No more “eloquent silence”

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DOI:
10.17192/meta.2018.11.7792

No More "Eloquent Silence": Narratives of Occupation, Civil War, and Intifada Write Everyday Violence and Challenge Trauma Theory

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Discourse on trauma has re-emerged in an era where media and mobility bring it to global doorsteps. Frameworks for understanding trauma remain dictated by thinking that emerged from Europe's "great wars" and American deployment to Vietnam. This framework—which sees trauma and the terrible as "out of time" or "other" to a perceived normal daily experience—has formed what critics call the "empire of trauma." This empire limits how war, violence, and the terrible can be talked about and understood as part of (or not part of) contemporary life. Looking at two trauma narratives, *Taḥta shams al-ḍuḥā* (2004) by Ibrahim Nasrallah and *Bāʾ mithl Baīt… mthl Baīrūt* (1997; Trans *B as in Beirut*, 2008) by Iman Humaydan, the paper gives short readings that disrupt what has emerged as a binary of trauma theory. It shows how repetition and open endings turn everyday/trauma into everyday trauma, then goes on to explore how the novels develop language and generic structures so that they hold—rather than silence—tellings of the terrible.[1]

Keywords: Eloquent silence, trauma, Arabic literature, Lebanese Civil War, Palestinian Intifadah, literary form

> Bam. Just one. Ah! He screams. Bam… another one. […] why is he silent?
> -*B as in Bayt… as in Beirut*[2]

> [T]here was nothing but the lower half of Nimr's body, the half that was clutched to Yasin
> -*Under the Midmorning Sun*[3]

Maha and Camilla shoot Ranger, "Bam … another one," (Humaydan 213) in what he tells them are the final hours of the Lebanese Civil War. When the militia fighter—who had moved into their flat—is dead, they wonder "why is he silent?" (Humaydan 213). Trauma theory would interpret this silence as a marker for the experience of extreme violence, the expression of events so horrible they "resist […] integration and expression" (Craps 45) into everyday life. Since "there are no words" sufficient to express trauma, horrendous violence can only be communicated through a profound "eloquent silence" (Ephratt 1909). Ranger, however, is not silent because he "has no words" for what has happened. He is silent because he is dead. The silence is not his, but belongs to Maha and Camilla, whose experiences before, during, and after his death are no less hideous than his assassination. The death of an abusive man (who represents the war) is only one of the

countless violent incidents of Lebanon's civil war; of countless violences in their lives. In Iman Humaydan's (b. 1956, Mt Lebanon, Lebanon) 1997 novel *Ba' Mithl Bayt … Mithl Bayrut* [B like house… like Beirut] (Trans: *B as in Beirut,* 2008), then, silence is not the end of the narratable. Maha and Camilla are simply incredulous at the idea that the fighter (the war) could "stop talking," given his (its) long impact. Their question—aimed at the reader—marks the impossibility of the war's silence. For the women, violence of the preceding years continues to provide life's operating logic—despite or even because of Ranger's death. This is not the silence of trauma theory.

Trauma, as the concept developed out of Europe's "great wars," the Holocaust, and American deployment to Vietnam (Stonebridge 195; Craps 45-6), sets out a problematic binary between violence and the everyday that has limited use for reading texts like *Ba'*. Problematically, it also sees itself as a universal paradigm, as Fassin and Rechtman outlined in their *Empire of Trauma* (3-4). Suffering as a result of trauma is perceived as the "keystone in the construction of the new truth" (Fassin and Rechtman 6) that has developed its own "language" able to "wield strong power to organize" (Das 107) and apply its framework of understanding to diverse contexts. Everyone who suffers must be recognized, but only if they suffer in the right way (Fassin and Rechtman 6). When faced with non-Western narratives, trauma theory "tend[s] to validate, or even to impose" its own readings on suffering "from within the range of possible ways of interpreting the experience of a conflict" (Fassin and Rechtman 211). This "range of possible ways" presumes that the experience of violence is exceptional—and exceptional as constructed against a particular sense of an everyday norm. This norm is narrated through "linear plot development whose teleological goal is the resolution of conflict" (Coby 119). The everyday is a "presuppose[d] 'text' … a story or history emplotted or predicted into narrative structures that are personally familiar to the reader" (Lang 19). This is a "western" notion of the ordinary (everyday) imagined chronologically as realism. It is opposed to the extraordinary, which is designated as a time of trauma.

The presumption is that "traumatic experience by its nature defies linear time" (Mostafa 209), and is placed "out of linear chronology" of the everyday (Stonebridge 195). Typical trauma narratives are thus non-linear and identified as postmodern (post-realist) where "interruptions and … flashbacks" "interfere" (Mostafa 209) with a constructed norm. Trauma and the everyday are mutually exclusive, so much so that the sealed time of trauma must never be "opened, accessed, interpreted or decoded no matter what apparatus or methodology is applied" (Lang 3). In other words, there *should* be silence because trauma is conceived as an "'unimaginable' reality, a logic of horror […] incapable of referring to anything known" (Wardi qtd.in Paterson 11). What happens, then, when violence is the norm? This is explored in *Taḥta shams al-ḍuḥā* (Under the Midmorning Sun) (2004), a story of Palestine and the Oslo Peace Accords, where the imposition of a closed "time of violence" only ends up "reinforcing the conditions that created the so-called trauma in the first place" (Behrouzan 2).

Written by 2018 International Prize for Arabic Fiction winner Ibrahim Nasrallah (b. 1954, Wihdat camp, Jordan), in this Palestinian text it is the fighter who takes a primary narrative role. 'Returning' to Ramallah in the wake of the 1993 Oslo Accords, the story opens (unlike *Ba'*) once violence is over—at least in theory. The very life history of *Shams*' protagonist, however, challenges the Oslo narrative that saw the Accords as an end to the violence of the 1948 Nakba. Born around 1936,

Yasin came into the world amid an Arab revolt against the British. Displaced in 1948, he joins the resistance in the 60s. When Israeli forces occupy the West Bank in 1967, Yasin is detained, tortured, and finally exiled. From Jordan and later Lebanon he carries out resistance operations, loses his fiancée and her son in the 1976 Tel Al-Zaatar massacre (Nimr, in the quote that opens this article), sees the resistance decimated in Jordan's Black September, and eventually moves to the new Palestinian Authority's de facto capital. His mid-90s "return" is where the novel opens. In PA-administered Ramallah, however, violence continues. Yasin is harassed at checkpoints, re-arrested by the Israeli military, tortured, and while in prison immortalized (without his consent) in a monodrama based on his *fida'i* heroism. He is finally shot in the face by the very playwright who memorialized him on stage. If trauma is unspeakable and "out of time," how can the trauma of all these distinct yet interconnecting violences be interpreted?

The "empire" of trauma is not so far removed from empire itself, and like colonial/post-colonial debates, there is no easy mapping of Arabic discourses of self, violence, and society onto existing trauma theory. In the Arabic context, "trauma" (*sadma*) refers almost directly to the dominant framework described here. It tends to bypass generations of thought on the violence of colonialism[4] and the difficult job of reconciling a "pre-colonial" self with the European "modern" (El-Aris 4)—a "modern" that includes unique conceptions of time (Davis 4), space, and the individual (Mitchell, 96, 4). In her analysis of the experience of torture in contemporary Egypt, psychologist and fiction writer Basma Abdel Aziz has begun to address the overlaps and distinctions between existing Arabic discourses and trauma theory, and she has developed distinct vocabularies to describe the experience of violence. Aziz introduces, for example, "*karb*" (73). A formal Arabic word meaning worry, grief, anxiety, and torment (Wehr 959) in the Egyptian context, she explains, is used to discuss trauma as "stress/sadness" (Aziz 73). For Aziz the word marks a key difference, since "in English it [trauma] is broken down into stress and stressors, but in Arabic one word (*karb*) is used to describe the causes and effect" (73). The very grammar of trauma differs, and not only between the "empire" and contemporary Arabic contexts: "The meaning of *karb* changes for each culture and people's habit" (Aziz 73). Trauma theory and Arabic narratives of trauma, however, share the fundamental aim of "build[ing] some logical meaning relating to what happened" (Aziz 77). The aim of analysis, then, is to think through (disentangle) these logics, and draw out the structures of understanding the works themselves create.

A structure of understanding, Mohammed Abd al-Jabri wrote, consists of "all of the relationships and connections of logical reasoning that build on one another" (6). Any attempt to make meaning from an event or phenomenon is done through this existing architecture. Breaking down the structure into a mass network of parts explains why "each culture and each people" craft unique (but connected) structures, "without propagating a single, solely valid view of reality" (Milich 286). These logics are investigated along two axes: first in the reorganization of time from a closed and teleological binary of everyday/trauma to an open and integrated narrative space that explores violence as an everyday and long-term condition. This turns trauma from a closed "other" to something open and undetermined. The second section pivots; building on a changed understanding of the teleological foundations of trauma theory it rereads *Ba'* and *Shams* as agents creating logic through intervention in both language and genre structures. Identifying

these logics gives names to alternative frameworks for reading trauma.

Everyday/Trauma to Trauma of the Everyday

Ba' and *Shams* engage what critics "from Sigmund Freud to Cathy Caruth" identify as a "discursive failure" (Gana 513) that separates the perceived differences between "trauma" and the "everyday." The novels engage this conception of time and show its problematic narrative implications. Their narrative logic defies discursive failure by addressing the trauma binary as part of the problem that characters living everyday trauma encounter. Narrative techniques break open the closed time of trauma: for *Ba'* it is repetition, for *Shams* open endings. In both texts the everyday and violence exist, in all their different forms, "here, living with us, as if they stand on the stage of a single scene" (al-Jabri 37). Everyday trauma is figured as an ongoing present-simultaneity.

1.1 Repetition

Ba' stalls the narrative foreclosure of trauma theory through varied repetition. It is used at once "to defer death" (Khoury and Mroué 184) and "to bring out nuances of the text" (Shannon 84). It is what Umm Kulthum scholars describe as taswir al-maʿna (literally: picturing or illuminating the meaning), when a single line is repeated "20 or more times, each time differently" (Shannon 86). Like the singer's ballads, Ba"s repetition alters "the listener's experience of temporality" (Shannon 85), holding open a present full of "cumulative and anticipatory" (86) possibilities that comes to resemble al-Jabri's "stage" of Arabic culture. Repetition is juxtaposed with what miriam cooke calls the "war story," the teleology that "gives order to wars that are generally experienced as confusion" (cooke 15). Between repetition and the "war story," one character declares, is a "chasm of silence" (Humaydan T1/6) that parallels the "discursive failure" of trauma theory. In Ba', the consequences of the failure are played out between a husband and wife. In the opening chapter, narrator and protagonist Lilian shows how useless trauma narratives are to describe her everyday, and uses repetition as a way to break down the closure that the 'war story' would impose.

The first of four narrators/protagonists, Lilian is married to a writer who loses his hand in an explosion. Without it he cannot write. Though he relearns left-handed penmanship, it is not the physical act of writing that has been damaged. When he tries to write, he ends up with "a pile of story beginnings: amputated stories with unknown endings" (Humaydan T5-6). His political essays need the certainty of teleology for structure; without it he has nothing to say. The personal experience of violence forced him to learn that the war does not make teleological "sense." He can find no 'reason' or logic within the war story for the loss of his hand. However, "to search somewhere else" for a narrative logic, Lilian observes, "would require extraordinary courage" (T49) he does not have. For a time, he exists in the "chasm of silence" that separates teleology from everyday violence. Eventually, he reconnects with his Islamist brother who resurrects the story of their grandfather—martyred by the French—to regain a sense of purpose, a trajectory, a way of giving what is now styled as his "sacrifice" meaning. Lilian records her husband's defeat but does not share it. In the war she sees an open-ended unknown to which she adjusts. His injury is only one of these unknowns. In war, she describes: "Many things happened. Little things piled up and strung our lives together. We might remember them all, or we might just remember some of them, but we certainly won't ever understand their trajectories" (T7). Lillian admits she initially fought this "disorder," but finally "stopped making plans," (T7) concluding: "At some point we must accept our affairs as they are; ques-

tions become luxuries" (T7). Rather than calling this the "chaos" of war, Lilian demonstrates sense-making through "cumulative and anticipatory" repetition exemplified by her daily task of packing and unpacking the family's suitcases. "I tried to organize everything," (T2/8) she explains. But no single method of organization will fit the constantly shifting scene of war. There is no perfect way to order the clothes, no perfect set of clothes to take, so she "repeatedly emptied the contents onto the rug, shook the dust off and repacked everything" (T2/8). The act, which "gave me strength" (T2/8), is Lilian's resistance to teleology and her way of absorbing the problem of the trauma binary. Constant repetition with slight variation becomes a way to narrate everyday violence, so the tedium of war—like the repeated lines of Umm Kulthum—is illuminated in all its minute, torturous, "cumulative and anticipatory" diversity.

Where Lilian packs, Warda lives a constantly restaged battle against dust. Nightly, after scrubbing the floors, she muses: "strange how the atoms of dust pile up so rapidly, like seconds in an hour, like time" (60). There is something about this accumulation, this neat layering of time, that bothers her. To combat the unrepresentative symbol of chronology, she rearranges furniture to unsettle the dust and to create a replica of the shifting battle lines outside, inside. Just like the arrangement of the flat, the war shifted, and "it became another war" (T71). Warda uses the flat to stage her mastery of unpredictable repetition. With every rearrangement she maps and memorizes the precise configuration of parts: "I would close my eyes and guess where everything was" (T61), then play guessing games, putting away laundry with her eyes closed. Her space has a knowable order, though a constantly shifting one. This mapping extends beyond the living room. Warda "always knew where my room was in the building" and "where my building was in the neighborhood" and "all of the distances separating me from the coast" (T60). She is constantly ordering: city, country, war. Repetition adjusts to and reflects patterns of protracted violence. To know the war, for Warda, is to know the distance between the clothes on the line and the route to the wardrobe—which she had rearranged that morning—with eyes closed. This is as true during the peak of violence as it is when a ceasefire is declared. Though militiamen take off their fatigues and tanks disappear from the streets, Ba''s women know nothing is "over."

The "end" of the Lebanese Civil War is depicted as yet another repetition with minor difference. This is why Maha recoils at Ranger's announcement that the "war is over" (T217). His declaration is an imposition (cooke's 'war story') and it is only Ranger's latest. He is rude, controlling, and violent. He had all but moved into the women's flat, bringing the violence of outside, in. Like war, the women endure Ranger, but with the militiaman they eventually take narrative control. It starts with Maha's anger: "I didn't like what he said about how the war was going to end, just like that, while we waited" (T218). The two then restrain Ranger and question him about his participation in the violence of war. He admits to murdering men out of jealousy, using the clothes of a militiaman to exact personal vengeance. There has never been an "outside" and "inside" to the war, a beginning or an end. Stressing this, the women shoot Ranger after the declared cessation of violence and dispose of his body amidst the war dead—the war still claims dead bodies. In relief, Maha declares: "they may say the war has ended, but I haven't finished my story yet" (T227). Indeed, if the story had closed with the war it would have ended before Ranger is killed. His death, central to the experience of the women, crucially extends violence beyond the "war story."

Ranger's assassination brings a number of other components into the story of war. His misogyny and masculinist viciousness were what lead to his death, and also become part of the civil war narrative that Ba' tells. "Civil war," then, also becomes Warda's husband, who abandons her and keeps their daughter when her mental illness is discovered. War is the family of Maha's lover who refuse to recognize an interfaith romance; it is Camilla's grandmother constantly lamenting the absence of a "man in the house" (T116). It is not just one structure of violence, but many, which are also repeated, before and after, inside and outside, and across chapters. At its core Ba' tells a story that chronology cannot hold. Though the women narrate in separate chapters that tangentially reference each other, in each, one or two other women appear. Connections are not tied to linear plot. By teleological standards the inter-referencing "goes nowhere." The women, simply, all lived above or below each other in the same apartment building. Without a timeline, without chronology, their stories, with repeated themes and repeated violences, become the story of the war.

1.2 Open-endings

The protagonist of Shams also challenges constructions of time. Though he fought for Palestine as a member of the resistance, Yasin does not see the Oslo Accords as a final victory. For him, it is simply the start of a new phase—one that will require the same determination to resist. Not unlike the repetition of Ba', Yasin's personal philosophy is one of beginnings, where each shift in violence marks not an end, but the necessity of innovation and adaptation. He envisions the Oslo Agreement as such a shift. Instead of leadership that sees things the same way, Yasin is faced with multiple urgent forces that would end his story—and the trauma of Palestine's past—through the teleological "Oslo Narrative" that has declared suffering over in order to lend legitimacy to the new Palestinian Authority government (Khalili, 117). When the "doors to his homeland [were] suddenly open" (42) because the new PA government was permitted to turn its Fatah fighters into a new cadre of police and bureaucrats, Yasin is offered a suspect "return." Suspect, because the "Palestine" of the Accords is neither the place he was born in, nor exiled from. He sees comrades kiss the earth "dreaming of a lost time" (14). Why this joy, Yasin wonders, when Israeli soldiers inspect their documents guns-in-hand. The returnees may not have expected the signs of continued occupation, but stick to the narrative of heroic return. Yasin would show no such exuberance, stating, "when there remain on this ground no soldiers, then it will be time to kiss the earth" (45). He does not believe his role as a fighter has ended, though the Accords mandated an end to arms.

Part and parcel of his critique of return is the narrative closure it implies. He sees his comrades "return to their homelands just to die in them" (43). He decides to go to Ramallah to continue his resistance, this time to Oslo:

> Ten years were waiting for him at least, there in front of him to do something, maybe something important, something that would make clear the meaning of this return for him. (44)

He wants his story to be an open one. This is challenged almost immediately, when Yasin is introduced to Salim al-Nasry, an actor and aspiring playwright in his 30s who grew up under Israeli occupation and looks to the hero as an imaginative way out. "This is a true hero," he believes, and wants to pen a "monodrama of no more than an hour and a quarter" (20) detailing his heroism. Salim asks Yasin if he can "write his story from beginning to end" (15). The endeavor repeats the form of Oslo's narrative closure and makes Yasin

uncomfortable—the end of the story as Salim imagines it, is his triumphal return. Yasin tries to explain:

> The story doesn't end when it ends, it starts and when it does the beginning must continue until a new beginning […] I don't see an ending at all, I see only a chain of beginnings. The ending is many beginnings: so where to start? (145)

Salim does not understand. Yasin pleads: his story is not exceptional, but average, in fact everyday:

> In truth, all heroes are like each other. Try for example to tell the story of Nimr on its own, or of Umm Walid on her own, or of Numan, and what would happen? They would all become the main character and I would be secondary. Do you understand now the meaning of a story? And how can you manufacture one with the flip of a hand? (158)

It is the "ordering" of events that create the hero. The chosen ending that looks back with a heroic teleology is what divorces the person from the everydays that came before, during, and after. This compartmentalization excises characters from their larger realities.

Salim insists on writing the monodrama largely because he wants to get out from "under the thumb" of a corrupt boss who pockets the plentiful aid money a children's theater brings. He writes the play and performs it in Yasin's village, for "one night only," as his 60-year-old muse wishes he could "escape far away" (19). However, "after a few days Salim al-Nasry returned asking if there could be another performance" (45). The play is such a hit, and Salim so disappointed at its short run that he treacherously wonders "what if Yasin was killed in prison? What if he died under torture?" (15); without the fighter he could tell a story of victory unimpeded. When soldiers come looking for Yasin, Salim is overjoyed: "from the day when Yasin was behind bars it became possible for Salim al-Nasry to carry out his project to its fullest extent" (15). "Yasin's absence planted in Salim that strange feeling of freedom, that the performance was his alone" (63). The play gleefully details Yasin's torture and post-'67 exile. By ending at Oslo, however, it structurally obliterates Yasin's more recent imprisonment. For the playwright, trauma of the Nakba, Naksa, colonialism, and occupation are displaced into some "other" time as long as the Oslo Narrative is maintained. Yasin's insistence that trauma is not "a particular historical event that can be placed in brackets" (Holbing, 194) threatens Salim's worldview. "The difference between life on the stage and life in life" (134), as one journalist who learns the truth of the play puts it, becomes a mortal one. Unable to face the truth of continued violence, Salim murders Yasin as an Israeli tank enters Ramallah. The tank signals of the start of the Second Intifada, and Israeli military oppression of the people's anger over the failure of Oslo. Like Ranger, Salim imposes a trauma binary. This time, however, the binary wins. His closed narrative not only hides a continued reality of colonialism; it amplifies colonial violence.

The structures of telling everyday trauma

For trauma theory, "the invention of a form susceptible to the transmission of an 'unimaginable' reality, a logic of horror" (Wardi, 39) was unthinkable. Ba' and Shams, however, plainly depict a "psychological reality of horror" (Shehadeh, 39). Their writings on violence are what Stephan Milich has elsewhere called a "wound turned into language" (153). Taking as given the fact of a narrative capacity to communicate everyday trauma, this section pivots, and looks at two examples of transmission's building blocks—words and genre— to more deeply

explore how wound is turned into language.

2. 1 Words

Ba"s title instigates a subtle play with language. It sets up associative links furnishing everyday words with traumatic meaning. Ba' mithl bayt…mithl Bayrut [B like house [bayt]… like Beirut] uses consonance to link Beirut—then synonymous with civil war bloodshed—with the personal and secure domain of the bayt [home]. The play requires readers to simultaneously register and reroute automatic associations. Language is shaped to communicate its context, and possibilities of the "real" expand. Taken from and expanded within the final lines of Lilian's narrative, the title associations swell as Lillian and her children await passage to Australia. The youngest pulls out his Arabic workbook "with the new smell of a library" (T58). Karim prepares to take his language abroad, where it will accommodate another reality. Demonstrating this word-flexibility, the scene unfolds:

Ba' said Karim, Ba' like Beirut. Yes, Ba' like Beirut, I answered. Ba', Beirut, bayt, added Karim. Yes, I whispered inside myself, Beirut … remains home. (58)

Continuing the play, "remains" [baqāyā] here carries two meanings: "what remains," and "what is left of." The city "remains home," and is simultaneously "fragments of home" (T56) [literally: what remains of home]. Letters, words, and their connecting grammar build a meaning of home that includes death, violence, misogyny, and exile.

Characters of Ba' constantly struggle to expand language. Camilla, the youngest and the only diasporic narrator, arrives from abroad to make a Civil War documentary. She has been recruited to the crew because she speaks Arabic and knows the city. The film is never produced; Camilla finds no language capable of telling it. In Beirut, she discovers, language has "buried in its letters and behind its words a fear that was still alive" (T102). She may speak Arabic, but she does not yet have the language of war. Between the linear style of the documentary and the layered language of the city there remains "discursive failure." The war has created new meaning for those who lived it, as Maha reflects: "when the sun had set, it left behind creatures trying to get used to a new language" (T102)—one permeated with meanings of everyday violence. Here, silence becomes embedded in language, an indicator of systemic colonial violences (Sacks, 77) and the "bottomless past" (T102) of words "exhumed" (T102) to describe the realities of violence. Words become capable of meaning everything "between the blue of death and the blue of sky," Maha reflects as her chapter closes, not because of, but despite the "loss from which there is no return, which waits for me to master it" (T223). Language mastery means speaking, not through an "eloquent" silence but one embedded in the practice of telling.

2.2 Genre

Despite attention to language, however, Yasin is written out of his own life in Salim's monodrama because "that's the sort of play it is" (36). Language is not the only structure mediating the telling of violence; genre also dictates what is possible to say. As Joe Cleary puts it, "European realism could never intellectually grasp" the realities of colonial locales, or of colonialism itself (259). The play is certainly realist, with Salim even rebuking the techniques of a Scandinavian theatre troupe that teaches the methods of Brecht. As the theatre director puts it, "there is no distance" between the Yasin on stage and the one Salim sees as the returned hero (13). Yasin is overtaken by the Oslo narrative (the war story, the realist play), but demonstrates through the structure of the novel, which closes after his death, that there is still the possibility of resistance. His charming, slightly clichéd insistence on love and

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romance challenges his community to see an alternative to Oslo, and demonstrates structurally Yasin's insistence that "all heroes are like each other," if the story is told the right way.

As he declares on the first day of his "return": "There must always be flowers," (35) because "we have become embarrassed of beautiful things more than we are embarrassed about bad things" (109). To prove it he asks Umm Walid:

> Have you ever in your life seen an airplane drop flowers on a city?
> Of course not.
> But you've seen an airplane drop bombs on a city.
> Any number of times.
> You see! The world is crazy! And you! How many times have you told ʿAbu Walid that you love him in front of other people? (136)

The logic they live under, Yasin implies, does Palestine a disservice. While it is too strong a narrative frame for the fighter to survive, his example is taken on by those less "under the thumb" of an Oslo narrative, and is illuminated in a novel that takes as its frame not the triumphal return but the story of its failure.

In mirrored scenes that open and close the novel, a narrator describes how "under the midmorning sun," Umm Walid sticks her head out of a window and yells:

> "Abu Walid!"
> "What is it?"
> "I love you!" (5-6, 181)

Abu Walid blushes, muttering "Yasin will drive her crazy in the end" (5-6, 181). Between the first and final pages of the text, however, something has changed. As the novel closes, Abu Walid (after muttering about Yasin) yells back: "I love you" (181). Resistance is realized, not to the play or the Oslo narrative, but, at least, to the life of the protagonists. Yasin forges—through his acts of resistance—a logic of horror that is also the logic of life. His insistence on trauma as reality is not the normalization of violence that Nouri Gana warns can "encourage, however unintentionally, the acceptability of these normally exceptional measures" (505). As unexceptional, trauma penetrates the wall of silence that would surround it, so that it might be recognized, its vocabulary understood, and perhaps one day addressed with new structures of telling that can hold silence as part of the story, in all its ugly ineloquence.

Notes

[1] With deep thanks to the editors and peer reviewers who helped develop the article. Their reflections and suggestions have been invaluable.

[2] Most references to *Ba'* are from the Max Weiss translation, and are indicated as such with T ahead of the page number. Where alternative translations have been made, page reference to both the Arabic and translation are provided. This quote is from the original Arabic (213, T224).

[3] All translations from *Shams* are my own (92-3).

[4] There is of course a history of Arabic intellectual debate about many psychological theories that stretches back to the late 19th century (See El Sharky 2016), but the debate remains pinned to European and later American ideas of the self.

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ISSN: 2196-629X
https://doi.org/10.17192/meta.2018.11.7792