, is more than about violence, but also works to articulate an insistence that a good life and good future in Jordan entails safety and human prioritization through the performance of dog death. In this context, killing dogs is a way to foster human life and wellbeing, and to realize a future in which dog violence against humans is something of the past. Framing this cultivation of a good life are notions of responsible governance of both human and dog bodies. By eradicating dogs, *baladiyyat* can demonstrate to their residents that they are dedicated to the preservation of human life over dog life, and to the tenets of safety and responsive care that underlie what it means to secure a good life for Jordan's citizens[18]. To do this, they demonstrate governance over stray dogs, who are framed as the perpetrators of violence and are characterized as animals out of control, in need of management through death[19]. Dog death thus becomes a way to enact a good human life and a better future.

3. GAM's ABC Program: Preventing Dog Life and Death

It is within the context of al-Qaraan's death and the misconstrued fatwa, and in response to increasing international pressure to find more humane tactics of dog management, that GAM pledged in 2017 to end their decades-long practice of culling stray dogs through shooting, instituting in its place a city-wide dog sterilization program. That year, they began a strategic and organized plan to trap, sterilize, vaccinate, tag, and return stray dogs from particular neighborhoods in East Amman that have the highest numbers of complaints from residents about bothersome dogs.[20] GAM dog patrols drive through these neighborhoods in search of stray dogs, and residents are encouraged to call the GAM hotline if they spot a stray or nuisance dog. The dog is then picked up, taken to the GAM Animal Welfare Center, sterilized and vaccinated, and then, after a period of recovery, tagged and returned to the spot where they were found (Figure 1).

18 See, for instance, Adely 2012.

19 Pandian 2008.

20 This was not GAM's first foray into ABC/TNR programming. NGOs and government bodies in Jordan have been piloting ABC programs since 2009, when a veterinary doctor from India's Blue Cross animal welfare organization came to Jordan to speak with government and NGO representatives about initiating ABC sterilization projects for dogs in northern Jordan. But it wasn't until 2017 that GAM began implementing the first well-funded and well-coordinated ABC program across the city. Representatives from the Blue Cross have continued to advise GAM staff in their methods and protocols; the Austrian animal welfare organization Vier Pfoten (Four Paws) has played an advisory role throughout the years as well.

Figure 1. Handlers from the GAM Animal Welfare Center catch stray dogs, bring them to the Center for vaccinations and sterilization surgery, and then release them back into neighborhood where they were found (photo taken by the author).

Response to the program has been mixed. Because the ABC program requires the dogs to be released back into the neighborhood where they were picked up, residents are dissatisfied with seeing the dog back on the street – and this dissatisfaction is comingled with a general disdain for what they see as the inefficiency and corruption of GAM's governance. For the most part, residents simply want the dog gone. As Dr. Rania told me, "People say: 'You took the dog, why did you bring it back?? Shoot it! You took it, and you brought the problem back to me!' They don't understand." Dr. Rania thus perceives education as an important component to her work; until the coronavirus pandemic shut everything down, GAM had been holding neighborhood meetings and school events to publicize the ABC program and to distribute posters and brochures about their work.

But, despite these efforts, fear continues to be the most visceral sentiment felt by many Jordanians who encounter a stray dog; as many interlocutors told me, they are scared both of dog attacks and of rabies. Indeed, misunderstanding normative dog behavior is, according to the GAM staff I spoke with, one of the major barriers to Jorda-

nians living peacefully with stray dogs[21]. GAM staff told me that, when people call the GAM hotline to report a stray dog, many exaggerate their description of how the dog looks and behaves, and they are quick to assume that any dog they encounter is aggressive and/or rabid[22]. When GAM dog wranglers locate the dog in question, I was told, it is usually healthy enough and minding its own business. Correcting misperceptions about dog behavior and changing attitudes of fear is thus a top priority in GAM's educational work.

Much of the public outreach of GAM's stray dog programming is aimed at cultivating positive affect for dogs through one-on-one interactions, photographs, and brochures: replacing the fear of dogs with safety, comfort, and compassionate care – an approach in line with the growth of Euro-American animal welfare programming in Jordan[23]. I witnessed this approach first-hand when, in 2019, I attended an educational program hosted by the GAM animal welfare team at a private middle school in northern Amman. Shortly after the program began in the school's large auditorium, the young dog that the GAM had brought with them for show-and-tell began barking loudly from the back of the room, causing a range of squeals, screams, and nervous laughter from the auditorium full of middle-schoolers. Dr. Wael, a veterinarian who works with GAM and was the presenter that day, gestured for another staff member to tend to the dog so that he could address the fear that some of the kids had exhibited:

> This dog, he barked a lot, right? Is there anything in its bark that got you scared? [The children yell out a range of answers]. Okay, why are you scared of it? He wants to send you a message, in a way, so he barked… Is he going to hurt us? No, right? Okay, when we see a stray dog in the street, the right behavior to deal with it is what? To not get scared of him. If the dog feels that you are scared of him, he will hurt you. Because he will think that you want to attack him. After we are finished, we will go and pet the dog's back. We'll show you how to interact with the dog.

After the presentation, though some students hung back, many were elated to be able to pet the dog who had caused the commotion. The dog, a stray Canaani adolescent who was still very puppy-ish, was clearly nervous, but tolerated the excited pats of the schoolkids without much protest, and calmly posed for pictures with them (Figure 2). The mood at the end of the presentation was happy, hopeful, and keenly oriented toward the future: students were learning to respect and love dogs, and the Municipality was demonstrating their compassion and efficiency in city planning by envisioning a human-canine future that is responsible, progressive, and devoid of fear.

Framing stray dog management through life and hope rather than death and violence parallels the kinds of modernizing cultural reforms that have been taking place throughout the Middle East in the past decade. Mayssoun Sukarieh (2012) labels these kinds of projects the 'Hope Crusades' – a series of PR campaigns focused on

21 Hart 2019a; Orr 2016.
22 Ibid.
23 McClellan 2019.

Figure 2. Schoolchildren pet a sterilized stray dog after a school presentation by GAM staff about stray dogs and the ABC program (photo taken by the author).

culturalist reforms advocating optimism, life, and hope as a form of development, modernization, and responsibilization in Jordan and beyond. The overarching goal of the Hope Crusades, Sukarieh explains, is 'moving the Arab world from death to life, pessimism to optimism, and despair to hope'[24], often through forms of neoliberalization that propose to modernize the Arab world and 'fix' its cultural problems[25]. The ABC program, in this sense, is one of many of GAM's interconnected projects designed to modernize (or neoliberalize) Amman, like the controversial downtown revitalization projects the GAM has led for the past fifteen years[26]. The ABC experiment attempts to alter the course of what GAM sees as a violent present and future for dogs and humans alike by altering the bodies and dispositions of Amman's stray dogs, which they say become more docile and friendly after surgery, and the minds

24 Sukarieh 2012, 116.
25 Ibid., 119.
26 For example, Musa 2017.

and hearts of Ammani residents, who, GAM staff told me, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, also need to be made more docile and friendly. ABC in this sense is also a project of urban renewal that envisions Jordan as a place with controlled and healthy populations of street dogs as a form of modern life[27].

As such, GAM publicly explains its sterilization program as a future benefit to both human and dog lives, in terms of the prevention of too many future dogs, rather than the reduction of too many present dogs. Couched in this approach is the claim that stray dogs are part of the natural order of life in Jordan, and that eradicating them all would spell disaster. At the school presentation described above, Dr. Wael explained this logic to the audience of middle-schoolers:

> There are neighborhoods where there are a large numbers of dogs. So…We control their numbers by doing the sterilization surgery so that that they don't reproduce. In this way, we can balance between all residents – between humans and the dogs. [Dogs'] existence is important in our life. They are part of an environmental balance… So, we control the number of puppies. Every male and female who mates will, after 6 years, produce 67,000 puppies. Even if we love dogs, we can't handle this number of dogs. Right? It's too hard! So we are trying to decrease the numbers because the balance is so important. But…if we try to eliminate all the dogs, what's going to happen?...Disease will spread in every [human] family. Because there is no balance. Right now we have a balance, right? Right.

Creating a sense of urgency and future doom is, in fact, a common tactic in animal welfare, environmental, and humanitarian work;[28] it serves to both justify and give special importance to the work as the only thing that will stave off a highly undesirable outcome. Dr. Wael's narrative about environmental balance is telling as well, as it parallels the kinds of disaster forecasting that is common in narratives surrounding climate change, extinction, and natural resource management[29], in which bleak prognoses about the earth are meant to stir urgent action. The vision of a single set of dogs producing 67,000 puppies is overwhelming to anyone, but is particularly so in a country where dogs are often feared and distrusted. Thus, with this statistic – which is repeated often in lectures and in public programming – GAM can quickly demonstrate an urgent need for the sterilization program as one that both is humane to dogs and works to preserve an abstract vision of human-dog ecological balance, and one that serves to correct Jordan's path towards a disease-ridden and unbalanced future.

With these two visions of the future laid out – one that maintains the present human-dog balance through compassionate and modern methods of care (namely, sterilization), and one that prevents a dystopian future in which there are either too many dogs or none at all – GAM relies on multiple forms of interspecies affect in their work. Though they aim to reduce fear and misunderstanding of street dog bodies and behaviors in the present by encouraging positive interactions with individual animals, they

27 See also Karamaniola 2017; Lemon 2015.
28 See, for example, Ticktin 2015.
29 For example, Barnes 2016.

also use fear as a tactic to create a corrected course for Jordan. Sterilization is offered by the GAM as a compassionate alternative to contemporaneous dog culls of the *balaidyyat* – an assertion of a good life that turns on dog life rather than dog death, and dog life despite human death. But the ABC program also envisions a future devoid of *too much* dog life (and thus potentially too much dog death). Here, the meaning of a good life is framed through the control of both dog life and dog death.

But sterilization, which is a tactic for the long run, is not, for many Jordanians, an obvious substitute for the immediacy of shooting and poisoning; and, in fact, many people would rather see the dogs dead and gone than sterilized and returned – after all, 67,000 puppies can also be prevented by simply killing a male and a female dog. Culling dogs is meant to be a corrective to what many residents feel is a lack of compassionate care from their government; piles of dead dogs may not be pleasurable to look at it, but it is a visceral sign that their government is doing something – anything, really – that places the care and concerns of its citizens first. It is a form of future-making that many residents approve of, because it is, in their eyes, a potential betterment of their lives.

4. Sterilization or Death? Competing Meanings of a Good Life

Dog sterilizations take place at GAM's Animal Welfare Center, founded in 2011. The Center is located in an area on the very outskirts of Amman called Muwaqqar – a ghostly way station of a place, with street after dusty street of truck repair shops and small convenience stores. The Uber driver who took me and my friend to Muwaqqar noted as we drove through the area that the agricultural fields surrounding the commercial district were known to be drug dens; he once got spooked and drove off after the customers he dropped off there late at night asked him to wait for him while they got high. Ghostly, in fact, is also an apt word to describe the Animal Welfare Center, as it is positioned on the corner of Muwaqqar's famous Sahab Cemetery, and one drives alongside gravestones to get to the entrance of the Center's compound. Putting a dog shelter next to a cemetery was a deliberate strategy to avoid complaints from neighbors about their close proximity to dog sounds, smells, and discarded body parts; indeed, as one of the vets at the Center jokingly put it: "We don't get any complaints from our neighbors here!"

When I visited the Center in September, 2019, there were only about a dozen dogs in what the veterinarians and veterinary assistants call the prison (*al-sijin*) – a large caged area, with dirt floors, where dogs are kept for a period of 48 hours before their surgery, and then three days after. After talking for a while in the building's main office with some of the Center's small staff, one of the vets, Dr. Ahmad, a confident man in his late twenties, got up and said that it was time for him to do a sterilization surgery: Did I want to watch? Ten minutes later I was ushered into a narrow room with a few cages and three operating tables. Dr. Ahmad was in scrubs, in the process of removing the ovaries and uterus of a young female Canaani dog, who was splayed open on the operating table. (Figure 3). Flies were visibly landing in her open body,

Figure 3. GAM veterinarian performs a sterilization surgery on a stray female dog at the GAM Animal Welfare Center (photo taken by the author).

but this didn't seem to bother anyone – nor did the smoke from the cigarettes of two of the attendants. Dr. Ahmad, surgical tools in his gloved hand, pointed back at a male dog who had just undergone the surgery and was still under anesthesia: "The procedure is more difficult for the female dogs. The male dogs are much easier." Then he cracked a joke: "With females, everything takes more time!"

There is much to say here about gender and the bodily violence of sterilization – an opposite but similar issue to what Parreñas (2018) examines as the violence of forced orangutan copulation, an attempted antidote to orangutan extinction, as a troublesome form of animal care. But here I focus on what Jordanians themselves typically say about it: that spaying and neutering dogs is a form of violence to life worse than death. This is the case because of a widely-held belief that the sterilization of animals, whether dog or not, is *ḥarām*, or forbidden in Islam – in part because it prevents them from living what many would call a "natural" life, which includes re-

producing and having offspring, and in part because it alters their bodies, which God created in perfect form.

So widespread is the idea that sterilization surgery is against God's will that Dr. Rania went herself to consult with the *Dār al-Iftaa'* and brought back a ruling specifically about sterilization. She told me: "I have a fatwa for this point. You have to use a comparison: killing or castration? I myself don't know the answer to this. That's why I went to the Mufti and asked him. What is the religious opinion about us doing castration procedures? He told me that if there is shooting dogs, then it's better to choose castration. But cats, no." With a sigh, she continued: "Honestly, I don't know. The fatwa that I have allows for this procedure – castration over shooting." Dr. Rania brings copies of the fatwa with her when she oversees the educational programming of the ABC program, and shows the fatwa to people who ask these questions about the permissiveness of sterilization in Islam.

Still, the modal response to the sterilization program is one of disapproval and injustice. One interlocutor, for instance, was incredulous when I told him about GAM's sterilization program: "They can't give birth anymore? What do they do to them? Take their reproductive organs out? All of them??... That's *ḥarām*. For sure it's *ḥarām*. It's an injustice to them. It's better to kill them, right? To die would be better." When I pushed him on whether killing them would actually be less *ḥarām*, he thought about it and responded: "Both (sterilization and killing) are *ḥarām*. But to be alive and not be able to reproduce…?" Veterinarians, too, often share the opinion that sterilization is *ḥarām*; I talked with several throughout the country who refused to perform the procedure "for fun", as one veterinarian put it, unless it is an emergency situation. Jordan's only veterinary university does not teach the procedure because it is so controversial, so the GAM veterinarians who perform it at the Welfare Center learned it from a visiting team of Romanian veterinarians a few years ago, and pass on their surgical knowledge when new vets join the team. Other veterinarians I spoke with said they learned the procedure from textbooks – they had never seen the surgery in person before attempting it themselves.

Having children is something that for many is an important way to cultivate a good, religious life[30]; taking away this opportunity for any creature, even a dog, is thus seen as a violation of one of life's (and Islam's) fundamental rights.[31] Many Jordanians view dog sterilization as anathema to the dog's right to live a full life, and are convinced that shooting is a better solution. Some are even worried about the long-term implications of sterilization: my friend Suha, a soft-spoken Syrian refugee whose life has been completely overturned in the past decade, noted that, though she does not like dogs, she would be scared that sterilizing dogs would in fact eradicate all dog life. In this sense, she preferred the usual tactic of periodic dog culls to the ABC pro-

30 Adely 2012.

31 Though birth control is common among humans in Jordan, it is, interestingly, not widely viewed as a transposable situation to animals – despite efforts by the GAM and other pro-sterilization groups to make direct comparisons of this sort. Indeed, this is in part why the GAM refers to their sterilization program as 'ABC' or 'Animal Birth Control'.

gram. This future vision – of a Jordan with no dogs, or with less-than-fully-animal (i.e., sterilized) dogs – is in direct conflict with the dystopic vision GAM promotes of too many (multiples of 67,000) dogs in Jordan. Different imagined multispecies futures, then, create different modes for constructing desired outcomes.

5. Conclusion: Dogs and the Good Life

What does it mean to lead a good life in Jordan? Though debates over dog life and death may be a surprising way to address this question, I suggest that human-animal relations are in fact an overlooked medium through which the ethical project of leading a good life is navigated by Jordanians. To understand human-animal relations in Jordan is to listen to the ways in which different Jordanian futures are envisioned, and in particular the affect that colors those visions. By paying attention to the many affective forms of interspecies entanglement – not just the entanglement of animals with humans, but the infinite entanglements of animals, humans, futures, infrastructures, economies, ethics, and so on – we may get glimpses into how the mutual-fatedness of animal and human lives is at the heart of how future-making works. The human-dog politics I recount here are also important reminders that people strive for better futures – and attempt to stave off bad futures – in highly variable and sometimes even opposing ways.

To this point, it is noteworthy that different sets of actors in Jordan's dog politics enact competing performances of appropriate governmental care: the *baladiyyat* perform mass dog culls in large part to appease public fear and dissatisfaction and to demonstrate, through visceral displays of dog carcasses, the caring and responsible nature of their governance. The GAM, on the other hand, urges compassionate and humane care of citizens and dogs alike through dog sterilization, and takes pains to foster among their audiences transformative interactions with dogs who are very much alive and active (as was the case at the school presentation). Though they aim for the same outcomes – fewer dogs; safe and happy citizens – these two approaches to the care of dogs and people contain wildly different modes of future-making.

As the field of animal studies begins to grow in scholarship of the Middle East and greater Islamic world, the histories, politics, and cultures of human-dog relations will certainly receive much attention. In Jordan, dogs are omnipresent yet religiously and socially problematic; some are objects of prestige, while others are pests; and their mere presence evokes both love and affection and fear and loathing. In short, they are ambiguous figures who, as I argue in this article, are important actors in the formation of Jordanian presents and futures.

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