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Porous masculinities: agential political bodies among male Hamas youth

Maria Frederika Malmström

Constructions of gender, embodiment and agency among male Hamas youths in the West Bank are discussed in this article through the prism of violence. It focuses on the constructions of uncertain masculinities in a complex interplay of violence, political Islam, suffering and loss, and the importance of analyzing the body in such processes – both as agential and as victimized – is highlighted. To be able to move away from the sensationalist Western media that often portray Middle Eastern Muslim men as “violent,” and as terrorists, we need to understand the motivations and the meanings of violence. The method of analysis is to use a discourse-centered approach and to use experience-near ethnography that begins with men’s own practices and attends to how they understand themselves, how their bodies are involved, and how they live out norms and ideologies in their everyday lives. Thereby we are able to understand how men’s realities and identities are interpreted, negotiated and constructed and how the body is actively involved in these processes. This approach is relevant since it is possible to analyze the singularity of experience, not only as a form of social interaction, but as linked to social structures and discourses, which implies negotiations of tensions, conflicts, and uncertainties.

KEYWORDS: violence, gender, masculinities, agency, embodiment, Middle East.

Masculinidades porosas: corpos políticos com agência entre jovens do Hamas ♦ O artigo trata as construções de gênero, encorporamento (*embodiment*) e agência entre jovens de sexo masculino do Hamas da Cisjordânia, através do prisma da violência. A construção de masculinidades incertas numa articulação complexa de violência, Islão político, sofrimento e perda é analisada destacando a importância do corpo nesses processos, como veículo de agência e como alvo de vitimização. Para nos distanciarmos do sensacionalismo mediático do Ocidente, que frequentemente retrata os homens muçulmanos do Médio Oriente como “violentos” e terroristas, é preciso compreender as motivações e os significados da violência. A abordagem centra-se no discurso e numa etnografia próxima da experiência, que começa com as próprias práticas dos homens e leva em conta a maneira como eles se compreendem a si mesmos, como o corpo participa e como as normas e ideologias são elaboradas nas suas vivências quotidianas. Assim se compreende como são interpretadas, negociadas e construídas as realidades e identidades destes homens, e como o corpo é ativamente envolvido nesses processos. Esta abordagem permite analisar a singularidade da experiência, não apenas como forma de interação social, mas na sua relação com discursos e estruturas sociais, o que implica a negociação de tensões, conflitos e incertezas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: violência, gênero, masculinidades, agência, encorporamento, Médio Oriente.

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WHY AND HOW YOUNG MEN CHOOSE TO JOIN VIOLENT TERRORIST/military organisations – often using their bodies as deadly weapons – is a matter that continues to puzzle social scientists and the policy world, as well as society at large.¹ This enduring question, which is ultimately about humanity and the allure of violence, has become particularly salient given the changing nature of the global landscape concerning security development. The character of contemporary danger, threat, uncertainty and belonging; the prevalence of terrorism as a seemingly viable political response to injustice; and the (US-led) global War on Terror that is being waged upon the personal lives of peoples in disparate sites all over the world – all render imperative readdressing this question in distinct and varied ways. However, despite a general consensus that understanding the call to violence is vital to mitigating its effects, there is surprisingly little research that explores the intimate and complex production of violent (male) subjects in militant organisations. This article discusses this overarching question in relation to young male Hamas members and the appeal of becoming soldiers in the context of the Hamas in the Palestinian-Israeli struggle. Yet the body does not always cope with inculcations of bodily violence and social expectations of fearless manhood. Therefore, this article explores constructions of masculinities in a complex interplay of violence, political Islam, suffering and loss. My account highlights the importance of analysing the body in such processes – both as agential and as victimised. To be able to move away from the sensationalist Western media that often portray Middle Eastern Muslim men as “violent,” and as terrorists, we need to understand the motivations and the meanings of violence.

The theoretical perspective combines generative theories of gender,² embodiment and agency theory (McNay 2000, 2003; Mahmood 2001, 2005; Ortner 2006a, 2006b). I also draw upon earlier research on the constructions of violent militant masculinities (Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2008, 2009, 2010; Whitworth 2004; Enloe 1990; Higate and Hopton 2005).³ Theoretically, this approach means inquiring into lived experiences (cf. Bruner 1986) and embodied agency that offers a way to a better understanding of the complexity and appeal of violence. In order to grasp constructions of masculinities in a complex interplay of several factors, I specifically combine experience with representation through phenomenology and ethnography. Thus, I use a

1 After being accepted for publication in *Etnográfica* as part of the dossier “Masculinities in times of uncertainty and change,” a complementary version of this article was included in Frerks, Ypeij and König (2014).

2 I base my framing of these questions in the conceptualisation of subjectivity as a process of becoming – through relations of difference and power and in line with Butler’s (1990) notion of reiteration as a means of constructing identity. See also Hall (1996).

3 For an overview of the literature on the military and the reproduction of violent masculinities, see Ackerly, Stern and True (2006); Stern and Nystrand (2006); Stern and Zalewski (2009).

discourse-centred approach and an experience-near ethnography that begins with men's own practices and attends to how they understand themselves, how their bodies are involved in this process, and how they live out norms and ideologies in their everyday lives. Thereby we are able to grasp how men's realities and identities are interpreted, negotiated and constructed, and how the body is actively involved in these processes. This approach is relevant since it enables analysis of the singularity of experience, not only as a form of social interaction, but as linked to social structures and discourses, which implies negotiations of tensions, conflicts and uncertainties.

WHY YOUNG MEN IN HAMAS?

Hamas is particularly interesting because of its unique positioning as a legal, democratic, legitimate political actor, as a terrorist organisation, as a paramilitary force, and as a social association. Hamas has used both suicide bombings and rocket attacks as part of its political struggle against Israelis, and has been classified as a terrorist organisation by the EU and the US, as well as by Russia, Israel, Japan and Canada. However, the Arabic "Islamist" party democratically won the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council elections, with a political platform that underlines *Shari'a* as the basis of the law. Thereafter Hamas has reduced their "terrorist" activity. Additionally, Hamas plays an important role in providing social services in the area of health, education and welfare, all based on religious education and guidance from Islam. The main goal of Hamas, as a national and religious political movement, is to liberate Palestine, but also to Islamise Palestinian society (cf. Hroub 2006). The "Islamism" of Hamas is part of the larger Islamic revival of the Muslim world since the 1970s (cf. Malmström 2009b). Hamas developed as the first branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, the major Islamist movement, outside the Egyptian borders.

The politics of Hamas and their proposition of social change promise their followers a sense of security, belonging and moral order, and this, arguably, helps restore people's sense of confidence in the Palestinian nation. After the overwhelming victory that caused shockwaves not only in the region but also across the Western world, Hamas has experienced internal tensions as it tries to "balance the art of politics and the power of the gun" (Milton-Edwards 2008: 1598).

The weakening of political moderates within Hamas and the strengthening of more militant factions of the movement can be seen as a direct result of the EU/international boycott of Hamas (e.g. Hovdenak 2009). Hamas can thus be seen as an integral product of or actor in the global(ised) War on Terror, at the same time as it is an organisation that aims at state building through "legitimate" modern state mechanisms.

MOHAMMED AND THE IZZ AD-DIN AL-QASSAM BRIGADES⁴

Mohammed was the first member of the militant wing of Hamas that I met, who openly told me about his former Qassam identity. Already he had been in prison for many years as a Qassam soldier and subsequently he had been forced to be passive and non-active by the Palestinian authority and Israel. I had conscious and unconscious presumptions about militants as explicitly tough, non-emotional, fearless and sometimes aggressive. I was therefore surprised to meet someone who was explicitly shy, warm hearted, well educated and well mannered, and who later on expressed a good sense of humour. Mohammed was very attentive in relation to my questions. He was courteous, even chivalrous. This young man was always respectful and he was also protective towards me when we walked around in the public area.

A lot of times thereafter, with him and with other Hamas men, I asked myself whether it was possible that I had been manipulated by the men's engaging manners and personalities. Was I, then, an inexperienced and easily influenced researcher? These men willingly use violence and they legitimise it as political resistance. They resisted talking about their actions as acts of violence. Additionally, they had all killed in the name of God. And as Mohammed told me, "Of course, some of the men you have met are carrying weapons, but you will never know when, and who they are." No, I do not think I was naïve; rather, I experienced the complexity of trying to understand violence on several levels at the same time. In the case of Mohammed, he had done what was expected of him by the local community, as a man, as a freedom fighter, and not least as a national hero. He was held in great respect in his neighbourhood, not only by Hamas members, but also by political actors living in other parts of the West Bank. I understood Mohammed as very proud of his Qassam soldier identity and of his experiences of prison. But I also read him as if he was relieved from duty. He explained that he could not actively work against the occupation in the same way today, but that he did it in other ways. It was now time for him to continue with his civil life: to find employment, to marry, to have children and to live as peacefully as he could. He underscored that his future children were to be part of the resistance. Mohammed was now able to accentuate other vital aspects of manhood, father and husband, which is necessary to be locally perceived as a proper adult male. Nonetheless, he was very clear that in his heart he was a member of the military wing of Hamas. Forever.

When Mohammed informed me about his experiences, including actions and lived experiences of violence, or resistance as he entitled it, he talked with

4 Or the abbreviation Qassam (Brigades), the military wing of Palestinian socio-political organisation Hamas. The soldiers cannot choose to be soldiers on a voluntary basis but are carefully selected by Hamas after their "secret" assessments of the individual.

pride about how the society around him respected him after his imprisonment. I understood that he was perceived as a hero in the local community, but he never showed off. He expressed that he was surprised that almost everybody in the West Bank had the knowledge of his Qassam identity and of his many years in jail, which must have felt strange compared to his secret years before prison as a Qassam soldier. Qassam men, as the chosen soldiers of Hamas's independent militancy wing, maintain secret identities and positions in the group and operate on a model of independent cells. However, in line with the ideology of Hamas, warring includes activities not usually associated with violence: a high standard of education and the good health of the people are considered integral to the armed resistance. Therefore, being a Qassam soldier also may imply receiving an education. Qassam soldiers are renowned for carrying out complex attacks as well as for how they regenerate new cells after members' deaths or incarceration. Locally, they enjoy the status of ultimate "manhood." However, Qassam youths cultivate a hidden space for "forbidden" actions, including dating girls, while outwardly expressing seemingly progressive ideas in order to keep their secret identity. This means that young men are able to act independently of what is prescribed (and against local norms of morality and Islam) if they do so in order to protect their identity as soldiers. Through inhabiting and enacting Qassam identity, these men thus also destabilise ideologies of gender, family, faith, and even nation.

Mohammed talked in long narratives about his double identities, as a civil person in public and as a Qassam soldier underground, and about his experiences in jail. He underscored with respect the amount he had learnt from other older "high-status" prisoners, the intellectual fellowship and spirit of community, the friends he had met for life, but also the outstanding quality of the secular and religious education he had received in prison.

Nevertheless, at the same time as Mohammed claimed that he did not regret anything, his body language expressed that he had difficulties coping with his experiences of violence and imprisonment. He did not mention any severe symptoms, as many other men did, but he appeared very tired, stressed and drained, and unhealthy. He had dark rings under his eyes and his legs were constantly shaking. Could it be that Mohammed related one story while his body reported another?

FEAR, FIGHT AND FIELDWORK IN THE WEST BANK

Before digging deeper into the ways in which these young West Bank men's subjectivities and agency are informed by, and animated through, their desire to inhabit specific manhood, I would like to highlight some of the limitations encountered for this research as well as a number of reflections on the fieldwork and the political context. Fieldwork in the West Bank was carried out

during the winter of 2009. Conducting research locally is not easy, in relation to ethics, access and security on different levels. I had many preconceptions of the difficulties involved.

Carrying out research among women and men as a Swedish woman and researcher had clearly affected my earlier research in Egypt. My own gender role did not permit me to speak to men about topics such as sexuality, body or femininities. In Palestine, however, my concerns that being identified as a “woman from the West” would inhibit my interaction turned out to be totally inapt. The interviewees, despite the risks or maybe also because of the risks we took, spoke willingly and at great length about political issues. However, we never touched on forbidden topics, such as sexuality or other gender-related inappropriate themes.

Naturally, due to the political situation in the West Bank in 2009, it was extremely dangerous for the individual to admit their Hamas membership. During my stay, I was expected to meet several men who had recently been released from Israeli prison. But before we had the chance to speak, several of the men were detained again by the Palestinian authorities. I was told that these men were imprisoned only because of their political affiliation to Hamas. Several men talked about the huge difference between how Fatah⁵ and Hamas members were treated in modern Palestinian jails. The men referred to the prison in Ramallah as the slaughterhouse, explaining that Hamas men were constantly killed inside, a story confirmed by others. They also pointed out that the situation in the West Bank was increasingly difficult for the faithful Muslim population. Religious men were the main target for suspicion. Men who went to the mosque for the morning prayers were considered too religious by the Palestinian authorities and were taken into custody. It was a Hamas “witch-hunt,” they emphasised. The men expressed that it had never been worse in the West Bank. People were afraid to talk to anybody. Hence, people often began their conversations by communicating not only the danger, but also the fear and the many risks they took by speaking with me about Hamas politics, such as withdrawing of licences, blacklists, beatings and detentions. One cold afternoon downtown in Hebron, I met Karim, who underlined that it was increasingly unsafe to speak about your political affiliation in the West Bank. In line with many other voices, he expressed that no one discussed their political affiliation anymore, since you would be put in prison if you expressed your political membership of Hamas. I never met him again, but he concluded our meeting with these words:

5 Fatah, the left wing of Palestinian politics, is the largest faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Fatah retains control of the Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank, even since Fatah lost its majority in the Palestinian parliament to Hamas in the 2006 parliamentary election. For further reading about the Palestinian authorities (PA), politics and history, see e.g. Beinun and Stein (2006) or Pappé (2004).

“I have a good job, no black points. It is dangerous for me and for you. We have to meet in different places. I am doing this for my people. If you talk you will be imprisoned. Thereafter [...] your career is over and then it will be problems if you need any juridical document. Black points [...]. You will lose everything.”

Clearly, to conduct research about Hamas members in the West Bank is intricate in terms of ethics. Moreover, it is extraordinarily unsafe for the interviewees, since the researcher actually exposes the respondent to danger. During my limited field period, as mentioned, several of the men I was expected to interview were detained or imprisoned before we even had the chance to meet. I tried to take every precaution I could, and instead of focusing on one place I travelled around in every city of the West Bank. I interviewed mostly men and I met them in public and private spaces, in cities and in refugee camps. I was given the opportunity to meet them through various contacts. These initial persons had been contacted through different unknown individuals, who in turn had received their information through other persons, who did not know one another. The particular situation in the West Bank also meant that I had to stay alert, to constantly be on “stand by,” as well as ensuring I was prepared for meetings to be postponed on the spot or for several interviews to be held in a row. In the end, I completed 35 interviews, including focus-group interviews, along with casual conversations as well as observations concerning the surroundings.

The interviewees used different strategies to cope with the current political situation in the West Bank. Some expressed explicitly that they were Hamas members, while several did so implicitly. Other men began their narratives with taking up a stand against any membership, but admitted a positive response towards Hamas politics, despite their own political standpoints. A number of men had already been in prison as Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades (Qassam soldiers) and they could be more open because they were already known by the authorities and therefore were no longer able to perform as soldiers. These “former” or non-active Qassam men told me that both Palestinian and Israeli authorities had their eyes on them and they were forced to act passively. I met some men who claimed they had been imprisoned when they were only in their early teens. Many had been in prison between fifteen and twenty years. Additionally, a limited number told me that they were against Hamas politics. Some of the men said that it was impossible to be actively political in today’s West Bank.

CREATING PROPER MEN

In the West Bank idealised masculinity (*rujulah*) is closely linked to themes of brave actions, resistance, risk taking, assertiveness, toughness, virility, potency, sacrifice, self-control, paternity, generosity, sociality, respect, dignity

and honour, the latter often used with respect to men's duty to protect their family honour (*sharaf*) and face (*wajh*) (cf. Gren 2009; Hart 2008; Peteet 1994; Kanaaneh 2005). In the daily construction of a proper male self, taking risks seems to be a significant act. From my field experiences I could see that young men not yet imprisoned, especially if their brothers or father had been in jail, were more assertive and took many more risks than the former prisoners. One unmarried man in his thirties told me that his older brother – who had been imprisoned for several years, as had his deceased father – forbade him from going out after dark, because of the risk of detention and beatings, an order that he constantly disobeyed. Peteet, an anthropologist and author of the classic article “Male gender and rituals of resistance in the Palestinian intifada: a cultural politics of violence,” points out in another article that “violence does index masculinity [...] but [masculinity] refer[s] more to the ability to protect, defend and sustain home and family, whether this protection demands militancy” (Peteet 1997: 107). Of course, identity is always a process of becoming and being, and in the Middle East region as elsewhere, masculinities diverge and are in constant transformation (Ouzgane 2006; Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb 2002; Massad 2007; Murray and Roscoe 1997; Peteet 2007).

As in many other parts of the Middle East and North Africa, “personhood” in Palestine is often defined in collective and relational terms. A person is always responsible for her or his actions in relation to collectivities, such as the family, the neighbourhood or the state. Although the socio-centric self is accentuated in the Arab world, this does not preclude people from acting individually too. Therefore, I distinguish analytically between the private self and the public honourable self as these are defined by the family, the group and the state. Constructions of personhood are related to honour and shame, though not in the way that these terms have formerly been understood in social science literature (e.g. Gilmore 1987). Honour ideologies have to do with appropriate conduct and they shape interactions between men and women with various identities and selves – that is, they embrace both individual and collective selves. Honour may also be analysed at the national level, where the group sharing in honour is not the family but the whole nation, which is of particular importance in relation to external aggression by the occupying power and global political boycotts. However, an honour code is not a uniform scheme of rules and guidelines but is dynamic and multi-stranded (Baxter 2007). Notions of honour are always in flux and they are influenced by historical, political, economic and socio-cultural change. Viewing honour from this perspective expands earlier, more static viewpoints. It makes room for understanding agency by taking into consideration the power, vulnerabilities, rights and responsibilities of both women and men (Malmström 2009a, 2009b, 2012; Baxter 2007). Additionally, what must be understood concerning the current situation of the West Bank is that these young men live in a

specific setting of Israeli occupation, Palestinian disruption, and escalation of political violence, where they continually seek out different strategies to cope with the unpredictable demands of life.

IMAGINING THE ICON? IMAGINING THE TERRORIST?

Colonial thoughts have through rhetoric played an active role in constructing violence as part of manhood in the Middle East (Peteet 2005). Today's changing political landscape, including the aftermath of 9/11 and the US-led global War on Terror, implies a continuation and acceleration of this discursive production of an aggressive Muslim male subject. The prevalent image of a terrorist today is someone with a violent extremist ideology (of Islam) who, as the UK government posits, "follow(s) a broadly similar ideology as Al Qa'ida but [who may] have their own identity and regional agenda" (HM Government 2009: 12). This image is rarely nuanced or contextualised, despite the widespread recognition that "identity" and "agendas" may be distinct and important (cf. Stern 2003; Lutz and Lutz 2008). Appadurai suggests that the intensity of today's global processes produces a world of social uncertainty and incompleteness. He suggests that, when these forms of uncertainties "come into play, violence can create a macabre form of certainty" (Appadurai 2006: 6). This must be understood in relation to constructions of male identity, including aspects of dignity. Following Appadurai, these Palestinian male youths also respond to the global politics of insecurity. However, the politics of Hamas and Islamisation in general are of course not only a reaction to national and global politics. Islamic movements are also part of the global system and of globalisation (cf. Beyer 2007).⁶ The religious identification of many young men forms part of a process in which they are making themselves subjects of modernity. This religious modernity is not a "false version" of the Western modern project. Rather, it represents a modernisation with other moral signatures. Hamas offers alternative approaches of coping with global dynamics. Thus, the interpretations of what modernity entails are diverse and exist simultaneously with other alternatives. Hamas is part of the modernisation process in Palestine and part of the global order. Its discourse proposes a modern project embedded in its religious faith, in contrast with Western notions of modernity with its emphasis on secularisation (cf. Malmström 2009b).

For Palestinians, Israelis and the global community, the acts of violence are closely linked to especially young men but in different ways. For many Israelis, "the young male is a metonym for Palestinian opposition and struggle against

6 See also Meyer's (2011) article about media, religion and senses within a Ghanaian setting, where she argues that the negotiation of newly available media technologies is key to the transformation of religion.

domination, the idea and symbols of which must be rooted out and silenced” (Peteet 1994: 36).⁷ For powerful actors of the global community, the image of a terrorist is most often that of the young violent dedicated Muslim man. On the other hand, during my fieldwork, I discovered that the young men were seen as the actors in whom the local society had their only confidence – where young Qassam soldiers were, by many, perceived as the “icon” of struggle.⁸ The trust in the military wing of Hamas was something that children in refugee camps expressed also, through particular role plays. The boys acted out as Qassam soldiers against Israeli soldiers on the streets (cf. Wiles 2010). However, the negotiations of manhood occur among adult men filled with ambivalences and ambiguities that affect the cultivation of a proper modern manhood among younger men. Common and frequent for several young Hamas men was the feeling of solitude, which of course affected the men and their well-being in many ways. One man I met, who was extremely nervous and in bad health, described to me the great loneliness that he constantly felt. He explained that he could not tell anybody, not even his own family, about his activities (and about his true identity as an active Hamas member). It was too dangerous for them and for him. He had to protect them from this knowledge. The result was that he felt totally dissociated from the people he loved. He lived two lives at the same time, as he said, as so many other Hamas members in the West Bank were forced to do. The eventual agential space these men receive through political membership of Hamas had a very high price.

Another difference between Palestinians and Israelis is that they have different concepts of violence, which also imply different meanings. The men whom I interviewed referred to “violence” only when speaking about domestic violence, scuffles amid the upbringing of children. In fact, the Palestinian men I talked with never ever used the term “violence,” but argued that such actions formed resistance to occupation against a colonial power and a well-armed state. “Acts of violence” as well as “endurance of violence” are in this sense locally encouraged and interpreted as political resistance and as a struggle for independence. Mohammed underscored that violence should in any context be used only as the last resort. However, resistance, by way of contrast, he expressed, is the right of every Palestinian citizen. To resist is to be political, which (I was often told) is a must for a proper Palestinian man. The total

7 See Kanaaneh (2005) for an analysis of Palestinian soldiers in the Israeli military, where she discusses two sorts of masculinities: the family-centered provider masculinity, and the immature, pubescent masculinity in relation to nationalism and agency.

8 For further reading about gender and nationalism, see Katz (2003), who discusses Jewish and Palestinian early nationalism as linked to images of masculinity that excluded or marginalised women. See also Kanafani (2008) for a discussion of mutual dependency between nationalism and hegemonic Palestinian masculinity (cf. Amireh 2003; Massad 2006; and Hart 2008). See Bowman (2003) for a discussion of imagined violence of a national enemy and nationalism.

opposite is a non-political man. These men are perceived by the men I talked with as total failures, as frail creatures, as “faggots,” as one young man, Nawal, expressed. He explained that these men did not care about anything. These non-political men were even perceived as having a particular look: “long hair and sickly-sweet style of dressing.” Nuur told me about one of his neighbours. He had made a journey – from a “gay” to a real man. He had changed his mind and life after what had happened with his older brother, who had been killed by the occupation’s destruction of his house. At last, Nuur concluded, the neighbour had eventually joined the political and violent struggle. For the government of Israel, all these actions are probably perceived as terrorism and nothing else. In order to understand how the male subject is formed in the West Bank, one must pay much more attention to the complicity and dynamics of global forces in the making of Palestinian masculinities, even in the creation of suicide bombers or martyrs (cf. Massad 2006; Araj 2008; Linos 2010). Knowledge of the body and of embodied memories is crucial in the ongoing making of the male subject.

LIVED AND EMBODIED EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE

The understanding of the Palestinian male body is manifested in local discourses of manhood. It suggests and signifies, among other things, as mentioned earlier, generosity, fearlessness and self-control. However, it is not enough to examine the body as a sign: we need also to explore the experiences of the body in relation to the current dynamics and the ambivalent cultural meanings of violence. For a deeper and more complex analysis, it is vital to grasp how the men’s bodies are involved in processes of becoming a subject and how they live out norms and ideologies in their everyday lives. The political occupation in Palestine is intensively embodied. As Pitcher (1998) in her research about the practice of martyrdom in Palestine points out, the Palestinian body is written on by others, while at the same time the Palestinian body strives to speak. Furthermore, violence seems to be naturalised in the occupied territories, probably due to the daily repeated various experiences of war, where people try to make an everyday life (cf. Gren 2009). Often it has been very difficult for me to listen to people’s experiences of violence. Many of the narratives and testimonies about attacks, sudden deaths and explosions (including bodies of relatives, neighbours and friends) were for me horrifying and overwhelming, but were retold as part of the everyday by my respondents.

However, lived experiences of beatings and imprisonment in the West Bank are, in my understanding, not rites of passage into manhood, as Peteet (1994) suggests in her well-known article about masculinity and agency in the West Bank. My argument is that these experiences are life-long, embodied processes rather than a ritual and a single event. The experiences of jail and its suffering

obtain meaning and legitimacy through mutual effort and shared imagination (cf. Malmström 2009a). Even painful sensory experiences may become meaningful a long time after jail, when shared repeatedly and interpreted as purposeful. During the focus-group interviews, the men articulated most frequently the experiences of imprisonment: even if I did not ask them, they talked about jail experiences together or with my male field assistants. The men spoke about their prison experiences with dignity and pride. Many men spoke about the prison as the university, including both religious and secular education. As Peteet (1994) points out too, the men emerged from the prisons as academics, with stature to lead and with power to resist – and, as the men told me, with increased religious knowledge and confidence. The men I spoke to told me that there is a strict spatial separation between the different political factions inside the jails, where they met friends, mentors and brothers for life. Several men expressed that it is in prison a man will transform into a true Hamas (cf. Wiles 2010). The individual experience of suffering may here be transformed into a social meaning and social memory (cf. Davis 1992). Daily life in the West Bank is infused with references to violence/resistance through which its meaning is communicated and it is confirmed as unavoidable. The meaning of violence should therefore be analysed as an integral part of the daily making of masculinity, where the subject is moulded and gendered through the lived experience of violence, both as victims and as actors (cf. Dahl 2009).

In the case under study, in the daily construction of an adult moral male self in the occupied territories, not only being imprisoned, but enduring of beatings seems to be central (cf. Peteet 1994). However, body marking is only one moment in an incomplete process of learning how to be a person. Male gender identity is also continually created and re-created through a number of other everyday practices. Yet the body clearly learns the lessons of pain, lessons that are reiterated. It is also a strategy to approach resistance to domination. Peteet suggests that the male Palestinian body in fact signifies contradictions. The body in this specific context both reaffirms and transforms internal Palestinian forms of domination. The Palestinian body may have the power to reverse power structures, in the sense that “political agency [is] designed [through acts of endurance] to reverse relations of domination between occupied and occupier” (Peteet 1994: 31). She suggests that enduring torture (and being imprisoned) is a strategy to approach resistance to domination and in fact inscribes power on the body. Furthermore, the occupation, the political belonging of Hamas, the internal struggle between Hamas and Fatah, by the use of violence, sculpts the individual body at the same time as it regulates the social body (Linos 2010). Men learn, but they also actively and consciously develop and maintain proper masculinity, through the lived experiences of both violence and captivity. In this way, if they endure, these men become respectable

Muslim men. Stoicism and self-control are key values for developing a proper male identity, especially among Hamas, and they are essential for endurance and the control of emotions.

My informants talked about the daily humiliation at the checkpoints as one of many difficult everyday experiences where self-control and endurance were crucial; this was something I could see also through personal observation during my stay in the West Bank.⁹ I provide the following short account as an example of what men often experience. One young man had been on his way to his final exams at the university. At the first checkpoint (of several checkpoints on his way to the school), he had been caught by the young soldiers. At last, after several hours, after forcing him to climb up on a stone in the sun, in a body position of standing on one leg, and after singing children's songs, he could continue to walk to the university, but way too late for the scheduled exams. These common experiences in young men's lives are of course active steps in the ongoing process of attaining manhood.

Detention, prison and occupation, as part of the apparatus of domination, imply many sorts of violence, both physical and psychological beatings (including torture – also by the Palestinian Fatah authorities, according to the men). As one of many examples, one man retold his experiences of detention. In the middle of the night, the soldiers forced him out of his cell, put him in a car and drove him to the highway. They told him to thoroughly clean the highway with the help of a toothbrush. He was scrubbing for hours. In this case, we can use Linos's (2010) analysis of biopower violence in the occupation of Palestine and see how the individual Palestinian is psychologically tortured simultaneously as all Palestinians are disgraced by the same act.

The experiences of beatings, torture and daily humiliations are all part of "the education of endurance," important within (political) Islam. Furthermore, their own violent military actions in their resistance against occupation, as Hamas soldiers, are at the same time part of "the education of fearlessness and self-control." As soldiers especially, these men use their collective self for national identity and sacrifice their individual identity, which is – currently – expected and as part of the route to becoming an appropriate man in the local community as well as on the political level of Hamas. As both Massad (1995) and Kanaaneh (2005) point out, Palestinian national masculinity is a new type of masculinity. Kanaaneh underscores that the agency of Palestinian men in Israel, for example, must be understood within the limits set by the Israeli state and the colonial powers: "The experiences of these soldiers, how they negotiate their relationships to their communities and to the state, and the

9 See Sasson-Levy (2008) for a discussion on how the individualised body and senses of the Israeli soldiers reinforce hegemonic masculinity and Israeli militarism and thereby, at the same time, serve the state.

ways in which they are accepted, integrated, and marginalized form a powerful vantage point from which to view the workings of citizenship and gender in Israel” (2005: 261).

Moreover, men are taught morality through the endurance of pain and through the body’s capacity to feel; the body actively experiences and remembers how to be a moral man in daily life, in accordance with the norms of manhood. The norms and cultural models of pain are embodied (cf. Talle 2007). These men are moulded into men via the senses and within the local framework of meaning; they learn through the body how to be masculine. Men’s embodied memories of endured ordeals are compulsory in the creation of the fearless Muslim subject, since endurance is a key virtue within Islam (cf. Malmström 2009a, 2009b). The body feels God. Intense painful experience produces self-awareness and teaches lessons that are unforgettable (Morinis 1985).

In the worst-case scenario, these men sacrifice and use the most intimate tool – their own body – as martyrs (*shaheed*). Martyrdom has since the first (1987-1993) and the second (2000-2005) Al-Aqsa intifada increasingly been associated with manhood and political agency (cf. Linos 2010; Abufarha 2009; Asad 2007; Reuter 2002).¹⁰ Based on my fieldwork experiences, I recognised the need and the importance of a sensitised understanding of the concept on different levels. What is considered “terrorism” for someone is deemed “resistance” for somebody else. In the West Bank, the notion of violence is linked to the domestic/local sphere. However, the fight against what is considered Israeli occupation is seen as resistance. Understanding the appeal of violence entails grasping the ways in which violence is understood, experienced. In this article, I have tried to highlight some aspects of how violence applies from my interviews and observations. Yet additional research will be needed to further these insights on how violence in relation to manhood is learnt and how its values play out in the everyday lives of boys and young men in the West Bank. Acts of sacrifice may also be emically understood, as Linos (2010) in her work of terrorism and embodiment suggests, not as an act of self-destruction, but actually as an act of construction with political significance for both the individual and the wider Palestinian community. She argues, “when political and structural violence threatens the identity of both individual and group, suicide violence may be considered an extreme form of reclaiming the violated

10 Female martyrs inserted themselves into the political arena in 2002. Thereby, these women challenged the earlier male political space and links to proper manhood (Hasso 2005; cf. Ness 2008; Berko and Erez 2007; Schweitzer 2006; Naaman 2007; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009). Hasso (2005) argues that the female martyrs both reproduce and undermine local discourses of gender in relation to violence and politics. The Palestinian female martyrs represent national identity and honour. However, Palestinian men continue to be perceived as the subjects and agents of the struggle. On the other hand, the women gain attributes of Arab masculinity.

body – a force that ultimately rejects oppression and allows the individual to reclaim the body through self-directed violence” (Linos 2010: 8). She points out, “if the discipline of the body can be both externally imposed (in the way Foucault might suggest) and also self-inflicted in an effort to effect autonomy, then similarly, when violence on the body is used by an external power to claim authority over the individual’s life, self-directed violence may be used as a symbolic reclaiming of the body” (2010: 10). In other words, according to Linos, these men reclaim the physical space through actions of self-destruction by the help of the polluting power of their bodies. Abufarha (2009) discusses the performances of martyrdom as forms of social resistance, where the martyr turns into an agent, but never acts as an individual, only as a social person – that is to say, as the Palestinian people. He puts forward also that martyrdom simultaneously may be understood as an alternative life, since it “becomes a form of living in and by the death” (2009: 233). Both Abufarha’s and Linos’s analyses are “good to think with” in trying to understand not only the young men’s actions, but also the expectations from the local community that these young Palestinian men face every single day.¹¹ A former Qassam soldier, Ahmed, confessed to me that some men could not handle the actual military operations, including martyrdom, as Qassam soldiers. These men had to give up their duties as soldiers immediately, since they exposed the other men in the military cell for futile missions and immediate danger. According to Ahmed, there were no other consequences. However, to be forced to give up one’s identity as a member of the military wing of Hamas because of lack of courage must be the ultimate failure and indeed a punishment in itself.

To conclude, my argument in this section is that the violation of the body, on different levels, is vital in the making of a moral agential masculine self. The body is acted upon by others and by a conscious self, through the techniques

11 Inculcation of the local society’s discourses concerning ideal manhood is naturally created and re-created daily through various actors and institutions. One of the key groups of actors here is the mothers, according to both the men and the mothers I spoke to. The mothers teach core values of stoicism and resistance. However, mothers’ ambivalence towards their duty of creating brave and fearless sons seems to be common as well. As one mother respondent expressed, even if it was the Palestinian mothers who were the most important actors in educating the young men to be good soldiers, she did not want her own sons to be a Qassam soldier. She told me that of course she did not want her sons to die, and being a Qassam soldier “is the highway to death.” The majority of men verbally underscored the importance of strong mothers in the process of becoming fearless, but they also expressed that women were not as political as men, since women stayed in their homes all day long and did not have the same access to political life. Many men perceived women as more afraid and therefore in need of protection. At the same time, these gender ideologies are ambivalent, and other images of women as political actors were often given. One male interviewee told me that, when he and his brother were sent to prison, his mother had told the whole neighbourhood that God had given her many gifts in life. She had brought up her sons to be warriors. The prison was proof that she had succeeded with her hard work. This same informant expressed that his mother was extraordinarily strong. He had never seen her cry.

and practices of learning how to be a man. Thus, the body is formed through experiences. In the context of Hamas youths, the body senses God through enduring bodily violence. Endurance gives religious merits (cf. Meyer 2012). This article has shown some examples of such processes. I am referring firstly to the unreflected, sensory memories and responses generated by the various ordeals and subsequent painful bodily procedures enacted upon men's bodies that cannot be recalled; I discuss these below against discourses of proper masculinity, for example through torture from detention and prison experiences or from beatings at checkpoints, and furthermore, concerning the unreflective way in which men learn about manhood and re-create themselves as men through sight, hearing, touch, scent and flavour. Secondly, I am referring to how the body is acted upon by a conscious self. Mahmood's (2005) notion of embodied agency as intention and desire is fruitful in this regard.¹² In contrast with Bourdieu's (1990) focus on the unconscious power of habitus, Mahmood uses the concept to cover the formation of self as a conscious process and the bodily procedures whereby a moral self is shaped. This notion of embodied agency is useful in exploring the ways young men consciously cultivate themselves (intention and desire) to be proper militant Hamas men – that is, enduring torture, prison and humiliation.

However, even if the male Palestinian body is taught and normatively expected to bear hardship and to show uncomplaining patience and endurance, my findings reveal that the body is not always capable of fulfilling these demands. All the men I talked to showed symptoms of illness. Many men had bodily symptoms such as constant pain, stomach problems, balance disturbance and impaired hearing, while some men spoke of plethoric faeces. Several of the young men talked openly about tiredness, feebleness, despair and depression. During the interviews, I observed that the bodies of the men were never relaxed and their legs were constantly moving, bounding, vibrating, while the air was thick with stress and with smoke from the constant chain-smoking. The illness symptoms, stress and psychological lack of balance of those I interviewed may be bodily responses to what they have experienced. The body speaks, but it is also marked. Linos (2010) asserts that, since the skin is the most visible of all organs, it has the ability to act. The skin tells a larger story; it can comprise evidence, while as the first layer of our bodies it has the ability to be both de-formed and re-formed. Additionally, the skin has the ability to resist (cf. Scheper-Hughes 2004). Johansen (2002) and Talle (2007) have also discussed the body's ability to act in relation to the pain of infibulation, and Good (1992) in relation to chronic pain. Talle claims that extreme, intense

12 Mahmood (2005) followed the women's mosque movement in Cairo from 1995 to 1997, focusing on how female agency is formed by the conscious subject in a specific historical context with the help of bodily practices.

and unbearable pain is the body's indirect way of protesting against cultural hegemony through physical agency and intentionality. The agency of the body in relation to intolerable pain has, as Johansen (2002) suggests, the potential to "explode" the cultural universe. The body makes sense of the various acts of violence through a conscious self, but it also reacts against overwhelming and traumatic experiences. The body in the occupied West Bank continuously experiences the physical and psychological beatings and humiliations. Furthermore, the body senses everyday stress, anxiety, anger, frustration, uncertainty and suspicion in relation to other political factions, eventual collaborators in the home community, the occupation power and the global community. I have argued that the body is acted upon by the unconscious and the conscious self. However, when the body resists norms of violence, because the sufferings are unendurable, and rejects them as part of becoming appropriate Palestinian Muslim Hamas man, and where the meaningful becomes meaningless, the reactions work against an idealised male gender identity. Experiences of violence that is devoid of meaning will not be part of the process of becoming a respectable Muslim man in contrast to lived experiences of violence that the body can bear. Instead, violence inscribes the body and self with illness, incompleteness, loss and maybe also with chronic disease. Good suggests in his analysis of chronic pain that, "as locus of pain, the body takes on agency over and against the self" (Good 1992: 39). Hence, the body of pain becomes distinct from the self.

CONCLUSION: LAYERS OF AGENCIES

This article has dealt with particular aspects of making masculinity. I have given some brief examples of how men are taught to conduct themselves and their bodies, a process in which values and norms are incorporated through the reiteration of bodily and verbal practices. The text has also exposed men's conscious struggle for a male respectable identity, but also in relation to existential matters – being in the world. In line with Eriksson Baaz and Stern (2008, 2009, 2010; cf. Nordstrom 1998, Enloe 2000), who point out in their research into constructions of violent militant masculinities the very importance of attention to the complex interplay between individuals and the discourses that (in part) produce them, this helps us to see how very fragile even seemingly solid constructions of subjectivity are.

I have shown also that the male Palestinian body is both agential and victimised – it does not always cope with the inscription of bodily violence and social expectations of manhood. Values and norms are incorporated through the recurrence of bodily and verbal practices, but the body sometimes resists and sometimes reacts in various ways against dominant discourses and inculcations of norms. Instead of merely discussing the notions of agent and victim,

we may analyse them as different sorts of agency, at the same time as this latter kind of agency is victimised since the masculinising part is absent. The first agency resonates with Mahmood's embodied agency – where the subject consciously uses the bodily practices whereby the moral self is created. The other agency refers to the agency of the body – where the body is not submissive, but clearly protests against intolerable pain and suffering, and thereby also against the norms and discourses of violence and masculinity. As we can see, it is impossible to talk exclusively about agency or victimhood or to draw rigid lines between these categories – they are blurred. To bring back victimhood into the analysis of gender is also important on an analytical and a political level (cf. Dahl 2009). A more fruitful analysis of Hamas youth is possible if we try to understand the production of masculinities as a process of making uncertain masculinities, where aspects of both agency and victimhood are active parts.

My contribution to the analysis of violence in relation to agency, victimhood and constructions of gender is to affirm the role of embodiment. By doing this, I highlight the role of bodies in subjective and intersubjective meaning-making of violence. Understanding the appeal of violence also entails grasping the ways in which violence is understood, experienced, as well as what it does for and to us. Therefore, the anthropology of violence has a lot to offer the research field, since it explores violence as a meaningful relational social act (see e.g. Das 2007; Coulter 2006; Nordstrom 2010). I have shown how experiences of violence are intensely embodied. Violence shapes and makes the male body in a complex way. In this specific context of the West Bank, the making of masculinities is in a constant dialogue with violence, pain and suffering.

Finally, the production and reproduction of discourses of violence and agency in relation to moral masculinities must be understood against the backdrop of the global War on Terror and post-colonial politics that may also transform ideals of gender. As Linos suggests, “The body can thus be seen as a stage upon which local and global conflicts are played out, and where agency over the body is contested” (2010: 9). Consequently, the continual process of becoming a male subject in the West Bank results from a complex interplay between the phenomenal immediacy of lived experience and social structures/discourses of power and inequality (McNay 2003, 2004; cf. Malmström 2009a, 2009b, 2013).

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