Abstract
This article explores the complex interplay between masculinity and nationalism amongst Palestinian living in a refugee camp in Jordan. As the expression of either immoral behaviour or unthinking radicalism, youth masculinity in the camp is widely perceived in Jordan as a symbol of cultural and political difference and the failure of camp dwellers to embrace assimilation. However, camp dwellers’ masculinities are not uniform. I argue that young men’s ability to navigate and master diverse and sometimes contrasting registers of manhood enables them to reproduce a Palestinian national identity in exile while achieving socioeconomic integration in Jordan. In pursuing this argument, the article has two goals: to challenge popular stereotypes about Palestinian refugees in Jordan today; and, on a broader level, to problematize the discursive mutual dependency between nationalism and hegemonic masculinity in the study of Palestinian masculinity.

Originally set up in 1955 to host Palestinians who had fled Palestine following the establishment of the State of Israel, the refugee camp Al-Wihdat is today part of Amman, the capital of Jordan.1 Al-Wihdat’s inhabitants, like many other Palestinian refugees in Jordan, enjoy full citizenship rights through an amendment to the Passport Act of 1949. Nevertheless, many people in Jordan suspect that Al-Wihdat (and Palestinian refugee camps in general) is inhabited by unruly individuals incapable of integrating into Jordanian society. Local authorities, for example, describe its inhabitants—male adolescents and young men especially—as threatening and hostile “others,”2 a depiction that feeds into pejorative popular views of the camp dwellers.

I encountered such a pejorative view in my conversation with the head of Al-Wihdat’s police station, from whom I was seeking approval to conduct research in the camp. As he sat in his armchair watching a popular Lebanese soap opera on a large plasma TV, he complained to me about his troubles at work:

My job is very difficult. Here there are many sorts of crimes! . . . Everything! Drugs, stabbings, homicides, fights . . . Everything! [We have problems] in the summer especially, when young men get out of their houses and vent their frustrations . . . Unemployment and the poor conditions

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of infrastructure aggravate the situation . . . Yes, you can say it, the camp is much worse than the surrounding areas. It is a dangerous place!

This kind of representation is echoed by the Jordanian upper class in well-off neighborhoods of West Amman, and even in poor areas of the city. “Be careful in al-Wihdat; it’s a dangerous place,” I was continuously reminded by people genuinely concerned for my safety after hearing the subject of my research. “Folks from outside” (nās min barra), as camp dwellers call them, think of al-Wihdat and other camps in contradictory terms as places of immoral sinners and religious fanatics, as hubs for troublemakers (mashkaljiyye) in general.

People from the outside see youth as most dramatically exhibiting deviant behavior. A constant source of social anxiety, camp youth are seen as idlers and loafers (dawāwīn) who are responsible for a large share of the problems that afflict the camp—from petty crimes, such as fighting, theft, and drug dealing, to family feuds to political radicalization and Islamic fundamentalism. The alleged social marginalization and political estrangement of refugees has led some authors to question the very idea that camp dwellers—young men (shabāb) especially—nurture any genuine feeling of identification with the Jordanian state.

These enduring stereotypes about camp dwellers are involuntarily reinforced by a specific understanding of masculinity in the scholarly literature. An established body of scholarship exists on the discursive construction of masculinity. Highlighting the fictitious character of masculinity, this scholarship has explored gender’s role in the imaginative and material production of the nation. A portion of this literature deals with the relationship between gender norms and Palestinian nationalism. Drawing on the notion of “hegemonic masculinity,” it has explored the performance of a style of manhood that celebrates militaristic notions of irreducible resistance and independence, the anxieties emanating from the incapacity to embody this ideal of masculinity, the shunning of the “feminine” within official Palestinian national discourse, and the coexistence of different scripts of masculinities. In a recent article on the construction of masculinity in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan, for example, Jason Hart has shown how camp dwellers “reproduce the camp as an authentic location of an exilic national community” through the instantiation of a hegemonic masculinity.

In this article, I explore the complex interplay between masculinity and nationalism amongst Palestinian refugees living in al-Wihdat. In so doing, I challenge not only popular stereotypes about Palestinian refugees in Jordan today, but also the discursive mutual dependence between nationalism and hegemonic masculinity in the literature. The display of manly values is doubtless central to the way young men in the camp express Palestinian nationalism whilst in exile. Yet I argue that, more than the performance of a hegemonic masculinity, it is the ability to downplay overt expressions of these values and to move between diverse and contrasting styles of manhood that enables the reproduction of Palestinian nationalism in exile.

When used to assess the imbrication of gender and Palestinian nationalism, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has a number of interrelated problems. First, it sets a
standard of masculinity against which all other masculinities are measured, leading to a poor understanding of the complexities of being a Palestinian man in the camps. According to the logic of hegemonic masculinity, Palestinian men in al-Wihdat can only be interpreted as frustrated individuals, whether due to ostracism in their communities for not upholding the qualities of hegemonic masculinity or due to marginalization within broader Jordanian society, where their display of those same qualities are seen as evidence of unruliness and unwillingness to integrate.13

Second, the notion of hegemonic masculinity seems to imply a binary understanding of refugees’ agency: while certain “hegemonic” virtues such as assertiveness and independence are associated with Palestinian nationalism and resistance to integration, “subordinate” male traits such as passivity and compliance are association with assimilation and normalization in the host country.14 Accordingly, refugees can either assert a virulent and liminal national identity by performing a hegemonic masculinity, or pursue integration in Jordan through a subordinate masculinity. However, living in exile in al-Wihdat, refugees continuously reproduce their allegiance to Palestinian nationalism despite performing attributes traditionally associated with a subordinate masculinity. As Marcia Inhorn states, the notion of hegemonic masculinity “obscures the lived reality of different forms of masculinity as ever-changing social strategies enacted through practice. Actual men’s performances of gender are constantly in flux and may change radically as their social-physical circumstances change.”15 In the camps, young men certainly aspire to act out a hegemonic masculinity, but they are critical of those who yearn to embody such ideals exclusively, accusing them of being unable to adapt to changing circumstances in Jordan.16 I show here that the very people who, to use Robert W. Connell’s phrasing, are “complicit” in reproducing hegemonic masculinity sometimes appreciate and even seek to embody attributes that are antithetical to it.17

HEGEMONIC IDEALS OF MASCULINITY IN THE CAMP: FROM DAWĀ’IN TO SHUYUKH

At first glance, paradigmatic styles of manhood in al-Wihdat parallel a local cliché that camp dwellers are inherently unruly.18 These styles are best embodied by the figure of the dawānji (pl. dawāwīn).19 The word dawānji shares the same root as dīwān, and the plural form of dawānji, dawāwīn, is also the plural form of dīwān, the latter of which means the collected poetic works of an individual or a tribe. In daily speech the term dawānji has come to indicate someone who boasts and brags, and who passes time telling stories and idling in the company of friends rather than working. Dawāwīn organize their time around forms of sociability that, according to “mainstream” attitudes in the camp, are immoral, such as consuming alcohol and drugs. They are also said to exhibit a strong appetite for women, independence, male assertiveness, and transgressive behavior. In Jordanian dialect, the word dawānji is generally used to denote any kind of thug or troublemaker, regardless of origin or place of residence. However, the word also evokes a hostile attitude toward the authorities that is widely associated with “camp refugees” (awlād al-mukhayyam, or mukhayyamīyye).

Violence is frequently said to be a distinguishing feature of masculinity in the camp. In fact, violence is etched onto the faces of dawāwīn in the scars stretching diagonally...
across their checks, which are the result of cuts they inflict upon each other as reminders of some past event. The association between dawāwīn and violence is further reinforced by sensational nicknames.20 For their unpredictable and explosive behavior, dawāwīn earn sobriquets such as khartāsh (from khartāsha, meaning “cartridge”) or bunduqyye (rifle).

Dawāwīn often display other distinctive features as well. These include long hair, a purposefully long fingernail (on the little finger) in which they take pride, and shabby dress. A dawāwīn can typically be seen in jeans, dirty t-shirts, and tattered tracksuits that are occasionally combined with garish garments such as studded shoes or belts with brash metal buckles. Tattoos are also common among the dawāwīn: many in the camp have three points tattooed on the back of their hands between the thumb and the forefinger, which supposedly symbolize the three-word sentence kuss ukht al-hukāma (translated loosely as “fuck the government”). At the time of my fieldwork, being a dawānji was for some a source of pride. People who self-identified with the category proudly displayed its associated features.21 Still, the term dawāwīn carried clear negative connotations, and those who complied with this ideal type enjoyed little support in or outside the camp.

Things were different in the past. “There was a time when the dawāwīn were muhtarāmin [respectable]!” people often told me. Many of my friends in the camp saw the traits associated with the dawānji as the most tangible consequence of the existential emptiness and socioeconomic marginalization experienced there, especially among young men.22 There was a time when Jihad—who in the 1960s spent time in an Israeli prison—proudly displayed a large tattoo depicting Palestine on his right forearm. By the time of my fieldwork, however, the situation had changed drastically. Jihad now felt awkward about the allegiance engraved on his body: “I am not young anymore and al-Wihdat is different now . . . before there were a lot of dawāwīn in al-Wihdat, and I was one of them . . . But now I do not want people to think that I am a dawānji.”

In the years immediately before and after the showdown in 1970 between the Jordanian army and the PLO militias (i.e., the civil war, or Black September), dawāwīn fitted the ideal of active resistance. Even today, in the narratives of refugees, the terms fidā iyin (guerrilla fighters) and dawāwīn often intersect. As long as the figure of the armed fighter embodied the ideal of resistance, the dawāwīn’s quarrellsome spirit could be admired and respected. However, Black September precipitated a dramatic change of status for the fidā iyin in Jordan, leading to their expulsion from the kingdom. The center of Palestinian resistance shifted first to Lebanon, and then to the occupied territories. With the Jordanian state’s decimation of the fidā iyin, on both the political and military levels, the myths encircling them began to fade.23 This—along with the significant growth of so-called “revivalist” religious discourses in Jordan24—led to the rearticulation of camp ideals of masculinity in terms of a different set of values. Devoid of political significance, dawānji masculinity became de facto marginal, immoral, even dangerous; shaykh masculinity, by contrast, became increasingly prominent and accepted.

The Arabic word shaykh (pl. shuyākh) has a wide range of meanings, though in the camp it primarily refers to piety and Islamic knowledge. The term is applied to those adopting a pious lifestyle and with broad knowledge of Islamic doctrine, regardless of political affiliation (though at times it may be used to respectfully address an elderly
man or a local leader). More pointedly, a shaykh is one who strives to live by the Prophet Muhammad’s example. Although displaying a long beard, a modest haircut, and a dishdasha (an ankle-length, long-sleeved garment, similar to a robe) is often sufficient to gain the apppellative of shaykh, many feel that these features do not alone indicate that one is a “real” shaykh. Being a shaykh is regarded as a genuine, holistic, and all-encompassing endeavor that leads the believer to develop and sustain a God-fearing personality. In exchange for complete rigor and devotion, the man of piety achieves a life devoid of all ambivalences and inconsistencies.

The way in which religious commitment (iltizām) finds expression in the lives of believers varies widely—from the mere fulfillment of major religious duties, such as prayer, almsgiving, and fasting, to attempts to realize a morally and spiritually elevated self. In principle, a pious Palestinian man in the camps would not only choose the mosque over the street; the pious man would also avoid contact with the opposite sex, refrain from lying, and abstain from consuming intoxicating substances (alcohol, nicotine, hashish, and so on). Moreover, he would participate in social and political activities that promote Palestinian resistance, collect zakat (alms-giving) and distribute food to the poor, as well as listen to cassette tape sermons of and study the Qurʾan. In other words, his iltizām would find expression in a spectrum of social, political, and embodied practices all centered upon submission to God. These dispositions converge in the figure of the shaykh, who according to many of my informants in the camp is the perfect exemplar of a human being (insiān) and of manliness (rujūliyya) in the modern world.);

The emergence of the shaykh model is not unique to al-Wihdat but rather is common among Muslims in the region. The widespread fascination with this style of masculinity can be explained by the increasing power of Hamas in the Occupied Territories, the concomitant loss of PLO influence, and the general rise of Islamism in the Middle East. In Jordan, mounting levels of religiosity are both symptomatic of, and responsible for, the growing popularity of the Muslim Brotherhood, a group that has factored significantly in the lives of male adolescents and young men in al-Wihdat. Since 1971 the Brotherhood and its political arm, the Islamic Action Front, have filled a vacuum in the camp left by the diminishing influence of the PLO’s various factions. Advantaged by a special relationship with the regime at a time when all other groups and movements were repressed, the Brotherhood built an extended network of health and cultural centers, charitable societies, and youth clubs both inside and outside al-Wihdat. The capillary grassroots activism of the Brotherhood—along with its campaigns against corruption and normalization with Israel, and for political inclusion and democratization—allowed it to disseminate its ideology and develop a following in order to become one of the main representative political bodies in the camp. Although it would be misleading to explain camp dwellers’ masculinity through their allegiance to a singular group or movement, the Brotherhood has undoubtedly driven a growing fascination with ideals of Islamic manhood among refugees. This is especially true of the youth, whose clubs—once firmly in the hands of PLO factions—have fallen under the influence of the Brotherhood.

The exhibition of transgressive behavior—once idealized as a sign of masculinity among dawāwīn—is no longer met with a sympathetic public among the Muslim Brothers and those who—like them—generally identify themselves as shuyūkh.
In a compelling article, Joseph Massad points out that the “national agent” in Palestinian nationalistic discourse articulated by the PLO is a young, muscular, and self-assertive male.\textsuperscript{31} The hegemonic position of this kind of masculinity in the reproduction of Palestinian national identity is also evident in al-Wihdat. Although not everyone in the camp embodies the image of the hard-boiled fighter or the pious man, the youth aspire to act out these ideals of manhood. They perceive the Palestinian national predicament as being tightly connected to performances of idealized notions of manhood characterized by independence, fierceness, and potency. Indeed, it would be a mistake to see the two ideals of manhood—the\textit{dawānji} and the shaykh—as antithetical. Despite obvious differences between them, the shaykh has taken over the\textit{dawānji}’s role as a fighter and borrowed many of his virile qualities.

In the camp, the shaykh embodies a style of masculinity that is appreciated not only for its pious qualities, such as religious devotion, spirituality, and studiousness, but also for its association with male assertiveness, independence, and potency.\textsuperscript{32} Camp dwellers perceive Islam as crucial to re-enacting hegemonic gender norms. A case in point relates to polygyny. I heard several times in the camp that there is nothing wrong with marrying two or more women so long as the man is capable of treating his wives equally. The latter, of course, demands a great deal of sexual potency: the Muslim man must be not only hypervirile, but also sexually prolific. As Inhorn points out, “the Islamic mandate to reproduce an Islamic ‘multitude’ encourages pronatalism within polygynous marriage, with some men producing their own small tribes of children from multiple spouses.”\textsuperscript{33} Interestingly, very few of the men whom I met in the camp are polygamous. Whether certain attributes and practices associated with hypervirility are simply narrated or actually embodied by people in the camp is irrelevant here. What is important is that certain hegemonic attributes invoke considerable fascination amongst the youth. The powerful, virile patriarch who can satisfy his wives and has fathered many children represents an ideal of physical strength and endurance. While staring at a robust, bearded man one day, a friend—whose father was a shaykh—called my attention to the man’s imposing figure: “look, Luigi, you see the shaykh over there? You see his arms [mimicking the shape of the man’s massive biceps]? Shuyūkh are strong, even stronger than\textit{dawāwín}.” With a self-satisfied tone he went on to point out how physical strength and bravery are as important qualities for these men of faith as their pious dispositions.

To many in the camp, Islam also plays a role in reproducing ideals of militarism and heroism. When\textit{dawāwín} lost their appeal amongst the refugee community, the\textit{shuyūkh} inherited the militaristic and heroic traits with which\textit{dawāwín} were associated. The Muslim man’s duty to defend Islam when it is threatened from inside or outside made the shaykh a veritable bastion against imperialism. In al-Wihdat, the cultivation of a pious self enables these men to hold on to the ideological imperative of Palestinian nationalism. According to my interlocutors in the camp, Islam allows them to pursue meaning in the face of the broken promises of secular nationalism; it is also key to overcoming Arab national divisiveness by uniting Arab Muslims, eventually leading, it is hoped, to the eviction of the evil (\textit{shaytān}) forces of Zionism and Western imperialism from Palestine. When reflecting on the possibility of political change, many camp dwellers invoke the
example of Muslim leaders such as Salah al-Din, whose triumphant liberation of the Holy Land from the crusaders centuries ago is evidence of the power of his faith (imān). This Islamic ideal of masculinity still exerts considerable fascination in al-Wihdat. Young men recall the time when their fathers fought Israelis in Jordan or in Lebanon; they are proud to have a family member who died while pursuing the goal of national liberation. One such young man is Abu ’Umar, whose piety earned him the appellative of shaykh. When Abu ’Umar was three years old, his father became a shahīd (martyr) after Israeli soldiers killed him in Lebanon. He was buried in a cemetery in Syria, where his son periodically visited him. At the time of my fieldwork, Abu ’Umar was in his early thirties, and he was proud of his father for what he saw as his glorious death. On a few occasions, he also confessed his wish to fight for Palestine and Islam in the Occupied Territories: “I want to go to Palestine to fight. I don’t know when; I only know that I will go, [and] not necessarily to kill—I can also help in other ways.”

Abu ’Umar’s urge to follow in his father’s footsteps was particularly evident during our two-day journey to Aqaba together. On the last leg of the journey, the road ran parallel and with great proximity to the Israeli-Jordanian border. My companion glanced with feelings of both excitement and sorrow at the nearby city of Eilat in what is today Israel. Turning his gaze away from the hills and back to the Jordanian side of the border, Abu ’Umar frowned and said: “I can’t see these mountains and do nothing. My father died for them, and I don’t do anything.”

Physical prowess and militarism do not encompass the full extent of shaykh masculinity. At its core is the capacity to be a virile agent of change. This capacity contrasts with a rather passive ideal of femininity according to which women should be merely the nurturers and makers of men. According to this ideal, women’s national role is to comply with an astringent code of modesty that includes, for example, the adoption of specific veiling practices and relegation to the familial sphere. Palestinian nationalism is thus discussed in highly gendered terms. If young men see struggling against the Israeli occupiers and colonizers as a highly masculinizing deed, they perceive “resettlement” (tawfīn) into the host country as a feminizing act because it indicates a passive acceptance of their political situation.

The full extent to which resettlement is considered to be indicative of an inferior masculinity was revealed to me in a conversation with Hussein, a young man I came to know during my stay in the camp. Hussein was in his early twenties when I first met him. He lived with his family in a small house in a low-income area of al-Wihdat. At the time, Hussein was studying in the university to become a high-school teacher. He was also volunteering at an educational program for orphans held in a camp youth center. During one of this program’s sessions I had the chance to hear his opinion on the difference between refugees from the camp and refugees living in well-off areas of Amman. “They are all fags (manāyik) and whores (sharāmites),” he said, referring to the descendants of the so-called “generation of 1948” (jīl al-nakba, or jīl al-thamāniya wa-arba‘īn). When I asked him what he meant by this, Hussein responded that,
how their women go out in Jabal Alman? None of them is veiled! . . . Here in al-Wihdat, most of the people are refugees from 1967 [Palestinians who arrived in Jordan after the 1967 war]. We are different . . . we are more respectful of Islam and still care about Palestine!

Several aspects of Hussein’s comments are particularly noteworthy. First, he seems to overlook the fact that al-Wihdat camp was actually set up to accommodate refugees from the first exodus—the “generation of 1948.” Second, his statement reveals the intersection of class and gender in the performance and representation of masculinity. Al-Wihdat is located in the heart of the densely populated working-class quarters of East Amman. Although socioeconomic and power disparities exist within the camp, a larger socioeconomic and power chasm separates camp dwellers from the rich Jordanian–Palestinian upper-class living in the wealthy neighborhoods of West Amman. In his comment, Hussein links socioeconomic integration, moral disposition, and national identity in order to establish a gender difference between the refugees of 1948 and those of 1967. The former are more likely to have found a decent job over the course of almost four generations in Jordan. For this reason, they moved out of the camps and ultimately adopted what he terms an “immoral” lifestyle. In Hussein’s view, the comfortable and luxurious lifestyles of these refugees have caused them to forget their origins and political struggles, rendering them unfit to represent the Palestinian national cause. Moreover, since national honor is tightly intertwined with gender and religion, their sexuality and morality are also deviant. To Hussein, refugees outside the camps are “fags” and “whores.” It is marginalized and pious males from the camp (“the 1967 generation”) rather than rich Palestinians who best embody the Palestinian national predicament.

The image of the heroic fighter does not fully exhaust the repertoire of actions and attributes associated with dominant ideals of masculinity in al-Wihdat. It is accompanied by another model predicated upon the capacity to act as a provider and a nurturer. Despite camp dwellers’ harsh criticisms of those who have “abandoned” the moral and manly space of the camp to live in well-off areas of Amman, virtually all youths hope to make enough money to leave al-Wihdat one day. In fact, Hussein—the very person that drew such a sharp distinction between camp and noncamp refugees—studied at the university and worked hard as a clerk in a chic West Amman hotel in order to put himself in position to secure a good position and earn enough money to wed and leave the camp. Such an aspiration has to be understood as his negotiation between ideological conviction and practical needs.

Young men’s willingness to act as breadwinners is located in a moral code shared among Palestinian refugees in which family provider masculinity is a marker of respected adult status. In the Palestinian case, then, the family-provider model is clearly entangled with that of the “bourgeois-in-the-making.” According to Massad, this “includes not only the masculine ability to launch armed struggle, but also to have a bourgeois economic status. The appeal is made in the context of the Palestinian diaspora, where most of the Palestinian bourgeoisie now lives.” The nationalist agent is one who pays
for the education of “his” brother and sister, takes care of “his” parents, raises “his”
children, and dreams in “his” heart of returning to Palestine. For the refugees in al-Wihdat, the rising cost of living has rendered docility and compliance the only available paths to full social adulthood. In addition, since Black September, the government has discouraged overt expressions of toughness and hostility among refugees by implementing a number of measures aimed at tightening its control over the camp. In 1986, for example, the Nadi al-Wihdat passed under the control of the Ministry of Youth and Sport. Originally set up and supervised by the UNRWA, in the 1970s the club grew into a major sports club and a place of political activism. A decade later, the government widened Sumayya Street, a small alley that crossed the camp from northwest to southeast, turning it into a large two-lane road in order to allow tanks to enter. A few years later, on the occasion of the outbreak of the second intifada, the government also visibly enlarged the police station located on the outskirts of the camp. Many refugees have felt the need to deemphasize certain characteristics that could be perceived as aggressive or independent.

Nader, the owner of a game room notorious in the camp for attracting dawāwīn, explained to me how the increasing government control is leading to the gradual normalization of al-Wihdat: “Yes! Before, there was mafia! Here, right here, where we sit, there was a man that controlled the whole neighborhood (hāra). I knew at least five dawāwīn that were living here and were hanged by the government. Now, the only mafia here is the government.” Nader’s narrative is corroborated by Assaf, a man in his thirties who, when I first met him, managed a local NGO in the camp: “Yes, many [dawāwīn] were arrested.” Like him, Assaf sees the normalization of the camp (i.e., its economic, political, and social integration into the city of Amman) as the result of the government’s exerting control over the territory. Another factor, in his view, has been camp dwellers’ need to find work in a context marked by ethnic discrimination and fierce competition over employment: “Now most of them [the dawāwīn] work. They don’t have time to fight and make problems. If you want to live in Jordan, you need a job. This is not easy for anybody. For us [people from the camp] it is even more difficult because there is racism in Jordan; nobody will ever employ you if you behave like a dawānjī.” Negative stereotypes about camps and refugees further hinder camp dwellers from finding work. Many of my interlocutors admitted to having lied to their potential employers about their place of residence, claiming to live in the adjoining neighborhood of Ashrafiyya. This discrimination is particularly visible in the public sector, where “East Bankers” are usually privileged over “Palestinians.” One friend of mine in his late twenties summarizes this situation well:

After graduating from college, I had to wait four years before finding a teaching position! Do you know how long it takes for urduniyyīn [Transjordanians] to find a place? No time—it’s straightforward! For us it is as if there is a wall beyond which you cannot go. For example, if you work for the police [shurtā], you can’t have more than three stars [senior commander]. I had to wait four years before getting a place as a teacher with a salary barely enough to pay my expenses [250 dinars] ... if we were in Palestine, it would have been different; there we would have had land, a good position, work, wāsta [relationships of patronage]! If you want to get a job here in Jordan, you need to work hard, harder than the urduniyyīn.
The most viable strategy for gaining employment is to build social connections rooted in the camp but extending beyond its borders. Refugees’ economic hardships largely relate to wāṣta, or more precisely, the lack of it. While this term can be translated literally as “means” or “intermediary,” here it indicates specifically the family connections and relationships of patronage that are central to obtaining a job, credit, favors, and housing in Jordan. The term refers to both the process of intermediation and the person who, by virtue of his or her connections and reputation, provides services and connectivity.\(^{26}\)

In Jordan, ethnic discrimination leaves Palestinian refugees with very few opportunities to set up the right connections. And yet building networks is extremely important. For young male students enrolled in the university, for example, it can make all the difference in determining whether they land a job in the future. My interlocutors saw their Transjordanian peers in the university not as inimical others but as friends and companions with whom they could have fun, work together, and share other aspects of life. In the context of the university, shabāb from the camp deploy traits of masculinity such as studiousness, docility, and diligence rather than hostility, aggressiveness, and independence, to succeed.\(^{47}\)

Camp dwellers not only accept aspirations and behaviors that diverge and at times even contradict normative ideals of masculinity in the camp, they also embrace them. Yet these different codes of masculinity do not stand in opposition to each other; they are all part of how refugees manage their national predicament in the context of exile in Jordan.\(^{48}\) Camp dwellers see docility and compliance as essential to maintaining Palestinian nationalism as a viable project. Overt displays of independence and aggressiveness devoid of rational reflection can exacerbate their socioeconomic marginality. Rather than treating poverty as a source of authenticity, many camp dwellers claim that being maskīn (poor or miserable) leads people—especially young men—down a crooked path, the end point of which is clear to all: entire families lacking a fatherly example and stable financial support; children and adolescents lacking proper guidance and turning to the streets; shabāb lying on the sofas of barber shops or idling on footpaths, engaging in immoral activities such as cursing, smoking, watching pornography, and drinking alcohol.

Many of the people with whom I spoke in al-Wihdat perceived the camp’s deteriorating infrastructure as part of an international conspiracy to liquidate the Palestinian issue and sink refugees into despair and oblivion. As a friend told me while pointing to a group of children playing amidst garbage and debris piled up in the middle of a narrow alley:

I am afraid for the future! If you live in a bad environment, you grow wild; if you are poor, you don’t eat; and if you don’t eat, you can’t sleep. So what do you do? You think, and you get angry, more and more, until . . . until something bad happens. This [situation of ours] is still not the lowest point, but we are close to it. Once people get to the bottom, they will start making trouble, maybe kill each other . . . This is what they [Israel and the USA] want! They want us to kill each other!\(^{49}\)

Once refugees have sunk into despair and oblivion, social uneasiness and tension among them become a threat to the national cause. In this context, refugees yearn not for marginality but rather to reproduce their political identity in terms of practical responsibilities, such as securing income.\(^{50}\) The otherwise negative connotation of being acquiescent and compliant acquires a positive dimension in the camp, indicating ethico-political qualities such as that of suḥmaṣ (resilience or steadfastness).\(^{50}\)
Palestinians’ commitment to nation and family are not at odds with one another. Amongst the youth in al-Wihdat “breadwinner masculinity” constitutes an alternative, yet equally attractive, script of masculinity to that of the dawāwi and the shuyākh. Like the other ideals of masculinity in the camp, breadwinner masculinity serves to reinforce patriarchal structures and normative relations of gender domination by prioritizing the man’s role as provider over the rather passive role of women in the family.

However, while the image of the “glorious fighter” sits comfortably within the hegemonic ideal of masculinity, that of the “nurturer father” does not, straddling as it does the border between the masculine and feminine domains. To be bourgeois-in-the-making in a context marked by overt discrimination against Palestinian refugees, camp dwellers have to display a form of docility that contradicts the very principles upon which the Palestinian nationalist agent is built: male assertiveness and independence. Significantly, the very attributes that make up breadwinner masculinity—nurturing and steadfastness—are often ascribed to the feminine sphere in official Palestinian nationalist discourse as well as in camp dwellers’ narratives. When the ideal of the patient and nurturing mother overlaps with the ideal of the stoic and providing father, the boundaries between normative ideals of masculinity and femininity get blurred: what traditionally makes a woman a woman becomes constitutive of manhood.

Interestingly, these seemingly contradictory scripts of masculinity—the independent fighter and the docile breadwinner—coexist simultaneously in the lives of my informants. To today’s camp dwellers, manliness necessitates an active process of thinking about the consequences of one’s actions. Take, for example, the story that Anas, a young man in his mid-twenties whom I came to know for his studiousness and piety, shared with me from the time he and his friend worked as seasonal workers at a branch of Kentucky Fried Chicken in a wealthy area of Amman. One day several of their Transjordanian colleagues at work allegedly disrespected them by ordering them around, in response to which Anas and his friend beat them up soundly. Anas told me with evident self-satisfaction: “shabāb from the camp are different from shabāb living in Jabal Amman and Shmisani, and Abdun! We are mukhayyamjiyye [camp refugees], they are like girls [bañat]!”

However, on another occasion, Anas chastised his friend for not being able to secure a long-term job, claiming he was lazy (kaslān) and too short-sighted to understand that being reliable and trustworthy is in most cases more profitable than displaying hyper-toughness and independent behavior. Because even ordinary jobs are hard to come by in Jordan, dedication and docility are essential virtues for successfully securing a decent economic position. While Anas was obviously proud of the sheer exhibition of masculine potency in the first episode he recounted, he disapproved of the unthinking display of roughness and independence:

He is a dawājī. He can’t do the same job for more than a couple of weeks . . . [because] he is too lazy . . . [Also,] he always argues with his employers. After two weeks maximum he loses his job. [Most days] he wastes his time in the game rooms, watching girls or drinking . . . if he is lucky enough to find someone to pay for his booze!
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The attempt to reconcile diverse ideals of masculinity is a deeply fragile project in which men frequently experience failures, setbacks, and frustrations. Within this framework, it is important to shed light on the relationship between the youth in the camp and the authorities. From the viewpoint of local authorities, and indeed in the popular imagination, shabāb in al-Wihdat embody opposition to the state. Their interactions with shabāb often involve disciplining, monitoring, and repression, all of which shabāb find humiliating and injurious. Harassment at the hands of overzealous police officers, camp dwellers told me, is so common that refugees carefully avoid passing by the massive al-Wihdat police station (makhfar) without their identification papers. If stopped without proper documents, they can be detained in the station until a relative or a friend comes to vouch for them.

Discrimination and stalled upward mobility, especially in the public sector, endanger camp dwellers’ transition to social adulthood, which is dependent upon the capacity to provide for the family and live independently. They also exacerbate the marginalization of camp dwellers’ masculinity, relegating it to a condition of liminality or negation. Negative stereotypes that accompany camp dwellers in their relationships with the broader Jordanian society further aggravate this crisis of masculinity. My interlocutors frequently complained to me about their incapacity to forge a productive masculinity by getting married, having children, and being responsible for wife and kids. Getting married is a costly affair and the ability to afford it is undermined by discrimination in the public sector. This situation has exacerbated the feeling amongst camp dwellers that they are second-class citizens. As Abu Shadi, a young man who works as a taxi driver in Amman, put it:

We are not strangers [ajānīb] in Jordan, but we are also not like Transjordanians [jurduًniyyin]; we are second-class citizens [muwātānin min al-daraj al-thāniyya], even fourth class! If a Palestinian, a nawari [equivalent to “gypsy”], and an Egyptian go to the makhfar [police station], the Palestinian will be the first to be arrested! . . . I have a friend [a Jordanian of Palestinian origin] who works as taxi driver. He was going to Aqaba with a friend of his, a Jordanian, who was driving another car. The police stopped the two cars. One [officer] asked for their passports and said to the other [police officer] “this one is fine, he is ṭafīlī [inhabitant of al-Tafila].” They let him go and gave my friend a ticket for speeding . . . You see, Amza [pointing at his brother, who is two years his junior]? He passed the tawjihī [secondary examination] with a 70. That’s very good, but he didn’t find a job. Transjordanians who get 50 in the tawjihī find a job! And they can work in the army or in the police. Let me tell you, we are beneath the Jordanians!

If discrimination and negative stereotypes tarnish camp dwellers’ chances of living a life like that of other Jordanian citizens, they also restrain any enthusiasm for male potency, political independence, and toughness. This point is evident in Jordanian filmmaker Sandra Madi’s documentary Qamar 14, which takes place in al-Baq’a, a large Palestinian refugee camp on the outskirts of Amman. The film depicts the real life of Faraj Darwish, a young boxing champion whose promising career came to an abrupt end upon his refusal to fight an Israeli boxer. Born and raised in al-Baq’a, Farag, similar to many other shabāb in the camps, was filled with frustration due to unemployment and unfulfilled aspirations. He passed his time chatting with friends, idling at home, and playing with homing pigeons. Unlike other shabāb in the camps, however, there was a time when Faraj was well known and popular in the country.
In 2004, when he was twenty-one years old, Faraj won the Arab boxing champion title in Algeria, a victory that earned him the chance to meet the King of Jordan in person. Despite his accomplishment, however, in 2006 the Jordanian Boxing Federation barred the newly decorated champion from competing officially again due to his refusal to fight an Israeli boxer at an international competition in Turkey. The discriminatory ban irremediably damaged Faraj’s blooming career, leaving the boxer powerless and embittered, capable neither of reaching full socioeconomic integration within the kingdom nor of becoming a virile symbol of Palestinian nationalist struggle as a boxing champion from Baq’a.

**Conclusion**

Terms like “refugee camp” or “camp dweller community” might induce lingering assumptions about the homogeneity of models of masculinity. In Jordan, these ideal forms of masculinity are abstracted and reified—some romanticized, others “abjected,”54 but all pointing to the camp dwellers’ lack of integration despite their status as citizens. However, camp dwellers’ masculinities are not uniform. In this article, I have demonstrated that it is young men’s ability to move through and master diverse and sometimes contrasting registers of manhood that enables them to reproduce a Palestinian national identity in exile. In so doing, I have also exposed the utility and limitations of the notion of hegemonic masculinity in relation to camp dwellers’ discourses about and performances of manliness.

Over the course of their adolescence and early adulthood, young men in the camp reproduce “Palestinian nationalism” as a system of human values and as an everyday reality through the negotiation of diverse ideals of masculinity, most notably the figure of the *dawânjî* and the *shaykh*. My research shows that Black September and its immediate aftermath caused a shift in masculine ideals in the camp. Whereas before Black September there were many *dawâwîr* in the camp, after this event the *dawânjî*, disillusioned by the broken promises of Palestinian nationalism and deprived of their political agency by poverty and governmental control, was gradually replaced by the *shaykh* as the dominant model of masculinity in the camp. Despite their obvious differences, however, *dawânjî* and *shaykh* masculinities share common attributes traditionally ascribed to what authors have called hegemonic forms of masculinity. The performance of these two paradigmatic models of masculinity in the camp is thus exemplary of the working of hegemonic masculine norms at the level of the political subject. In the narratives of my informants, the Palestinian national subject is clearly represented in masculine terms and re-enacted through the display of male assertiveness, physical strength, and independence.

However, I have demonstrated that the flexibility of camp dwellers’ masculinity is, more than anything else, a means to ensure the reproduction of a Palestinian national identity in the context of their exile in Jordan. While hegemonic gender norms remain crucial, in certain contexts they do not play their normative role. In other words, hegemonic masculinity is not the only way of being a man in the camp.55 Not only are certain attributes generally associated with subordinate masculinities and/or femininity (such as docility and passivity) sometimes preferred over more manly virtues, they might even constitute an important source of nationalist agency. Refugees’ display of
these attributes reflects their reconciling of the fact of exile in Jordan with their strong desire to uphold the values and ideals of Palestinian nationalism. Moreover, it opens a space in Palestinian national discourse for seemingly subordinate and feminine ways of being male, a space that is generally overshadowed by sometimes-cumbersome ideals of masculinity.

Nevertheless, the simultaneous performance of antithetical forms of masculinity does not always bear success. Discrimination at times jeopardizes refugees’ attempts to carry out “ordinary” male lives, leaving them powerless and frustrated. The incapacity to perform a more contingent masculinity—that is, to harmonize different styles of masculinity—ultimately jeopardizes their chances of entering social adulthood as both Palestinian and Jordanian males. The failure to move through conflicting registers of masculinity reinforces refugees’ experiences of marginality and ultimately broadens the chasm between the “refugee” and the “citizen,” relegating camp dwellers to a condition of liminality.

NOTES

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1 After conducting preliminary research in the Palestinian refugee camps of Jordan from May to December 2004, field research for this paper was carried out in the al-Wihdat refugee camp from July 2009 to September 2010 and complemented by return trips in February–March 2011 and March 2012. During this time, I lived mostly in the camp. Though participant observation remained the most important part of my research and field notes my main primary source, I have also conducted a number of semi-structured interviews and devoted some time to analyzing refugee texts, textbooks, blogs texts, and other published material.

2 Among my informants, “youth” is a relatively broad category that encompasses a wide spectrum of people. However, the term is often used to refer to unmarried young men between their teens and early thirties. This age group is generally referred to as al-shabab.


4 See especially Sami al-Khazendar, Jordan and the Palestine Question: The Role of the Islamic and Left Forces in Foreign Policy-Making (Chicago: LPC Group, 1997).

Becoming a Man in al-Wihdat

According to R. W. Connell, hegemonic masculinity is an ideal type of manliness that exhibits general patterns. This ideal combines a number of attributes ranging from male assertiveness and emotional detachment to heterosexuality, physical strength, and attractiveness. Since the performance of this style of masculinity requires access to specific resources, it generates dominance not only over women but also over subordinate men who cannot comply with it. See R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987); and R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender Society* 19 (2005): 829–59.


that such coexistence entails. Demetrakis Z. Demetriou, “Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A
17 Connell, Gender and Power.
18 Scholars have documented in considerable detail the importance of violence—endured, narrated, or
performed—to the creation and reproduction of masculinity in the Arab Middle East. Violence and masculinity
have been studied extensively in Palestinian studies in particular. See, among others, Peter, “Male gender and
Rituals of Resistance in the Palestinian Intifada.” On the intersection of violence and masculinity elsewhere
in the Middle East, see especially Michael Gilsenan, Lords of the Lebanese Marches: Violence and Narrative
in an Arab Society (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1996). On violence and patriarchy, see
19 The world “dawā‘in” is often used in daily speech to refer to both a group people and a single individual.
20 On nicknames, see, among others, Gabriele Vom Bruck and Barbara Bodenhorn, The Anthropology of
Names and Naming (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). On nicknames in Jordan as a device
of social control, see Richard T. Antoun, “On the Significance of Names in an Arab Village,” Ethnology 7
(1968): 158–70. On the use of nicknames among criminals, see Diego Gambetta, Codes of the Underworld:
21 Compare with Hart, “Dislocated Masculinity.”
22 A fascinating aspect of recent work on youth across the world is scholars’ tendency to focus on the anxieties
that many young men experience in times of social and economic uncertainty. See, for example, Craig Jeffrey,
Timepass: Youth, Class and The Politics of Waiting in India (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010);
Adeline Masquelier, “The Scorpion’s Sting: Youth, Marriage and the Struggle for Social Maturity in Niger,”
Rural Egypt,” Contemporary Islam 28 (2008): 251–70; and Oskar Verkaaik, Migrants and Militants: Fun and
23 Laleh Khalili, Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 2007); Mary N. Layoun, Wedded to the Land? Gender, Boundaries, and National-
24 On “political Islam” in the Muslim world, see Faisal Devji, Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality,
696–723; Gilles Kepel, Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002);
For an anthropological critique of the concept, see Charles Hirschkind, “What is Political Islam?” Middle East
25 On the imbrication of piety, gender, and modernity in the Middle East, see, for example, Lara Deeb, An
Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi‘i Lebanon (Princeton, N.J.; Princeton University Press,
2006); and Sabah Mahmood, Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject (Princeton,
26 On the political influence of Hamas in the Occupied Territories, see Zaki Chehab, Inside Hamas: The
Untold Story of Militants, Martyrs and Spies (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007); Loren D. Lybarger, Identity and
Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories (Princeton,
Resistance Movement (Cambridge: Polity, 2010); Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, The Palestinian Hamas:
tween Hamas and the Brotherhood, see especially Khaled Hroub, Hamas: Political Thought and Practice
27 On the PLO’s loss of influence in the region, see especially Jamil M. Hilal, “The PLO: Crisis in Leg-
Historical Reversals and the Uprising,” Journal of Palestine Studies 20 (1991): 57–70. For a thorough analysis
of the history of the Palestinian National Movement, see Ye’idad Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for
28 For an analysis of the growing popularity of the Brotherhood in and outside refugee camps in Jordan, see
Quentin Wiktorewicz, “Islamists, the State, and Cooperation in Jordan,” Arab Studies Quarterly 21 (1999): 1–
17. For an analysis of the waning of the influence of the Muslim Brothers in Jordan, see, amongst others, Khaled
Without jeopardizing the Palestinian “right of return” (resettlement). In camp dwellers’ narratives, the former presents their attempt to secure a decent lifestyle.

Citizens of the State of Transjordan, and successively citizens of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, by virtue of the nationality laws of 1928 of the Emirate of Jordan. There was not an exact equivalent of “Transjordanians” in ‘Strangers.’


See Ismail, Political Life in Cairo’s New Quarters.

Massad, “Conceiving the masculine.”


Inhorn, The New Arab Man, 50.


This reflects Hamas’s position vis-a-vis women according to which “Muslim women have a role in the liberation struggle which is no less than the role of men; for woman is the maker of men, and her role in guiding and educating the generations is a major role”; Hamas charter as quoted in Hroub, Hamas, 278. This gendered difference, so familiar in the Islamist context, are not alien to the nationalist heroic discourse; Massad, for example, explains how the discrepancy between the role of men and that of women in the national project “is central to the concept of Palestinian nationalist agents as masculine. While men actively create glory, respect, and dignity, women are merely the soil on which these attributes, along with manhood, grow. It is as soil that they are the ‘guardians’ of Palestinian lives and survival.” Massad, “Conceiving the Masculine,” 474.

Palestinians who were forced to move following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

For a comparative discussion of the relationship between national and sexual boundaries among Palestinians living in Israel, see, for example, Kanaaneh, “Boys or men? Duped or ‘made’?”; Monterescu, “City of Strangers.”

In this sense, the notion of tāḥāl (socioeconomic rehabilitation) is opposed to that of ṭawfīn (permanent resettlement). In camp dwellers’ narratives, the former represents their attempt to secure a decent lifestyle without jeopardizing the Palestinian “right of return” (hulq al-ʿawda); the latter is best exemplified by the rich Palestinian refugees who have pursued integration in Jordan, mindless of the Palestinian national predicament.


Massad, “Conceiving the Masculine,” 478.

Ibid.


The term “Transjordanian” has been used in the relevant literature to indicate the population that became citizens of the State of Transjordan, and successively citizens of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, by virtue of the nationality laws of 1928 of the Emirate of Jordan. There was not an exact equivalent of “Transjordanians” in
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the camp. In daily usage, refugees would refer to Transjordanians either through the general term *urdunniyyīn*
(which literally means “Jordanians”) or through the word *badawī* (Bedouins).


Recent work on Palestinians has recognized the flexibility of Palestinian conceptions of masculinity and ways in which young men strategically soften their hyper-masculinity in order to facilitate their socioeconomic integration within the broader Jordanian society. See, for example, Monterescu, “Stranger masculinities”; and Hart, “Dislocated Masculinity.” In this article, I show how this “flexibility” does not necessarily herald a withdrawal from ideological commitment.


On how socioeconomic integration can serve as a strategy for reproducing the values and ideals of Palestinian nationalism in exile, see Achilli, “Disengagement from politics.”


For a similar argument in regard to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, see Julie Peteet, “Gender and Sexuality: Belonging to the National and Moral Order,” in *Hermeneutics and Honor: Negotiating Female “public” Space in Islamicate Societies*, ed. Asma Afsaruddin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 70–88. This ambiguity is clearly contained in the concept of *sumūd* (resilience or steadfastness), which is to Palestinian nationalism such. Because *sumūd* indicates passive resistance in the face of overarching forces, it is usually used to refer to the feminine sphere of patient endurance. Laleh Khalili points out how “the archetypal sumūd narrative commemorates women’s quiet work of holding the family together and providing sustenance and protection for the family.” Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, 101. See also Kanafani, “Leaving Mother-Land,” 313. As a swathe of scholarship has demonstrated, however, the term has become a form of infra-politics and organizational policy amongst Palestinian refugees in general. See among others Helena Lindholm-Schulz, *The Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism: Between Revolution and Statehood* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

Al-Tafila is a town located 183 kilometers southwest of Amman and known to be inhabited predominantly by Transjordanian families.


Cf. Connell, *Gender and Power*. 