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'The Violence We Live in':
Reading and Experiencing Violence in the Field

– Lamia Moghnieh –

Working Paper No. 2

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'The Violence We Live in': Reading and Experiencing Violence in the Field[1]

Abstract

Based on research on the humanitarian knowledge practices of violence, trauma, and the politics of suffering in Lebanon, the author in this article explores what an ethnography of living-in-violence can offer to our understanding and conceptualization of violence. The author shows the need to theorize critically the experience of living-in-violence in relation to dominant portrayals of violence as an experience of encounter. Reading violence in conflict sites is the work of experts who encounter violence 'in the field' (like humanitarian workers, ethnographers, psychologists and military personnel/fighters) as well as communities who live in violence. However, the work of reading violence in the everyday serves to delineate the conditions of possibility for liveability and precariousness. It also serves to normalize experiences of certain kinds of violence while others are produced as traumatic. Drawing from several ethnographic moments and writings on violence, the author asks: How can ethnography capture the experience of living-in-violence? And what is its analytical importance? How can an ethnography of reading violence help us make sense of different experiences of violence as distinct forms of knowledge production?

Keywords: violence; war ethnography; Lebanon; living-in; encountering; expert knowledge; trauma

Introduction: Violence in the Field and the Field of Violence

In 1991, a year after the end of the Lebanese Civil War, Lebanese singer and songwriter Khaled El-Haber released the song "Mish Hayyin," or, "It's not easy." The song goes something like this:

> It's not easy
> It's not so simple
> To walk calmly and slowly
> With bullets flying toward my head, an army tank blocking my path
> And the gunmen lurking around, waiting to mess me up
> It's not easy
> It's not so simple

During my field research on humanitarian psychiatry, violence, and the politics of suffering in Lebanon in 2011, I caught myself repeatedly recalling this song as an experience of 'living-in-violence' during the Civil War; it is a song that reveals the difficulty of inhabiting a place filled with lurking gunmen, tanks and gunshots in the streets. How does one walk in and inhabit such a place? And if it is not easy to 'live-in-violence', then how can it be easy to capture it ethnographically?

In my doctoral dissertation, I studied knowledge practices of violence emerging from humanitarian psychiatry, a new humanitarian discipline that employs psychiatric diagnoses, therapies, aid packages, and trainings to psychologize violence and its effects in conflict and post-conflict sites. At the core of humanitarian psychiatry is an understanding of violence as traumatic, as injuring the psyche and rupturing everyday life. I wanted to capture how humanitarianism's expert knowledge on violence in Lebanon defines it as trauma, and whether this process of psychologization was contested or appropriated by different communities. Yet while studying violence was at the core of my project, my experiences with what I call 'living-in-violence'—somewhat resonant with the conditions that El-Haber's song captures—seemed disconnected from what I was researching and writing about.

In this article, I reflect on my experiences of living-in-violence that in many moments became disconnected from the violence I was studying. While anthropology tends to privilege the lived

experience of violence analytically (Biehl & Moran-Thomas 2009, 270; Biehl et al. 2007; Good et al. 2008), the production of ethnographic tools to capture such an experience has been limited. In Lebanon, there has been extensive literature on violence that studied its protracted and prolonged nature and effect on people's lives (Makhlouf 1988; Tar Kovack 1986; Hermez 2017; Haugbolle 2010; Volk 2010). I rely on this important work to make another distinction about violence, that of the difference between experiencing violence by living in it and by encountering it. I privilege here experiences of "living-in-violence" without overlooking the analytical importance of the experience of "encountering violence" in the field. The experience of the encounter is an account shared by and common to many experts and some researchers. It seems to be the unmarked position of humanitarian workers, psychiatrists, and researchers, all of which encounter violence in the field and the clinic as an abrupt event that injures the psyche (Hacking 1995; Ghassem-Fachandi 2009). While I primarily focus on the experience of living-in-violence in this article, it is important to capture and highlight ethnographically both experiences of living-in and encountering violence as analytical tools that enable us to assess how livable, tolerable, or traumatic violent occurrences are.

Conversations on methodologies and ethnographic knowledge production in the Middle East have been taking various shapes and directions. The naming and nature of the region itself have once again been thrown into question in a new period of crises, regime oppression, wars and unprecedented displacement and migration to Europe and beyond[2]. From this emerging context, an urgent need arises to rethink the role of ethnography in offering a thick description of a place where violence is anticipated and experienced (Hermez 2017; Khayyat 2013) and in producing knowledge on "violence in the Middle East" amidst inadequate and un-tuned discourses and representations of the realities of violence.

In spite of critiques, some problematic research questions around violence still dominate the field of anthropology. I distinctly remember two research questions I learnt about in my PhD classes that felt alien to me. One was the famous "Why do they kill?", a question that emerged from ethnographic work on the genocides in Cambodia and interrogated the reasons behind people turning into mass murderers (Hinton 2005). The other was "Why do mothers not weep when their children die?", which questioned the "severe" or "extreme" situations, in the context of urban poverty in Brazil (Sheper-Hughes 1992) that turn people away from "natural" forms of suffering and grief. While the anthropology of violence has moved on beyond the limitations of these questions (see for example Valentine 1996; Thiranagama 2011; Das 2007), the study of violence still reflects certain dominant

tropes that construe violence as: (1) something encountered abruptly; and (2) something that produces a universal response of suffering.

For example, anthropological literature on ethnographic experiences of violence, such as *Ethnographies under Fire* (Nordstrom & Robben 1995) and *Violence: Ethnographic Encounters* (Ghassem-Fachandi 2009), mostly approach violence as either a force of destruction and rupture located at the end of politics and the social, or as a thing encountered during fieldwork that alienates the researcher from his/ her ethnographic object of study. Rarely does this literature speak of how ethnography can capture violence not only as destructive, but also as a social life force (Thiranagama 2011) that transforms and reconfigures subjectivities, suffering, and place in telling ways.

This article offers an initial exploration into how ethnography can help us investigate the social and political possibilities emergent from violence, while also accounting for its detrimental effects. I do so by highlighting the need to theorize and problematize experiences of violence in Lebanon by ethnographically drawing attention to different ways communities read and assess violence in the everyday. Reading violence in the everyday is a practice people in Lebanon engage in and are very much familiar with. However, these readings fail to inform and affect humanitarian institutions and disciplines, like psychiatry, that produce expert knowledge and determine interventions and discourses on violence.

Drawing on moments of disconnection between the protracted violence I live in and the one I research and write about, I invite more attention to analyzing the various framings of violence, by developing a way to capture the experience of living-in-violence ethnographically while problematizing the experience of encountering violence. I propose an ethnographic approach that is sensitive to the ways in which communities read and assess violence in the everyday. It is a daily activity that is inseparable from living-in-violence and it can help us understand and conceptualize violence in both its destructive and transformative, traumatic and ordinary, facets (Das 2007).

In the next section, I look back at my earlier experiences of living in the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) and then the July War in 2006. My experiences of living-in-violence helped me critique the humanitarian trauma model, best summarized by Derek Summerfield (1999) through seven assumptions behind international trauma programs: 1) experiences of war and atrocity only cause “traumatization”; 2) highly stressful events produce a universal human response captured by

Western psychology; 3) war-traumatized victims need expert and professional help; 4) victims of violence improve through "talk therapy"; 5) Some groups and individuals are vulnerable and specifically need psychological help; 6) War is a mental health emergency; and 7) humanitarian workers are themselves overwhelmed and may be traumatized. While heavily informed by experiences of the Lebanese Civil War and The July War, my research questions were transformed and reshaped by the Syrian revolution and the ensuing refugee crisis that unfolded in Lebanon in 2012.

In the second section of the article, I describe the dissonance between my experience of living in-violence following the assassination of Wissam Al-Hassan—the head of the intelligence information branch at the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF)—in 2012 and the expert knowledge production on violence I was theorizing and writing about. Through this discussion, I show the need to critically theorize the experience of living-in-violence in relation to dominant portrayals of encountering violence.

Living-in and Encountering Violence in the Field: Trauma and the Politics of Suffering in Lebanon

My research project was directly informed by earlier experiences with civil war in Lebanon, but mostly with the July War in 2006—Israel's war on Lebanon in July 2006 that lasted 33 days and was commonly called "the July War" or "Harb Tammuz." Like many people I know of my generation who were children of the Lebanese Civil War, I learnt early on how to anticipate violence and assess its risks. I could tell a dangerous militiaman from one I could negotiate with, joke with, challenge and even yell at. I knew how to distinguish between the different kinds of bombing and gunfire. Later on, I learnt how to prepare for war and upcoming street fighting: buy more food, especially cigarettes and bread, withdraw money before the banks close, identify which room in the house to hide in (the room with more walls and fewer windows), buy candles, and check the radio. I learnt to crack open the windows and balcony doors so that the pressure from the shelling does not break the glass.

Yet, I never saw my parents lose their nerves during the Civil War or in any of the other succeeding wars. My parents may not have been representative of how all Lebanese dealt with living-in-violence, but their poise does reflect how some people lived and survived the war. Once, toward the end of

the Civil War, we went swimming outside Beirut during the summer and the shelling started while we were in the pool. All the families ran to dry up and leave, but my father insisted that we stay, teaching us, while shouting over the intermittent sound of the shelling, how to read the sound of the bombs. He urged us to continue swimming since the sound of the shelling indicated that the bombing was directed at another area. The swimming pool's owner finally had to come and ask us to leave since no one else was left in the pool. While my father was right in his reading of the shelling, no one but him was that adamant to continue swimming while listening to heavy explosions. These earlier experiences informed my understanding of war as an event that one can prepare for, assess the risks of, and live through.

The aftermath of the July War in 2006 led to an unprecedented scale of humanitarian intervention in Lebanon, and included psychological aid and emergency trauma interventions**.** This was the outcome of intersecting factors reflecting the new identity politics and ethics of humanitarian action, on the one hand, and a universal acknowledgment of the importance of treating psychological injuries of war, on the other. Humanitarian organizations that arrived in Lebanon relied on "the trauma model" as a mode of intervention that understands violence solely as a traumatic encounter injuring and rupturing the psyche. Although my mother had been a social worker with the Lebanese Red Cross for decades, it was only during this more recent war that I began hearing her talk of trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). She came back home angry one day after a twelve-hour shift and described how her emergency work was interrupted by Red Cross youth asking if they could give her what resembled a trauma intervention. My mother was surprised: why did she need to be de-traumatized? She was doing her job, as she had done during the Civil War and other violent episodes. Trauma and PTSD were not alien concepts, neither to my mother nor to me. Yet, they somehow seemed out of context for us both.

To some extent, the July War was imagined by humanitarianism as a destructive force that depleted the country of all its resources and expertise (Moghnieh 2015). In reality, however, local aid initiatives were already underway since the beginning of the war, providing food and non-food items to the displaced as well as medical and psychological support when needed (Nuwayhid et al. 2011). Similar to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and Israel's Operation Grapes of Wrath in 1996, Lebanese and Palestinian local experts, students, activists, doctors, and community members joined forces and organized, under the initiative called Samidoun [We are steadfast], a communal aid response to the July War in 2006.

I briefly volunteered as a psychologist with Samidoun during the July War. I went to the Sanayeh Garden, a public park in Beirut, to play with the children of the displaced from the South and from the suburbs of Beirut who stayed there, just as they had stayed during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. International Humanitarian organizations and local psychiatrists proposed PTSD surveys, sometimes psycho- tropic medications and plans to install a psychiatric clinic within the park as treatment interventions (Interview with Ola Ataya 2014). My friend and I organized some games for the children. As we were leaving, a four-year old girl, who had been playing with us, held my shirt, asked me to lean in towards her and whispered, "My brother was injured. He got shot in the head and he went to the hospital and then we came here." She smiled at me then ran off.

There were obviously many cases of psychological suffering and pain that could easily be found to be traumatic. Discursively, however, for both the victims and those working with them, the war was not a time for articulating suffering but for resisting and standing firm in the face of Israeli aggression. Samidoun—meaning staying steadfast and strong—was both the name of the group I briefly volunteered with and a way to live through the July War in 2006. It was a time to prevail when war was out to destroy you. There was clearly a disconnect between the individualized, internalized diagnosis of 'war trauma' adopted by the humanitarian trauma model that global humanitarian organizations were advancing (Summerfield 1999) and the experiences of suffering and resistance of war-affected communities in Lebanon.

The result was that many global humanitarian organizations had difficulty detecting traumatized subjects after the July War. My friend Diana's entire neighborhood in the suburbs of Beirut was destroyed. Her building and her home were reduced to rubble. I kept in touch with Diana after we all left to resume our studies abroad after the war. We spoke of how our experiences of being abroad were similar and distressing. We resented the looks of sympathy and concern coming from "the foreigners," the way their voices changed when they asked about the war and the response they expected. We acted indifferently (sometimes on purpose) and told them that we were not affected. Needless to say, they were shocked by our attitude.

Diana was deeply upset about losing her house, but she was not necessarily traumatized. Losing her house was one of the things she expected to happen in Israeli wars. Moreover, standing steadfast in the face of destruction meant that she had survived the war. Her case was one of many cases of non-traumatized subjects that humanitarian psychiatrists encountered in Lebanon (Moghnieh 2016).

Diana's home and neighborhood, like those of most people in the South and the suburbs of Beirut, were rebuilt at an incredibly fast pace after the war. The reconstruction attempted to preserve the same urban landscape as before the war, although Hizbullah had declared that the suburbs of Beirut would "return more beautiful than they were," as the party pledged to rebuild all the neighborhoods and villages destroyed by the war. When I drove to the suburbs to pick Diana up from her rebuilt house after the post-war reconstruction, I struggled to remember where her house was. The whole neighborhood was the same, yet everything was just slightly different. The uncanny feeling of revisiting a place that is both familiar and not at all the same was how I experienced this process of reconstruction, but also our own psychological reconstruction as a community.

After the war ended, I felt isolated and depressed in the US. I mistook the sounds of trains for the sounds of military planes, and I was tired of constantly being pushed to talk about the war as an unfathomable and shocking event. Only when I returned home, five months after the war, did I feel better. I drove to the South; the destruction in most areas had already disappeared to be replaced by reconstruction plans and empty lots where a building or a gas station used to stand. One night, I sat with my friends, drinking, remembering, and making light of all that had happened during the war. We all laughed and drank. I remember that night as a night of healing, as reassurance that I had survived and that I was still human. My feelings of distress that I had not been able to share with others away from home, were mended that night, not through individual therapy, and not through talking about "my trauma," but by collectively sharing stories of the war and what we had gone through together.

These war experiences show how distinct the experience of living-in-violence is from encountering it, even when it is a sudden and brief war episode like the July War in 2006. They highlight a form of suffering from violence that is not necessarily traumatic, but something else that could be healed communally. They also reveal what it means to emotionally inhabit a place of violence in the aftermath of spatial and social reconstruction. These experiences of living-in-violence deeply contradict the ways in which humanitarian discourses understand and intervene in violence as a traumatic encounter that injures our human core and that requires expert treatment (Summerfield 1999).

Informed by all these experiences, my research questions then focused on understanding the implications of "an absence of trauma and suffering" in Lebanon, and the implications of an absence

of a universal and legible frame of suffering from war (Butler 2009). I began my project studying the ways in which communities in Lebanon resisted and contested humanitarian organizations' classification of their experiences with violence as traumatic, especially regarding Israeli wars.

However, while doing my ethnographic research in 2012, new wars and crises emerged that produced another visible dissonance in the field, this time revealing the multiplicity of the experiences of violence among various communities in Lebanon. By the end of 2012, new aid communities fleeing war, violence, and torture, like Iraqi and Syrian refugees, began to move to Lebanon. The Syrian refugee crisis, in particular, engendered new conditions of aid and violence, where trauma once again became the focus of humanitarian psychiatry, but this time intimately tied to a refugee status and access to aid. In 2012, the "Syrian presence" in Lebanon increased to reach around one million people in 2015, according to the UNHCR. This augmented presence revived anxieties within Lebanese society and was coupled with increased and overt forms of discrimination against the Syrians. The rise in anxiety and discrimination against the Syrians was accompanied by a massive mobilization of humanitarian organizations that shifted most of their aid to attend to the Syrian refugees, creating competing hierarchies of aid and suffering for other aid communities, like Palestinians, Iraqis, Sudanese and war-affected Lebanese.

Experiencing and articulating violence as traumatic now became part of a political economy of aid that reinforced victimhood, refugee status and access to services. These disturbed the dominant discourse around suffering from violence in Lebanon—like that of sumud/steadfastness –described above. What also disturbed the discourse was the new condition of violence represented in Hizbullah joining a war in Syria that was by far different from their previous discourses of military resistance against Israeli occupation and violence. My ethnography then shifted to capture and incorporate different subject positions on suffering (traumatized, resistant, normalized) together, rather than honoring one dominant discourse on violence in Lebanon.

In summary, privileging experiences of living-in-violence in Lebanon revealed their incompatibility with the expert knowledge production of violence and the humanitarian trauma model based on the experience of encountering violence. Second, the disconnections between the experience of living-in-violence and that of encountering violence, as in the case of failing to find traumatized subjects during the July War, and the disruption of the dominant discourse around violence, allowed me to

see the importance of historicizing and contextualizing the violence I was studying, beyond the discourse of a particular moment.

The Violence We Live in: Reading Violence in the Everyday

In this section, I describe the episodes of violence that emerged in Beirut between the end of 2012 and 2014 while I wrote my dissertation. The vignettes I share here further show the intricacies of living-in-violence, and the amount of work required to assess the level of danger and terror violence produces. Reading violence in the everyday and looking for signs and clues for how to inhabit it, are forms of knowledge that are incompatible with the expert knowledge production on violence. This shows the need to critically theorize the experience of "living-in" vis-à-vis dominant portrayals of encountering violence.

A big part of the disconnection I sensed while writing about the expert knowledge of violence was pertinent to the fact that the political assassinations, suicide bombers, and booby-trapped cars that emerged in Lebanon by the end of 2012, fell outside humanitarian psychological governance because they disturbed the very neat war/post-war, emergency/development binaries that humanitarianism functioned under. Humanitarianism and psychiatry, two major disciplines of intervention that produce massive amounts of knowledge on violence in Lebanon, classify what counts as grievable and traumatic in Lebanon. What falls outside this mode of governance falls outside of institutional representations of suffering.

I recognized the boundaries of my field-site when studying knowledge production of violence in an ethnographic field constructed by humanitarians. After all, they also go into the field, and must define and redefine what a field of violence is, in the hope of intervening. However, the various ordinary and non-expert forms of reading violence and the daily experiences of violence that are made and produced as "normal" and familiar seem to have been left unaccounted for. In this section, I invite more attention to the ethnography of reading violence in Lebanon, as a way to better understand and make sense of violence on the level of both discourse and experience, on the level of both expert and non-formal knowledge production. I do this through two vignettes I wrote in 2014, a little while after I finished my research, as attempts to process the incidents.

Bomb (2012)

I was having coffee with Zeina one afternoon at a coffee shop in the Hamra district of Beirut when a loud and indistinct sound interrupted our conversation. We stared at each other, wondering if the sound was something we should worry about. It was not followed by any other similar sound so it couldn't have been gunshots or fireworks. That worried us the most – as did its loudness. The fact that it was simultaneously loud and indistinct meant that it did not originate from our neighborhood. However, it also meant that if it were loud enough for us to hear in Hamra, then it must have been really loud where it had occurred. All signs led to a bomb explosion. Before we managed to check the news, everyone in the coffee shop was talking about an "infijar," an explosion in the district of Achrafieh.

Another explosion! Zeina, frustrated, decided to return home and watch the news on TV. I was planning on going to Achrafieh to get a haircut later in the afternoon. I didn't know whether I should cancel or go anyway. How big was this explosion? How terrifying was it really? I decided to continue reading the news online. Maybe it was a minor explosion and I could resume my day as planned.
News started pouring in.

The explosion was one of the big ones, occurring in a residential street in Achrafieh. Many of the buildings were severely damaged and cars were burning. I felt both drained and tense. Should I call and check up on friends and family yet again? I knew a couple of people who lived in the proximity of the explosion ... Alarmed by my familiarity with the news of the explosion, I wondered whether this time someone I knew WAS hurt. Perhaps I was behaving too indifferently? I decided to text some of my friends. Calling them wouldn't work since the phone lines would be overloaded, a recurring problem whenever an explosion happens in Beirut. I tried texting a few times until the messages went through.

> Are you alive?
> Yes I am, are you okay?

I decided to go for my haircut after all. Driving to Achrafieh, I got stuck in a hefty traffic jam. People were listening to the news on their car radios. Shop owners had all turned on their television sets and were watching the media coverage of the explosion in silence with a few workers and clients. The

explosion was caused by a bomb. It targeted and killed the head of the Internal Security Forces (ISF), Wissam Al-Hassan, as he was exiting an apartment in Achrafieh.

The information was terrifying. It was not so because it was a bomb but because of who the bomb targeted: such a high-ranking police intelligence official. The political repercussions of such an assassination could lead to more violence. At the same time, the news was also somewhat reassuring. This bomb was not random. It did not target a Christian neighborhood in Achrafieh with the aim of killing random civilians based on their sect. In that sense, the bomb was not a "civil war bomb,"' rather, it belonged to the new series of political assassinations that was launched with the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005. It followed a well-known political trajectory. This bomb had a political message, in a sense that it was a contained, planned, and organized political assassination, not a random bomb that targeted civilians to cause disorder and chaos.

Arriving late, I found the salon empty. I suddenly felt embarrassed that I had not cancelled my appointment but instead had decided to go ahead with my haircut although an explosion had just taken place and people had been killed and terrorized a short distance from my salon. The TV was on, showing pictures of the explosion, of people looking for their loved ones, of destruction. As he cut my hair, my hairdresser gave me updates on the explosions: 8 deaths and more than 50 people wounded.

On my way back home with a new haircut, I felt like crying. I was fed up, "zhi'it," with bombs and explosions. I got back home and decided that there was no escape from gluing myself to the television like Zeina. As familiar as the explosion was, I needed to better understand its political message: What was the bomb really saying? Is this bomb really similar to the ones before it, or does it have the capacity to shake and disrupt the country's stability? My parents were traveling and I was house-sitting. The fridge was almost empty except for a few items. Should I go buy more food just in case things escalate tomorrow? Will the roads be closed in protest? What about my plans of going out tomorrow night?

On the news, political analyses and live coverage of the site of the explosion had long begun. The site, although more devastated than 'normal', and its media coverage, were both familiar scenes and scripts. As policemen sealed it off, and with rescue work still underway, the site became a center for information gathering by different experts. Questions became more focused on the bomb itself and

on its political message: “What kind of bomb was it?” “Where was it planted?” “How much did it weigh?” “Is there a suspect?” “How big is the hole that the explosion caused?” “Who benefits from killing Al-Hassan?” And “What is the message of the bomb?” The next familiar script was that of “visiting the explosion site,” where politicians and ministers arrive to make statements about the bomb and the assassination.

On the day after the assassination, many of the roads were blocked in protest and stores were closed. The army maintained a heavy presence in certain areas of Beirut where clashes could erupt, including my own. I called all my friends who lived within walking distance from me and invited them to my house. My friends brought wine and cigarettes and I grilled some steaks left in the fridge. We called it a “violence healing party.” We drank and watched the news, screaming, laughing and commenting. In the evening, we decided to “risk it” and go out for a dinner party. At four in the morning, as I was returning home, trying to find open and safe roads there, I found a large army truck blocking the Salim Salam highway leading out of Beirut, right next to my parents’ house. I asked the army officer whether it was safe to take the road back home. He replied indifferently: “That is your problem, you deal with it.” I laughed and waved at him. In my car with me was a friend, also quite drunk, whose house was in Tarik Al-Jadideh, the sectarian nemesis of my neighborhood of Barbour. Army tanks had blocked the road leading from my neighborhood to his. As I watched him get out of my car and stagger towards the army tanks, I became worried. Did I make the right decision? Shouldn’t I have driven him a bit closer to his house? But then how would I have safely exited the neighborhood? I drove back home and called him to make sure he made it. We both returned home safely that night, and fell asleep, quite drunk. We had survived another bomb.

This vignette illustrates the various forms of reading and assessing violence embodied in the bomb that targeted Wissam Al-Hassan in 2012. Distinguishing between the sounds of explosions and whether they signaled a terrifying bomb, a regular bomb, or mere fireworks as well as assessing whether this form of violence is out of the ordinary or a casual occurrence, shape decisions to resume the day in an ordinary fashion or to retreat to one’s home. These readings of violence consist of an enormous amount of work to produce information about ‘the situation’ in Lebanon, by both communities and experts. They delimit the kinds of emotions and suffering that result from the violence we live-in. These forms of suffering and healing are unaccounted for by academic research questions that assume a universal form of suffering from violence.

Ethnography should pay closer attention to sensorial experiences in times of violence and conflict (see Al-Masri 2017). Reading violence in the everyday relies on heightened sensorial distinctions that allow communities to live-in-violence, and inhabit a reality where bombs and suicide bombers are part of its conditions of possibility (Vigh 2011). Such information is crucial in Lebanon during violent episodes, not only to remain alive but also to keep the everyday together. Reading violence and assessing its threat level was an overwhelming daily task in those days of protracted violence, inherent in distinguishing between behaviors that are safe and those that are risky. The presentiment that the ordinary everyday can abruptly transform into a terrifying reality required an enormous amount of work of distinction and separation to keep up with the changing information regarding "the situation" in Lebanon. Living-in-violence is a condition of continuous re-inhabitation and re-assessment of a social reality that oscillates between terror and normality, danger and safety.

Conclusion

In this article, I used various accounts of my experiences of living-in-violence in Lebanon to draw attention to the ways of reading and assessing violence in the everyday that are different from the experiences of encountering violence. While the latter experience is dominantly represented in expert discourses and representations of violence, the experience of living-in predicates a different understanding of violence and the suffering that results from it. Ethnographies of violence need to account for the "living-in" experience, while also problematizing experiences of encountering violence. Fieldwork on violence needs to take into consideration its knowledge practices and the ways in which violence is contained, produced and made sense of as normalized or traumatic. This I argue is a way to incorporate knowledge production of violence with the experiential that anthropology has privileged as a source of understanding suffering. The ethnographic capturing of various narratives and experiences of violence can allow for new analytical framing beyond binaries of trauma/resilience that tend to dominate the study of violence more broadly, but specifically in the Middle East. It can show how the process of normalization and traumatization of violence should both be investigated ethnographically and problematized.

Notes

[1] A longer version of this paper was published in Contemporary Levant in May 2017 (Contemporary Levant, Volume 2, Issue 1 available at https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ycol20/2/1).

[2] While the name and boundaries of the region constitute an old conversation (see for example Bonnie 2012), the debate re-emerged in recent conferences and workshops such as a symposium on the "Middle of Where, East of What: New Geographies of Conflict" organized by Saima Akhtar and Walid El-Houri at the Berlin Institute of Cultural Inquiry (2016); a workshop on "Theorizing Methodology in the MENA," organized by Helena Nassif at Philipps-Universitat Marburg (2016) and a roundtable on "Accessing and Defining the Field in Today's Middle East," organized by the Middle East section of the American Anthropological Association (2016).

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