Violence, Resistance, and Pleasure in Fadi Zaghmout's *The Bride of Amman*

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Abstract
As Fadi Zaghmout's novel deals with different forms of violence, resistance and pleasure, readings of these contingently interdepend with gender, sex, sexuality and desire by the novel's flaunty display of Jordanian and Egyptian society at its worst. In this article, I focus on various depictions and intersections of gender-based violence, institutionalized violence, structural violence, homophobia, and transphobia. Furthermore constructions of femininity as well as transgressions of binaries and their often violently opposed normalizations will be examined.

A close reading of Fadi Zaghmout's The Bride of Amman provides us with a master narrative of an inherently androcentric, patriarchal, misogynic, homophobic and transphobic setting/society and the reinforcement of this very system by its own people. By exposing the literary construction of two female protagonists as femini sacri (and one as their antagonist) and complicating these very constructions to speech act theory, it is shown how violence operates through language.

Keywords: Violance, Resistance, Pleasure, Feminism

"Though I looked everywhere, I could find
no men, only male beasts.
The true men were maimed or killed off
as masculinity fell prey to the clutch of violence." (B: 156)

When it comes down to it, *The Bride of Amman* can be read as a huge plea for love. It might not be the romanticized heteronormative love one might have in mind, instead it describes sundry versions of love and manages to deconstruct institutionalized, legitimate forms of love (marriage between men and women) and subverts heteronormativity in doing so. As Fadi Zaghmout's novel deals with different forms of violence, resistance and pleasure, readings of these contingently interdepend with gender, sex, sexuality and desire by the novel's flaunty display of Jordanian and Egyptian society at its worst. In this article, I focus on various

depictions and intersections of gender-based violence, institutionalized violence, structural violence, homophobia, and transphobia in Fadi Zaghmout's novel. Furthermore constructions of femininity as well as transgressions of binaries and their often violently opposed normalizations will be examined.

Violence, or let's call it marriage:

"We laughed about it, a sad kind of laughter
that betrayed the degree of unfairness
in a society that forces our relationships
to conform to one single format,
making things permissible for men only,
and only in one specific arrangement." (B: 160-161)

As the book title already suggests, the novel focuses primarily on the question of marriage in Jordanian society. It is described as a "much more significant achievement than getting a degree" (B: 16). Leila, one of the novel's protagonists, came to realize that no one cared about her getting a degree: "I genuinely believed that getting a degree would raise my value in everyone's eyes and establish my status as a fully independent woman. But at that moment I was stopped in my tracks, thunderstruck, by the realization that my degree was in fact nothing more than another step on the path towards the ultimate goal: marriage." (B: 20) As exemplified in Leila's story, the overall goal in a woman's life shall be marriage. What is more important than following this certain narrative, although it has to be acknowledged and thus quoted, are the repercussions these narratives have on women and hence how they satisfy normalizations. As a literary character, Leila subserves as a stencil for this very process of normalization. Although Leila used to have critical views of the system of marriage and its implications, she is more than willing to put those aside when Ali proposes to her and furthermore embraces all the apparent privileges that come with being a bride. She thinks that now she has everything one (a woman) can achieve in life and states what she once condemned: "Who cares about a degree? Soon I'll have the most prestigious certificate I can ever achieve: a marriage certificate." (B: 103) Finally she is to be called an *Aroos*, which means bride in Arabic:

> "Aroos – what joy is crammed into those letters! The name resonates in my ears like a sacred chant, the most cherished word in the human lexicon since time immemorial. Mankind has celebrated the concept of the bride throughout the history of civilization, and countless traditions, customs, and fables have been built up around it. Contemporary Amman society is no different." (B: 104)

The significance of being a bride is not only emphasized here, rather it implies in itself a sharp universal and eternal cultural aspect, which is not to be questioned anymore. Leila reproduces an essentialized and normalized master narrative that dominates as socially legitimate over others that are not.

Another narrative the text takes up against societal silencing and non-recognition is that of gay relationships. The dictate of marriage hangs like a Damoclean sword over the novel's texture and discourages its characters to go for, or in some cases even to think about the treasures they desire, as is depicted in Ali's character. He is madly in love with his long-term boyfriend Samir, but follows the dictate by deciding to marry Leila and therefore breaking Samir's heart. He justifies this by not having another choice and says that he would rather choose death than hurt the person he loves best. (B: 85) Ali's perceived Hobson's choice unsettles him at the

same time it forces justifications upon him. The text's intention is to blame Jordanian society for its strict regulations and codes when it comes to love and dating, even more so when it's homosexual, bisexual, transsexual, or intersexual dating or love. Homosexuality is not punishable before the Jordanian law but making use of Foucault's archeology of silence, one can only assume which power structure and dynamics lie behind a dominant discourse, within which ones (non-heterosexual) desire is silenced.[1]

Every society has its rules implied and directed towards its people, not necessarily *de jure* as implemented laws. Every community develops its own codes and labels certain forms of desire whether as morally acceptable or not. Implemented boundaries produce inclusions at the same time as exclusions. Inclusion privileges people over the excluded other. The struggle over inclusion and exclusion produced not only norm-conforming subjects, but also various and vibrant subcultures.[2] Following the novel's course, one has to understand that Ali could never be a heroic character in that sense, that he would fight a society's suppressive system and live happily ever after with his great love Samir. Keeping the text intent in mind, Ali's lack of choice is only logical and serves the text intent efficiently. If Ali were depicted as a hero of and fighter for gay rights and visibility, he could never have been the suffering, abandoned, self- and love sacrificing character/victim the narrative requires as its ethical anchor, which is directed towards (Jordanian) society by an educational wakeup call. The reader has to suffer with him and develop empathy towards his character. Maybe Ali could not have succeeded, even if he tried, since he knows his family and society; he knows, if he were to choose Samir, he would have had to change his whole life or leave the country.

Rana actually had to leave Jordan, since she was pregnant with Janty's child and her parents would not have allowed her to marry a Muslim. The only alternative would have been for her to secretly have an abortion and break up with Janty. Just as Ali, the literary figure Rana serves to tell a certain narrative. Therefore she is also left with any other choice apart from fleeing to Sweden. As doing so, she reflects: "I was filled with a sense of hatred for myself, and for everyone around me. I hated our culture and our religion, our traditions and our social prejudices." (B:150) To avoid being killed by her (male) relatives, Rana had to leave with Janty, whose parents assured their safe escape and confessed to Rana's parents afterwards. Since Rana's family is Christian and Janty's is Muslim, there was not even a chance to get married, because Rana's family never would have agreed (B: 152-153) or as Rana would put it: "Society left me with no other choice" (B: 154) Blatantly, not having an abortion is a means of Rana's resistance against this very society that forces women either into (unwanted) marriages or into (unwanted) abortions, whenever marriage is not an acceptable option.

Violence, or addressing *Excitable Speech*:

Following John L. Austin, Judith Butler uses the term "performative Speech acts", which put in force, what they designate.[3] Supportive examples can be easily found in *The Bride of Amman*. First, it is Leila rushing home proudly and happily after concluding her university degree, Leila – after a couple of moments of congratulations – is forced to succumb to what Butler calls Excitable Speech. Wishes and congratulations Leila receives are all about finding a husband soon, to start her own family as a young bride – unlike her sister Salma – or to be as good a cook as a student. (B: 19) Salma starts to cry when she hears her grandmother say "don't end up like your sister. No one wants to be an unplucked fruit left to rot." (B: 19) Salma is the very figure in *The Bride of Amman*, for whom the harmful effects of speech are worked up to a

[1] This article cannot cover all the implications, their very impacts and effects of speaking out about homosexuality like facing various discriminations, persecutions and the risk to be the target of violence or even murder.

[2] This article's objective is not to reproduce dichotomous binaries like culture – subculture or inclusiveness – exclusiveness. Since the novel works exactly with these oppositions, my aim is rather to expose and name them, in order to deconstruct and subvert them at certain moments.

[3] Bublitz, 2002: 23

climax – namely her suicide. On the surface of the story's plot, Salma appears to be less doomed than the seemingly inescapable faiths the other protagonists face. And yet it is Salma who commits suicide. The literary figure of Salma serves the purpose to demonstrate precisely the vast violence of linguistic acts and repeatedly emphasizes the forceful character of excitable speech. Even metaphors the text utilizes are violent: Selma reflects her grandmother's words as "a scalpel that sliced through" (B: 21) her "mask of self-confidence" (B: 21) Further examples for the humiliations addressed towards an unmarried "old" woman shall be given through the following quotes: "Thirty [...] it's the first time a girl dies in a society that can't wait to write its daughters off as 'old maids.'" (B: 22) we can find similar passages on other places, when for example people are thanking God for getting married before they turn 30 (B: 23) or when the ticking of the biological clock (B: 25) is mentioned. Salma writes a blog in which she deals with the huge amount on expectations towards women in Jordan, which she labels as a "society that is full of pressures and obligations". (B: 24) Still, it was Salma's decision not to get married, since she declined every suitor asking for her hand: "She couldn't stand this traditional approach to arranging marriages. She felt humiliated by the charade of putting herself on public display for them to decide if she was good enough." (B: 53)

Further, Ali experiences the hurtful character of hate speech as he reflects on his childhood and his early experience with his own sexuality. Children teased one another by using pejorative terms to describe gay men. As he grew older he took up a variety of other words and asked himself which of these terms could possibly refer to him: "Were all the degrading words teaming up to point at me and laugh? What had I done to get branded by these names before I even knew what sex was?" (B: 88)

Making use of Austin's Speech Act theory in a Butlerian way, the novel furnishes with an array of examples which explore the diverse ways hate speech operates. Language can originate different things and bestow reality unto certain things. While it is repeatedly said that marriage is the most important thing in life, it really does gain importance. Ali, who becomes very insecure about his desires even undergoes therapy in order to get ‚healed', because of all these hurtful words used to delegitimize, stigmatize, and pathologize his desire. In order to "act", a single invocation must, however, be repeated constantly[4] as we could see transposed on Salma as well as on Ali's example. Performativity also creates the effect of naturalization. As such, cultural norms appear to be natural.[5] Since norms need to be repeated constantly to gain their status of naturalized truth, they can never be finite and therefore bear the potential for (unintended) changes, subversion and shifts in the very process of repetition. By relying largely on Foucault and Austin, Butler assumes that reality is constructed through discourses assisted by language, which also serves as a leitmotif for this article. To be more precice, in acknowledging reality's discursiveness also the novels narrative can be unmasked as such and therefore deconstructed.

Violence: rape

As the novel deals with and portrays manifold forms of violence, it doesn't come as a surprise that also rape is discussed throughout the book. The topic of rape is relayed through Hayat, one of the protagonists, who was sexually abused by her father since childhood. By the time Hayat thinks that the sexual assaults lie in the past, it only takes her father's look at a family gathering to trigger fear and panic in Hayat. Her first sentiment of misreading his look turns out to be wrong: "I should have known that the torment I endured for years was not over yet. [...] Later it would seem that fate had conspired to play along with him that night, and the moon didn't stand by passively, either. They all ganged up together to play some satanic game in which I was the victim." (B: 68-69) The abuser here is not a stranger, it's her father. To portray this atrocity as fate with no means of escape appears unsettling. By shifting Hayat's rape towards a transcendent force,

[4] Butler, 1997: 29
[5] Butler, 1997: 41

the narrative tends to cutting down responsibilities, when guilt shall be ascribed solely and unquestioningly to the perpetrator. Notwithstanding this could be also a coping strategy for Hayat, since the transcendent is not as real as reality, more like a "satanic game" (B: 69). A further problematic depiction for not reclusively blaming the rapist father can be seen as follows:

> "The moon chose to hide that night and was nowhere to be seen. Perhaps the moon had given my father her blessing for his crime, or perhaps she was ashamed to witness it. I was alone with my father. I drove in silence, praying to God over and over in my heart, begging him to stand at my side and let me get through the night safely. But God did not listen. He also hid and abandoned me to my destiny." (B: 69)

Again, being raped is described as Hayat's destiny, to which the moon gave her blessings and from which God shied away. In calling rape a woman's destiny, rape becomes normalized and naturalized.
A different reading would suggest the moon and God being metaphors. Then God could represent kind of a male force in society, whereas the moon would stand for a powerful female principle. Thus being said, both look away or even give their blessing. This call for justice is at the same time an accusation towards a society, which rather tends to look away than intervene. That leads to Hayat blaming herself, when she tells that she promised herself not to allow him to touch her anymore, but "here he was exerting his control over me like he always did"(B: 69) Hayat tries to escape her father's sexual assaults two times that night, but first he threatens her with telling everyone that she ran away with another man, which means she would become what Giorgio Agamben calls *Homo sacer* or *femina sacra*, to make use of Ronit Lentin's term. The latter merges Gender Studies to Shoah Studies and applies her findings unto contemporary Israel. In doing so, she addresses and critiques suppressive modes of nationalities. Lentin states that „woman, due to her function as a vehicle of ethnic cleansing, and to her sexual vulnerability, arguably becomes *femina sacra* at the mercy of sovereign power: she who can be killed, but also impregnated, yet who cannot be sacrificed due to her impurity. […]."[6]
At first sight, adopting Lentin's research results of the Shoah and Israel for the purpose of analysing *The Bride of Amman* might seem far-fetched. The comparison becomes plausible however, as we find that both Hayat and Rana are excluded from the law[7] in Fadi Zaghmout's novel, and can therefore be killed. All that Hayat's father has to do is making the verbal threat (speech act theory also works here) of spreading the rumor of her running away with a man, which would make her lose what protection the state is granting her. Just like Rana can be killed by male relatives for getting pregnant while unmarried and her decision not to have an abortion and not being silent about it. Making use of the Arabic term *haram* - حَرَام - the meaning of the Latin word *sacer* becomes more obvious than in its English understanding, whereas it can mean both, sacred and accursed. By complicating the figurative construction of a *homo sacer* - or to be more precice, a *femina sacra* - on the literary construction of female identities like Hayat and Rana, their vulnerability

[6] Lentin, 2006. [03.03.2013]
[7] Since it is a novel analyzed here it's also figures of literatures, who become *femina sacra*. Nevertheless, as the book title suggests, the novel plays in Jordan and therefore a brief summary concerning Jordanian law shall be given: „Jordanian law is a blend of Napoleonic code (inherited from the Ottoman and Egyptian legal systems), Islamic *Shari'a*, and influences of tribal traditions. The Jordanian Personal Status Law (JPSL) (No. 61 of 1976) is derived from Shari'a, and includes various opinions from a number of jurisprudential schools; in the absence of a provision in the law, the Jordanian courts refer back to the most authoritative opinion in the Hanafi school. The JPSL is applied in all personal status matters related to the Muslim family such as inheritance, child custody, marriage, and divorce. Article 6 (1) of Jordan's constitution states: "Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them as regards their rights and duties on grounds of race, language or religion." Article 6 (2) of the constitution further stipulates: "The Government shall ensure work and education within the limits of its possibilities, and it shall ensure work and education within the limits of its possibilities, and it shall ensure a state of tranquility and equal opportunities to all Jordanians." While the constitution refers to the right of "every Jordanian" in numerous articles, it fails to prohibit gender discrimination." Nazir / Tomppert, 2005: 106-107

becomes evidently ostentatious. Not protected by the same law as other citizens (men) and by labeling not only their actions, but also themselves as *haram*, sovereign power leaves them with their bare life. Convicted of a crime by the people, the murderer is not to be judged[8] and the *femina sacra*, who can be killed is at once one who cannot be sacrificed due to her impurity[9]. Hayat, as well as Rana before, provides us with being the prime example and in doing so supplies a master narrative of *femini sacri*. In order to uphold the highly valued thing called honor, Hayat's father is more obliged than allowed to kill his daughter (due to a self invented story he uses as a threat to keep her quiet about the rape) as is Rana's family (due to her pregnancy). Referring back to Butler and linking the literary constructions of *femini sacri* to speech act theory, it's easy to see exemplified on these very constructions how violence works through language and in which ways it produces realities. Hate speech makes/does *femini sacri* – women who can be killed. This, unfortunately being not as fictional as one might wish, firstly serves the perpetrators of violence with an allegedly legitimate reason and secondly prevents them from being judged or punished.

Violence, or let's call it transgressing gender norms:

Ali is the gay protagonist in Fadi Zaghmout's novel. He is in a happy relationship with Samir, but asks Leila to marry him. Due to this literary figure one gets to know how life as a gay man in Jordan may look like. Homosexuality is not a crime before the law, but the only (socially and before the law) legitimized (romantic) relationship is marriage between a man and a woman, or a man and four women, or a man and two women or a man and three women. But let's get back to Ali's story and his decision to marry and therefore bending to societies restrictions. He pretends and performs/does heterosexuality, or as he puts it: "I wear my lie like a professional: it masks every bit of me and I take on the persona of a man who is not me, a man whose true face very few people know." With this statement, Ali challenges the idea of performativity in Butler's sense, assuming a true face behind his mask, referring to an existential origin as starting point of every performance. This leads us to Trinh. T. Min Ha's concept of the infinity of layers (over an assumed original), which „ […] subverts the foundations of any affirmation […] and cannot, thereby, ever bear in itself an absolute value"[10] What seems very obvious at this point are the pre- led relations of identity and difference, in which it is not to represent (describe) intelligible or monosemy identities, but to refer to an infinity, in which additionally various levels/layers of identity are being considered.

The novel does not subvert gender binaries, it rather reproduces them. It is sorely obvious what femininity and masculinity signify within the narration and therefore, a person assigned male at birth is a man and being assigned female at birth, one is a woman rather than becoming one. But as every norm produces resistance, there is an exception to this, embodied in the literary figure of Nawal/Tamer, the "gay camp". Although there are many hints in the novel that Nawal/Tamer is a woman, she is misgendered throughout the whole book – sadly enough even by the narrator. [11] She serves as a template and provides the reader with a role model:

[8] Agamben, 1998:71

[9] Agamben, 1998:81

[10] T. Minh-Ha, Trinh, 1989, S96

[11] Although the novel provides us with a non binary figure, this figure is referred to as *he* throughout the whole novel, and denies the character its self-definition. The aim of this article is to acknowledge a person's right to choose their gender and sex and therefore Tamer is called Nawal, as it was her choice.

> "He [sic!] had bleached his [sic!] hair [...] He [sic!] had a small earring in one ear. The strong scent of a feminine perfume wafted from him [sic!]. He [sic!] had face powder on, giving him [her!] a pale, yet slightly shiny complexion. He [sic!] held his [sic!] hand out softly like some kind of aristocratic lady. […] Tamer [sic!] is a very effeminate man [sic!] or, as he [sic!] prefers to see himself [sic!], actually a woman. Among friends, he [sic!] calls himself [sic!] Nawal after the Lebanese singer Nawal al-Zoghbi […] He [sic!] takes every opportunity when he's [sic!] at a party with gay friends to wear women's clothes […]" (B: 137-138)

Nawal's story which is horrible and might stand for the hardships a lot of gender-queer people or transwomen are put through. She grows up in Saudi Arabia and when the schoolchildren are divided into boys and girls, Nawal insists on being a girl, which nobody believes at this time. Her father sends her to Egypt in the hope that the harsher Egyptian lifestyle would make a man out of his child. Actually, quite the opposite occurres. Nawal swiftly makes friends in Cairo's gay and transgender communities, but since Egypt's restrictions on gays, their persecutions and imprisonments are highly brutal, also Nawal gets caught, imprisoned, tortured, beaten and raped. (B: 139-143) When she tells the judge about being raped, the former answeres: "Well, take a look at yourself. Who could blame them." (B: 143) As bad and horrifying Nawal's story is, as characteristic is the answer given to her by the judge, when it comes to depictions of Arabic culture/society concerning LGBTIQ issues and rights:

> "Tamer [sic!] realised that he [sic!] lived in the most chauvinistic society on the face of the earth, a society where femininity was seen as nothing more than the potential to turn men on and satisfy their sexual urges. It was a culture where it was the woman who was blamed for any kind of sexual liaison outside marriage, where a woman's natural expression of her femininity was seen as a free invitation to men to abuse her and treat her with contempt. " (B: 143-144)

This femininity is used by the judge as an excuse for Nawal's rape. Following this very problematic narrative, Nawal is to blame for being raped, since her femininity assumedly provoked the guard. What we witness here is a typical reversal of victim and perpetrator and additionally discriminates against femininity. As Nawal is sentenced to one year of prison, she must to endure the worst atrocities including rape. Shortly after her first sentence is declared unjust, the new sentence is set out for three more years, what leads Nawal to kill herself. As her attempted suicide fails, an American human rights organization bails her out of prison and arranges for her to stay in Jordan. (B: S 144-145) The text intent with Nawal's story obviously is to produce empathy in the reader. One should learn what society does to gender-queer and transgender persons and feel with them. It feels more like an educational project than an attempt to reclaiming transgender, gender-queer voices or empower transgender, gender-queer people or communities. Nawal's story is not a heroic one, it even can't be heroic, considering the intent of the novel. Nawal has to endure harm and injury, in order to raise the reader's awareness for violence against trans persons. Even Ali reflects on his privilege of acting cis male compared to Nawal's life as a transwoman:

> "We've both found ourselves outside of the traditional parameters of the definition of a man in our society. Being so obviously camp has meant he's [sic!] had no way of hiding or blending in or pretending to play the role society expects of him [sic!]. It's different for me in that my sexual preferences are less apparent. " (B: 145)

Violent Resistance, or let's call it death

> "The Palestinian woman who blew herself up in Tel Aviv, to cast a spotlight on the oppression of an entire people who did not benefit from legislation and international laws, is no different to the woman inside me who has had no support from modern social legislation in throwing off the legacies and the constraints that still restrict her relationships with others and her existence as a woman. And here I am today choosing to sacrifice myself [...]" (B: 170)

As analyzed earlier, the violent impact of hate speech on a person can become unbearable, which finally leads to Salma's suicide. The example above, a quote from Salma's Blog, demonstrates solidarity with Palestinian women and their struggle on the one hand and ties her own identity as a woman to a Palestinian woman's identiy on the other hand. In doing so, it is not only a state or occupation who gets the blame or is made responsible for suicide bombings, it is "the absence of political, social and economic justice" (B: 170) that led women to this choice. This explanation opposes public main discourses of the instrumentalization of female terrorists, while highlighting a female voice. It criticizes Palestinian authorities and international bystanders as well as Jordanian legislation and society. The quote implies a similarity in women's oppression across countries, that must be contextualized in various ways.

Salma's story can be read as the master narrative of self-determination, which sometimes seems to be the only escape route. In this case, Salma sees no other option than killing herself, also for the purpose of making a statement. Her suicide is depicted as an act of resistance, rather than surrender. Additionally, it could be construed as a move of solidarity with other women, and thus as an intrinsically feminist act.

Salma kills herself for every woman and mother in order to exemplify the immense amount of pressure addressed towards women and daughters. (B: 170) Making a statement of solidarity like this emphasizes the necessity of the concept of solidarity between women.

The society described in Fadi Zahmout's novel is inherently patriarchal and androcentric, which means that irrespectively of sex or gender, people reinforce this very system.

The staging of Salma's suicide is highly theatrical. She is dressed in a wedding gown and films herself for a live stream on her blog on top of Amman's citadel. As she holds the razor blade in her hand, she turns to the camera and asks loudly: "So you want me to be an *aroos*? […] Here I am [...] Your bride, my beloved city. Am I worthy of you, my love, my city? Am I good enough for you, Mum?" (B: 171) To sum it up briefly, Salma's suicide is perfectly staged, and can be read as an act of freeing herself, reaffirming her agency, making a feminist statement of solidarity and criticizing patriarchal and androcentric systems of oppression by actually becoming *The Bride of Amman,* and antagonist of *femini sacri*. She is the master of her own life and death. Thus, she cannot be killed. But she can be sacrificed, and chooses to do so.

Silent pleasure and resistant victims: Conclusion

Due to the novel's educational attempt it's only logical that the depiction of gay sex follows a certain narrative. This narrative tends to silence gay sex and replace it with love. As in the example of Ali and Samir: "Our bodies trembled in rapture and we fell back into each other's arms in an embrace of pure love. After our passion, we lay together in a state of tenderness and warmth; my head on his chest, my fingers stroking his hair, we drifted off to the symphony of physical and spiritual gratification." (B: 86). There is no depiction of the actual sex, more so, the afterplay is the topic. Also sex between men and women misses detailed descriptions. Since Ali is gay and not really attracted to women, it is difficult for him to sleep with Leila. When Leila finds out about her husband's desires, she reacts madly at first, but both of them find an arrangement that suits them. Leila decides to go back to University and starts gender studies: "The sexual

discrimination which had haunted me through every stage of my life was embodied in every passage I read in the books on the reading list." (B: 229-230) After finishing her master's degree, she becomes a women's rights activist while still being married to Ali, but more like a true friend and companion. The 'untraditional' relationship between Ali and Leila subverts the system of marriage at the same time as it shows us resistance in a place where resistance is difficult to think. Sure, both are not able to live the lives they would prefer, but manage to build a supportive and respectful relationship which most (traditional) marriages lack.
Also Hayat reclaims her victimized/raped body and starts to have a lot of sex with different partners:

> "I'm not gripped by fear for my reputation like most girls. I couldn't care less if it reduces my chances of getting married. I've always sensed that if I'm ever going to, it would probably to a foreigner anyway, because I'm unlikely to find a single Jordanian man who would be willing to accept the past I carry on my shoulders. After all, marriage is the furthest thing from my mind right now. All I want from a man is the pleasure that can be obtained from just one night." (B: 124)

All of the main characters are factoid victims of some sorts at the beginning of the novel. The achievement of this analysis – among others – is to point out the resistance that is tentatively shown in the characters' developments. All of them find and contrive strategies to cope with the different restrictions, oppressions and discriminations imposed on them. In the end, no one fully remains a victim, even if they are victimized throughout the entire book. Salma chooses to kill herself in a heroic act of reaffirmation. Rana's family finally realizes, after Sarah is born, that love shall be stronger than honor, which leads to Rana's and Janty's return to Amman. Ali gets the family he always wanted, he gets support from his wife Leila and doesn't have to fear of being exposed any longer. Hayat develops as a survivor of rape over enjoying sexual pleasure and freedom into a self-confident woman, living a self-determined life. Leila becomes an advocate for women's, LGBT and sexworkers' rights. Furthermore, the novel gives voice only to the former victims and never to the rapists, harassers or abusers. Men are mostly the bad guys, only gay and gender-queer people are depicted decently. In silencing the perpetrators of violence and giving a voice to the survivors, as well as through the characters' development throughout the book, the novel's narrative does not reinforce a simple dichotomy of perpetrators and victims, but it rather opens up spaces for resistance and pleasure. Only Nawal is left out of this emancipatory project by ending her storyline early. This leaves the reader with an unsatisfied feeling, not knowing how her life went on. It seems like her character was only introduced as a means of educating the reader about violence against transwomen. By refusing Nawal's self-definition and not acknowledging her as a woman, the text reproduces, maybe unwillingly, violence towards gender-queer and transgender people.
The attempt to give women, gays and transwomen a voice is the novels huge achievement, but fails due to the characters lack of depth at some points.
Nonetheless a close reading of Fadi Zaghmout's *The Bride of Amman* provides us with a master narrative of an inherently androcentric, patriarchal, misogynic, homophobic and transphobic setting/society and the reinforcement of this very system by its own people. As examined closely during this article, this is done through language's discursive powers. By exposing the literary construction of two female protagonists as *femini sacri* (and one as their antagonist) and complicating these very constructions to speech act theory, it is shown how violence operates through language and thus consequently generates normalized and naturalized facts.

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