

ARAB MASCULINITIES

Anthropological Reconceptions in
Precarious Times



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PALESTINIAN SPERM-SMUGGLING

Fatherhood, Political Struggle,
and Israeli Prisons

LAURA FERRERO

INTRODUCTION

From October 2015 to February 2016, I spent four months in Palestine, during which time I interviewed fourteen wives of prisoners.¹ They share more in common than just having their husbands in an Israeli jail; they are part of a smaller category comprised of about fifty women who became mothers during their husbands' captivity.

What sounds like a miracle, or at least an unbelievable story, is made possible by the following elements: brave Palestinian men and women, widespread social support on a sensitive issue, medical equipment, a "secret" strategy, and religious fatwas. This phenomenon can be seen through many lenses, but here, I put the intimate sphere at the core of my analysis. In so doing, I do not state that politics and conflict are not fundamental aspects of the life of every Palestinian, but I try to counterbalance a description of Palestinian men as dominated only by politics and of Palestinian masculinity as defined only by fighting and heroism. If in the last decades resistance against the Israeli military occupation opened new arenas of masculinity alongside the more "classical" view of the "real man" described as a person who is part of a family and a community (Joseph 1999), I think it is now time to reconsider how fatherhood and the devotion to family are pivotal to the construction of masculinity in Palestine. When men are in captivity—due to their active involvement in the resistance—new reproduction technologies can become strategic tools to imagine and realize the ideal of fatherhood.

The Palestinian men at the core of this chapter are political prisoners serving their detentions in Israeli jails. All of them have been condemned to long or life sentences. According to the Israel Prison Service, they fall into the category of “security prisoners,” defined as “a prisoner who was convicted and sentenced for committing a crime, or who is imprisoned on suspicion of committing a crime, which due to its nature or circumstances was defined as a security offense or whose motive was nationalistic” (Baker and Matar 2011). Abeer Baker and Anat Matar (2011) noted that most of the prisoners who fall into this category are Palestinians, because this definition is vague enough to consider all Palestinians “security threats.” The Israel Prison Service detains and imprisons thousands of Palestinians, putting them into a single category that becomes a means of justifying treatment characterized by brutal arrest, prohibition from meeting a lawyer, torture, and arrest without a trial (Baker and Matar 2011).

The Palestinian women I met are their wives. They are referred to in Palestinian Arabic as *fāqida*, a word originating from a verb (*faqada*) that means to be deprived of something or someone.² They are women who experience a *fuqdān* (loss) in their everyday lives. A *fāqida* is the wife, mother, or daughter of a political prisoner or of a *shahīd*, literally a martyr or someone who has been killed by the Israeli army or during a fight against the occupation. Wives of prisoners are suffering, in the words of Rita Giacaman and Penny Johnson (2013), a “triple captivity” of the Israeli colonial system, the Israeli prison, and the post-Oslo Palestinian political landscape with its isolating effects in their own communities. In such a context, they are at the same time “proud” and “lonely” (Buch Segal 2015, 34) because they experience an emotional hardship that results from “the tensions between what everyday life can be like during the absence of a detained husband and what is expected socially” (31), that is, to be proud of their husbands. An example of this ambivalence can be seen in the discourse on divorce. Formally, Islamic family law in Palestine allows a woman to ask for a divorce in the case of prolonged absence of her husband (Johnson and Hammami 2013), but the proportion of Palestinian women who ask for divorces because their husbands are in prisons is very low (Welchman 2000). The explanations can be found in the challenges encountered by divorced women in Palestinian society (Rubenberg 2001), who generally remain proud of their husbands and aware that divorce would invite social scorn.

ON SPERM SMUGGLING

The *fāqidat* I interviewed remained loyal to their husbands and are involved in the project of enlarging their families. They have been impregnated with the sperm of their partners and given birth to sons and daughters while their

husbands are serving their sentences. In August 2012, Dalal Zaban gave birth to the first Palestinian child born as a result of in vitro fertilization (IVF) treatment after her husband smuggled sperm out of the Israeli jail.³ Her baby is known as *safir al-hurriya* (ambassador of freedom), and following Dalal's example, more than fifty children have been conceived in the same way. These cases made the smuggling of sperm and the consequent pregnancies a transversal phenomenon that interested women from cities, villages, and refugee camps as well as educated, uneducated, working, and unemployed women with husbands involved in either secular or religious parties. Despite evoking initial suspicion, this practice is viewed favorably by most of the Palestinian population, thanks also to massive media coverage (Berk 2014) as well as political support.

In the West Bank, most cases have been treated at the Razan Center, a private clinic with three branches: Nablus, Ramallah, and Bethlehem.⁴ This clinic is at the core of the practice because it provides free treatment to prisoners' wives.⁵ When he welcomed me to the laboratory, Dr. Ziyad Abu Khairazan, the nephew of Dr. Salem Abu Khairazan, who is known as the inventor of this practice, explained that they undertake an ICSI procedure when treating prisoners' wives. He was proud to show me the equipment in the laboratory that, he said, "is very modern; it is second in the world only after equipment available in Israel." ICSI is a variant of IVF designed to overcome male infertility problems: "As long as one viable spermatozoon can be retrieved from a man's body . . . this spermatozoon can be injected into an oocyte under a high-powered microscope, effectively forcing fertilization to occur" (Inhorn 2012, xvi).⁶ Even if the prisoners are biologically fertile, they are affected by "political infertility" (Berk 2014). Bringing the sperm from the jail to the hospital is so difficult, dangerous, and uncertain that the seminal fluid is considered unique and precious. As a result, ICSI is preferred to IVF, which is less likely to result in a pregnancy. As soon as a sperm sample reaches the clinic, doctors—in these cases available twenty-four hours a day—examine it, and if they detect living sperms, they immediately freeze them. Due to the sperm's scarcity, doctors try to use the minimum quantity necessary to undertake the treatment, leaving the rest divided into samples in a freezer. From one dose of sperm, they can freeze up to five samples, each one a potential newborn.

This phenomenon is referred to in Palestine as *tahrīb al nuṭaf* (sperm smuggling). Palestinian prisoners are no strangers when it comes to smuggling; secret letters were traditionally passed via released prisoners or between different sections of the same prison through a system called *cabsulih* (Nashif 2008, 52–58). Due to the deep involvement of the physical bodies in the *tahrīb al nuṭaf*—the prisoner's body, which produces and passes the sample, and the

body of the person who receives it and who has the task of passing through the control system and reaching the clinic in the West Bank—this practice is part of a larger pattern of resistance practiced by Palestinian society confronting colonization. The *cabsulih*, the *tahrib al nuṭaf*, the beaten bodies (Peteet 1994; 1997), the sacrificed ones (Allen 2009; Pitcher 1998), the bodies of the women who undertake the treatment, and even the body of the newborn baby are “inscribing the social into the human body” (Nashif 2008, 59).

Although some women offered me unsolicited details about how the precious plastic bag was delivered to the medical center—the same details that are often reported on this issue in the news—I will not emphasize this point. I never asked any of the women how they received their samples. First, I think that this kind of sensitive question would have destroyed the women’s trust in me. Second, I presume they would have never answered the question. Third, I think they give the public a plausible (but maybe nonreal) version of the facts in order to explain the event but also (more relevant) to protect it. The secrecy and the repetition offer a kind of ritual essence to this practice that takes place in a “local moral world” (Kleinman 1997, 45), which renders it acceptable. One relevant issue is the existence of a fatwa issued by Dār al-’Ifta’ al-Filastīniyya, which proclaims that the insemination is *halal* if it respects some *shurut* (conditions). The most important conditions, reported to me both by the hospital and by Dār al-’Ifta’ in Nablus, are this existence of a valid marriage between the man and the woman, the fact that the woman should not be a virgin when she undergoes the treatment, and the presence of witnesses from both families who declare that the sperm belongs to the *’asīr* (political prisoner).

I will introduce the reader to the feelings involved in this topic through the words of Samah, and I will then analyze the public discourses and the private dimensions of the phenomenon. In both the dimensions, a gender perspective arises, so I will later concentrate on a gender analysis, turning my attention to fatherhood before drawing my conclusion.

A FAMILY FROM ASKAR CAMP

Samah is the first *fāqida* whom I interviewed. She lives in Askar Camp, one of the refugee camps in Nablus. She lives on the first floor of a house that belongs to her husband’s family. It was easy to reach her because her husband’s brother works as a taxi driver between Nablus and the camp. He was waiting for an *’ajnabiyya* (foreigner) to appear at the taxi station located on the underground floor of the central mall, and as soon as he saw me, he called to me and drove me to the entrance of the camp. From there, he spoke with a group of children

who were playing in the street and told them to take me to Samah's house. She was waiting for me, and we spent a very pleasant afternoon together.

After lunch, Samah showed me a video on YouTube, a half-hour documentary on the day of her delivery, which had been previously screened at a local television station, Filastin. Pointing to different people on the screen, she explained that she was surrounded by the director of the Ministry of the Detainees, the director of the media center of the hospital, the doctors, the journalists, and her family. Samah's voice on the video expressed gratitude: "I thank God, *alḥamdulillah*. I pray God, may he give to us freedom [*hurriyya*], to us, to all the Palestinian people and to all the prisoners. I thank God for this baby who came in God's will, and I thank Dr. Salem, the Razan Center, and all the staff. I thank my family and my husband's family. I thank my husband, who gave me this possibility, and I thank all Askar Camp. . . . *Alḥamdulillah*."

Pictures on the screen were accompanied by a nationalistic song addressed to the enemy, promising resistance and victory. An anchorwoman's voice in the video narrated, "Today something blessed happened. Today, freedom [*al-hurriya*] is among us, and *in sha' Allah* [if God wills] Hurreya [the name of the baby] will soon be embraced by her father. In sha' Allah Samir, you will be soon with your family . . . *ṣumūd* [steadfastness], more *ṣumūd* to our prisoners. . . . We will fight because your cause is political and is national, and your *ṣumūd* is stronger than the pressures you are submitted to." In the video, Samah's daughter said, "I want to say to my dad . . . in sha' Allah you will be released soon, you and all the prisoners. Don't worry about us, we are okay. '*Alf mabrūk* [congratulations]." The song in the background sings, "Oh enemy, oh coward, here we are and here we stay. You will suffer; in my country you will face all kind of difficulties." The video ends with pictures of the narrow street of Askar Camp and an anchorwoman narrating.

Askar welcomes Hurreya, the baby from the prison of the occupation.

Manifestations of joy filled the camp, welcoming the daughter of a man from here who has been in prison for eleven years! . . . Thank God for Hurreya and for all the ambassadors of freedom. Hurreya gave her mother joy, brought a light of hope to her father and his family, the hope that the sun of freedom will rise again in a free nation. Hurreya came from behind the bars. She is a message to confirm the strength of our people. We are *sha'b jabbārīn* [strong people].

THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE

One thing makes IVF treatments for prisoners' wives different from any other IVF in the Middle East. Infertility—and the consequent recourse to medical treatment to overcome the problem—is often perceived of as something to

keep secret (Demircioğlu Göknaç 2015; Inhorn 1996, 2012; Inhorn and Birenbaum-Carmeli 2008). The same often happens in Palestine when IVF or ICSI is a solution for infertility. However, when it comes to political prisoners, the treatment must be public.

The case of Amina—a thirty-three-year-old woman of Jenin—is typical in this regard. I met her at her parents' house, where she lives with her children. She married and had a daughter before her husband was arrested. While he was in prison, they divorced and remarried after some years (Ferrero 2016). At that point, they started to plan to have another child through *tahrīb al nuṭaf*. Amina reflected: "I was very happy. We had a new *katib al-kitāb* [signing of the marriage contract] in the court, and we had a big party. I wore a white wedding dress, I did my hair, I had a new ring, a new *mahr* [dowry] . . . everything was new. We arranged everything as if it were the first marriage, including the *'ishār* [announcement] to let everybody know that we were together again. It was important to me, because we were already thinking of having a second child through insemination."

Amina was in a very sensitive situation due to her previous divorce, but her worries about making the choice public are not unique. Women discuss the decision to become impregnated within their families and try to make the event public even before undergoing treatment, as a way of avoiding social criticism and gossip in a generally conservative society. Nadia relayed, "At the beginning, I was afraid. Every time I went out, I tried to cover my belly. . . . I was ashamed. How it could be otherwise? My husband had been in prison for seventeen years, and not everyone in the city knew I did the insemination. They were asking themselves: 'How is it possible? How did she become pregnant?' There are still people in Palestine who don't agree on this topic."

Even if the positions on the issue vary, there is widespread support for the wives of these prisoners. The media plays a significant role both in spreading the news every time a new baby is born and also in disseminating a certain discourse. Sometimes television also plays a role in the decision-making process. The wives and their families often stated that they were encouraged when they found out about a new prisoner's wife who became a mother. According to Umm Samira, the mother of a prisoner's wife, "They saw it on television. The TV broadcast everything, even the delivery! It's encouraging because you see moments of joy. You see that all the family came to assist the woman together with ministries and journalists. It is a special delivery, not a normal one. When my daughter was about to give birth, we all went to the hospital. It was like there was a party."

As in the description of Samah's video, the media presents each case as a victory against Israel and as an act of resistance. This has been happening since the

first public announcements: in February 2013, four wives of political prisoners gathered at the Razan Center in Nablus to announce that they had been impregnated by their husbands via sperm smuggled out of Israeli prisons (Khalil 2013). Those cases immediately followed the birth of *safir al hurriya*, Dalal's son. The women and the doctor involved drew legitimacy from fatwas issued four years before from the then mufti Ikrima Sabri and from Hamed Bitawi, a religious leader affiliated with Hamas, in a clear response to the situation of wives of long-term Palestinian political prisoners (Johnson and Hammami 2013, 21).

As mentioned earlier, in 2013 the Dār al-'Iftā' issued a fatwa that is now considered a reference point on the topic. It is important to note that the fatwa explicitly states that the information about the treatment must be spread via local television or "by any means between the people." As Morgan Clarke (2009) showed in his analysis of fertility treatment in Lebanon, religious positions are not independent from political context. Religious-legal prescriptions generally align with fatwas issued in other Sunni countries (Inhorn and Tremayne 2012), but the political situation plays a pivotal role in applying them to prisoners and in fostering social support. The hospital decision to provide the treatment for free, for example, is seen as a political response to the denial of conjugal visits for Palestinian prisoners in the Israeli jails, even if the official explanation describes it as a "humanitarian act" (Vertommen 2017).

The conflict has historically been presented as having an important demographic character, and as a consequence, reproduction represents more than an individual event. Reproduction has been politicized and nationalized, and Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh (2002) offers many examples of how the demographic aspect of the conflict has been made central to the discourses of political leaders on both sides. Both Israeli prime minister David Ben Gurion and Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat pushed "their" women to give more sons to the nation: birthing became both a biopolitical site for colonial control and a form of biopolitical contestation or survivalism (Vertommen 2017).

As a consequence, the conflict retains a gendered aspect. Palestine is not the only context in which nationalistic propaganda discourse is gendered and in which agency is thought of as a masculine trait (Massad 1995). I use Joseph Massad's analysis as a starting point to discuss what many scholars have pointed out regarding Palestinian masculinity and femininity. In his analysis of the first documents issued by the Palestinian Liberation Organization—which functioned as a sort of constitution, defining Palestinian political goals, Palestinian rights, indeed "Palestinianness" itself—Massad stresses two main points related to gender. First, the Zionist conquest of Palestine is presented as a rape of the land (Massad 1995, 470); this metaphor equates the land to female

virginity and symbolizes the loss of male virility, because in the metaphor the virile actor is the rapist/enemy. Second, the rape of the enemy changed the definition of Palestinian identity itself: whereas before the rape anyone born on the Palestinian land was Palestinian, after the rape “Palestinianness” is described as an essence transmitted from fathers to sons with the consequence that women cannot be agents of nationality (Massad 1995, 472). This gendered idea has been stressed and reinforced in subsequent documents: whereas men actively create glory, respect, and dignity, women are merely the soil in which these attributes, along with manhood, grow (Massad 1995, 474).

In general, studies of gender in Palestine are unanimous in affirming that fighting, activism, confrontation with the army, beating, and serving time in prison are part of the local idea of *rujūla* (masculinity), to the point that they can be considered part of the rituals for entering adulthood (Peteet 1994).

Kanaaneh (2002, 72) tries to understand the implications of a certain kind of masculinity for women, arguing that “nationalism conjures a gendered world in which women are principally mothers of the nation and reproducers of boys.” She also stresses the effect of the “demographic war” for women, stating that women in Palestine, as well as in Israel (Yuval-Davis 1987), are considered markers of national boundaries not only symbolically but also physically throughout their duty to produce the babies for their nations.

To summarize, collective language about Palestine is built around fighting and heroism (Allen 2009; Buch Segal 2015; Kublitz 2013). At the core of this imaginary are young men who sacrifice their lives and fight against military occupation (Asad 2007; Jean-Klein 2000), whereas women are primarily represented as mothers (Kanaaneh 2002). The idea that fertility rates are linked to politics and that political factors can increase the importance of having children and raise population numbers (Fargues 2000) is the framework within which the public discourse about *tahrīb al nuṭaf* is formulated and explains the position of the media and of the hospital (Berk 2014; Vertommen 2017).

THE PRIVATE DISCOURSE

I approached my fieldwork looking for a political or biopolitical explanation; I expected the women to frame their and their husbands’ choices as acts of resistance and was a bit disappointed when, after the first interviews, I realized that women do not describe their maternity as a threat to Israel but mainly as their right to be mothers, their husbands’ right to be fathers, and the families’ right to live their lives. By turning my attention to the perspectives of the families away from the media—or outside the public realm—I realized that individual

choices are made according to a political framework but also within a more intimate and personal sphere that often does not emerge in collective narration. Imen, a housewife in her forties who lives close to Tulkarem, said, “The idea of doing something against Israel made my desire to have a child stronger. Israelis put Palestinians in jail, but they keep having children. . . . This drives Israel crazy! The political side is important, but for me the most relevant aspect was to build a family, to have someone to live with.”

The will to have a child, enlarge the family, and keep living a “normal life” is often reported as the main reason for resorting to this practice. Rasha, an educated woman who lives by herself in Ramallah and works for an international agency, explains how the political and the private side are deeply intertwined:

This experience has several meanings for me. I cannot say that the personal side is enough to explain it; it is not “I want a baby; that’s it!” I cannot say that the political aspect is distinct from the personal side. Israelis put Palestinians in jail to forbid them from having a normal life. Not only to forbid from doing political activities, but to forbid them from having a life, a family, studying. . . . Prison makes life impossible, so having children is a message for the occupation: you cannot forbid us from living. You took my husband’s body, but we are still together, we got married, we bought a house, and we had a child.

Rasha had her first, and until now only, son through this practice and explains her choice also as a way to satisfy the imperative of reproduction in a pronatalist society, as well as a way to satisfy her own desire to become a mother. She reported,

At a certain point, I started to think: “Why don’t we make a child?” I am already forty, and the probability of getting pregnant will diminish soon. Furthermore the prison is not a safe environment, so maybe my husband will get sick and his fertility will diminish⁷. . . . I don’t feel like having a second child while he is in prison. Before, it was matter of having a child or remaining childless, but now I have one, so if the second comes, it will be after his father is released. He still has to serve four and a half years, the most difficult years have passed, and above all. . . . Now I have my son, and my life has changed.

Often, the decision to resort to this practice is framed as a way of avoiding the risk of divorce. According to Marwa,

You know what can happen? The army can arrest a man. His wife is maybe thirty years old, and he is sentenced to twenty years or even ten. When he is released, she is more than forty. At the age of forty or fifty, we don’t have our period anymore, so we cannot get pregnant. . . . Maybe if her husband wants a

child, he can go and marry someone else in order to have a child. Who is the victim in this case? The wife! That's why many women think: Better if I get pregnant and give my husband a child too, so when he is released, he will find his family, and he will live with me.

The hospital, framing its intervention as a "humanitarian act," also stated that the risk of divorce is part of what inspired them to "help the prisoners' wives." I often heard this version, but I was never told of a case in which it really happened. In her research in Egypt, Marcia Inhorn (1996) found the same: Orientalist views describe men as likely to divorce their wives who do not reproduce, but this rarely happens.

In my attempt to go beyond the political reading, I find myself in line with Lotte Buch Segal (2013; 2014; 2015) when she focuses on the tensions between what everyday life can be like during the absence of a detained husband and what is expected socially from the abandoned wives. The prisoners' wives about whom she wrote compel her to scrutinize aspects of human life that challenge the systems of thought normally used to understand them, like resistance, religion, or ideology, so often flagged in analysis of Palestinians. Buch Segal (2015, 39) explains, "If the feelings were actualized in public rather than in private, they would severely compromise the example detainees' wives are supposed to set (Nashif 2008). Loneliness and emptiness are thus best kept at a distance from words because they have no home in the standing language."

As the wives of political prisoners have a "public" and a "private" way of describing their husbands' absences, I argue that there is a similar double discourse on the phenomenon of having children with them. The men's captivity represents a major challenge to Palestinian families as a whole (Gokani, Bogossian, and Akesson 2015, 204), and in a situation of loneliness and uncertainty, motherhood is something that makes life enjoyable. Hadil reflected, "The whole nine months, my thoughts were addressed to the baby who was growing inside me. What would he be like? How would I live with him? Would I be able to raise him? Alḥamdulillah, when I saw him, everything changed in my life." According to Imen, "There are women whose husbands are serving life sentences. What can they do? I encourage everyone to take this step. My children filled my home, filled the gap I had inside me; they filled my life."

SON PREFERENCE

Preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) allows the selection of embryos before implantation; it is often used to prevent genetic diseases, but Sunni Islamic authorities have agreed that is also allowed in case of "family balancing," when

couples have children of only one sex (Inhorn 2012; Serour 2008). The Razan Center relied on a fatwa that allows gender selection when the couple has at least two children of the same sex. The media director of the center told me that until now, approximately 10 percent of the prisoners' wives used PGD, all to conceive boys. I met two women who chose to have boys and a third one who wanted to have a boy but could not for medical issues.

I asked the doctors how Islam views human interference in the natural (or divine) act of conception. They answered by citing a fatwa written by Majlis al-fatwa al-'ala (Supreme Council of Fatwa): "Who chooses is God, and the doctor is the means." As Inhorn (2012, 199) has asserted in her research in Lebanon, "science and medicine are also seen as God given," and "the physicians who employ these technologies are seen as doing God's handiwork."

Son preference is a relevant issue that emerges in a gendered discourse about tahrīb al nuṭaf, and it pushes my argument on political choices versus intimate choices a bit further. The women's explanations for this preference revolved mostly around the concept of *nasab* and security or dependence. For Fatima,

My parents-in-law proposed it to me. They wanted male offspring, someone who could keep the family name. You know, Palestinian traditions. . . . What really pushed me is that I don't know if my husband will never be released. I will get older one day [and I will need help]. . . . The second reason is that I want a *sanad* [support] for my daughters, and the third is that my husband wanted to have a son. Our society is *dhukūri* [male-oriented], loves boys. When someone gets married, the hope is always that the firstborn is a boy.

Marwa reflected, "My husband does not have a brother, and his father is dead. My husband is sentenced to life, and here in Arab society, women rely on men [*dhukūr*]. The man is who keeps taking care of his sisters and his parents . . . and he thought: 'How are they going to live?' My situation is difficult, and I wanted a son because I want someone to take care of me in the future. My daughters are also very happy to have a brother."

Fatima is from Saida, a village close to Tulkarem, but she lives in an apartment in Tulkarem with her sons and her daughter. She wears the *niqāb* (a veil that covers the whole face) as a way to satisfy her husband's desire. She explained her family's preference for a son as part of "Palestinian tradition." Marwa, who describes her husband's family as religious and conservative (*muḥāfaẓa*), instead mentioned the category of "Arabs," whereas the media director of the hospital talked about "Orientals." As in Kanaaneh's (2002, 237) research, however, son preference is explained more as a necessity than as an ideological act. In a context of uncertainty and statelessness, the role of the

family as the security and welfare provider increases, leaving more space for the recovery of “traditional practices” such as endogamous marriages (Taraki 2006) and son preference.

The preservation of the paternal lineage remains in general relevant throughout the Muslim world (Inhorn and Tremayne 2012), and in a period of tremendous change and uncertainty, the symbolic meaning and values of patriarchy became even more important (Muhanna 2013, 154). The persistence of what Diane King and Linda Stone (2010) called “lineal masculinity,” or a perceived ontological essence that flows to and through men over generations, is due to a strong link with the idea of manhood itself. By giving birth to a boy, women feel that they accomplished a familial obligation (Inhorn 2012, 88) and contributed to their own security.

When questioned about the choices behind *tahrīb al nuṭaf*, as well as about son preference, women do not explain them as political acts. Again, the political situation and its consequences in terms of the economic, social, and welfare situation is a fundamental part of the discourse, but the framework remains far from the everyday experience if it is not filled with the intimate hopes and fears these women reported.

THE COEXISTENCE OF POLITICAL STRUGGLE AND FATHERHOOD

Children bring hope to their parents’ lives. Although these words may be implicitly political, my interlocutors never framed their situations as such. One reason for this is the way political activism and participation changed after the second intifada. These changes are visible through the near absence of women and civil society, which affected the gender roles within Palestinian society at large (Muhanna 2013) and the role of women in particular (Johnson and Kuttab 2001).

The metaphor of the rape of Palestine equates the land to female virginity and also symbolizes the loss of male virility, because in the metaphor the virile actor is the rapist/enemy. One possible path through which to regain virility then is to struggle against the enemy. This struggle can have a twofold effect on manhood: it reaffirms the masculinity of the political activists, but it can also lead to the experience of detention, which can limit procreation. This experience can put fatherhood at stake, representing a “reproductive disruption” (Inhorn 2012, 4). The dominant discourses and conventional approaches to manhood in Palestine have always stressed the role of activism, resistance, and fighting to build “real Palestinian men,” but Palestinian men’s identities

and conceptions of masculinity are “closely intertwined with virility and paternity, and with paternity’s attendant sacrifices” (Peteet 2000, 203). The experience of the men who became fathers thanks to tahrīb al nuṭaf must also be viewed through the lens of the necessity of those men to become fathers and enlarge their families. The desire to have children and the social imperative of reproduction is normally thought of as something connected to women. But, as Inhorn (2012, 70) shows, a “masculine reproductive imperative” also exists within the Middle East.⁸ We cannot think about tahrīb al nuṭaf without acknowledging that it allows for the persistence and the coexistence of two “experiences of manhood”: being incarcerated for political activism and being a father. Imen spoke about her husband in prison: “Life in the prison is also better now. The newborn gave him hope. He has been in jail for thirteen years and still has ten to serve. Now he has hope again; he knows that his family is waiting for him. His personality has changed, and he still doesn’t believe that it is true! When he hears their voices from the phone, he is touched.” Similarly, Fatima reported, “Our relationship also improved. He realized what I did for him. The babies came when he had been in prison for twelve years. He is now serving the thirteenth year. The first twelve years were something. . . . This year is something different. There is finally something nice to think about.”

Changes in the political atmosphere altered both the kind of activism in which men can engage and the role of men within the family. Whereas in the first intifada, the participation in the national resistance used to be public, from the second intifada onward, it became invisible—if not secret (Muhanna 2013). Participation also became more violent, resulting in deaths and injuries related to a crisis of masculinity (Johnson and Kuttāb 2001, 33). In addition, the post-Oslo landscape and the economic, social, and humiliating effects of occupation marginalized some groups of men as providers and breadwinners and destabilized male roles as heads of household (Gokani, Bogossian, and Akesson 2015; Johnson and Kuttāb 2001; Muhanna 2013; Sa’ar and Yahia-Younis 2008; Taraki 2006). The historic image of the heroic Palestinian male fighter contrasts with the reality of Palestinian men’s lack of power and agency. In such a context, breadwinning has come to symbolize daily resistance against the occupation (Gokani, Bogossian, and Akesson 2015, 207).

Recent studies point out a similar dynamic among Palestinians living in Israel because it is becoming more difficult for men to maintain their breadwinner roles. Roni Strier (2014, 401) interviewed unemployed men, who revealed to her that “being a father means being responsible [and] carrying the burden of the family’s subsistence” and that “fatherhood means, first of all, providing for your wife and child.” Both in Israel and in Palestine, the expression of

masculinity through resistance seems to be at stake, with provision emerging (or reemerging) as a masculine trait to be fulfilled.

Incarcerated men who have recovered their manhood and honor through militant mobilization and through *tahrīb al nuṭaf* can also recover their reproductive imperative and their role as breadwinner. A salary is in fact given to prisoners through their families by the Palestinian Ministry of Prisoners to help the wives meet everyday expenses. According to Nadia, “It has been very difficult to educate my children alone, but *alḥamdulillah*, they have grown up and the oldest are already married. I educated them by myself, and I paid everything thanks to my husband’s salary. I also built the house thanks to that money. I built it over a year, gradually, and when it was built, I started to buy the furniture. This year I painted the wall; I did it gradually.”

It is interesting to note that some husbands were either unemployed or precariously employed before being incarcerated. Some of them faced difficulty being breadwinners, and it is precisely the act of being incarcerated with a long sentence that allows them to fulfill their breadwinning role.

In the first intifada, “the practice of suspending everyday routine was an example of domestic (self-) nationalization that was concurrent with, and even complemented, a formally organized liberational and nation-state-building movement” (Jean-Klein 2001, 93), but from the second intifada onward, maintaining the everyday became truly political, a way to face the problems created by the occupation and the post-Oslo landscape.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of Palestinian men smuggling their sperm out of Israeli jails to impregnate their wives is relevant from many perspectives. Palestinian political prisoners are not biologically infertile, but life in captivity can put fatherhood at stake. Hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1985) in Palestine has been largely described in terms of fighting, resistance, and captivity. Rarely has the struggle been considered to have a twofold effect on manhood: on one side, it reaffirms a local concept of manhood, and on the other side, it can result in a lengthy detention that can limit procreation, putting fatherhood at stake.

In this chapter, I show how the availability of modern medical treatments allows the persistence and the coexistence of two “experiences of manhood”: being incarcerated for political activism and being a father. Exactly as in Farha Ghannam’s work (2013), wives actively work to help their male relatives materialize the notion of the real man and contribute in important ways to their standing both in private and public. Furthermore, as in Inhorn’s (2012) work

on “emergent masculinities,” I consider this phenomenon in light of how Palestinian men engage creatively with new medical possibilities to overcome their enforced infertility in prison. Disrupting the dominant discourses on manhood in Palestine—which see Palestinians as dominated only by politics—I argue that the recent practice of tahrīb al nuṭaf reflects another element that is supremely important for Palestinian men and women: to become parents and to have families.

NOTES

1. I thank Tamara Taher for the help in transcribing and translating my material.

2. The Arabic terms are transliterated following the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* system.

3. This is the only real name I have maintained because her case is well-known. All the other names have been anonymized.

4. I refer here only to the cases that have occurred in the West Bank, although other cases have been documented in the Gaza Strip. This also means that when I talk about Palestinians, I am referring only to the West Bank population. I am not taking into consideration those who live in the Gaza Strip or in the diaspora.

5. IVF treatment in West Bank costs around US\$3,000.

6. For a detailed explanation of ICSI’s origin and diffusion in the Middle East, see Inhorn (2012, 26–27).

7. For another example of how conflict can affect fertility, see Kilshaw (2008).

8. For another example, see Görtin-Broadbent (2012).

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