

Hanouneh style resistance. Becoming hip-hop authentic by balancing skills and painful lived experiences

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine the dialogically constructed authenticity between an independent hip-hop and reggae artist and her audience and how this construction in turn influences the music-making process, art production and artist identity. It is argued that authenticity is constructed by the artist deconstructing the expected connections between on the one hand particular cultural belongings, lived experiences and ethnic origins, and on the other hand a certain appearance, style, set of values and behaviour. The representation of the Middle East found in the music and the album imagery is analysed as a part of the authenticity construction. The ethnographic study which the article is based on utilises qualitative interviews with the artist and her audience as well as observation in addition to analyses of multimedia content to provide a perspective into the dialogically constructed authenticity.

Keywords

Sweden, rap music, gender, Palestine, identity, music

Introduction

“Keeping it real” has become an essential goal for most artists in the music industry today (Barker and Taylor 2007:xi). Media and the internet are spheres where music is shared, consumed and created in the 21st century (Johansson 2009:141) and thus where authenticity production and consumption take place. This article is based on an ethnographic study conducted on the musician Hanouneh, an independent reggae and hip-hop artist from Sweden, and her musical followers.¹ The research was conducted over the course of five months during the second half of 2010 and the first

half of 2011. Hanouneh's politically infused music is often linked to the Middle East and she has made several songs about the Gaza Strip, where she lived for a period of time. This article seeks to deepen existing understandings of how authenticity can be constructed in the relationship between an independent artist and her audience, musical followers, and what this results in.²

Becoming and being Hanouneh

Hanouneh means caring, considerate, thoughtful and pleasant in Arabic. Hanna, who learned Arabic during the periods when she lived in the Middle East and continued to study the language at university upon her return to Sweden, told the author that the word is often used in the context of a mother's care, to indicate tenderness and affection. Henry Diab, a lecturer in Arabic at Lund University in Sweden, agreed with this description of the word. Diab agrees that is a very positive word and explained that it comes from the Arabic word *hanun* (masculine) and *hanuna* (feminine) and claims the spelling of *hanouneh* to be the way he would transcribe the word from Arabic into Latin letters (personal communication, April 27, 2011).

Musical followers Big H and Alexander, who both work with music, associate the Arabic word *hanouneh* with musical ability. Big H is a blogger and radio show host in Saudi Arabia who promotes what he defines as "good music that doesn't disrespect your mind" (Big H, personal communication, February 14, 2011). When the author was discussing Hanouneh's name with Big H he described it as "a great name... Mixed in a way between Arabic & Western... I like it. Hanouneh means 'soft' in Arabic, in a way she's silently killing on the mic, softly killing it, like the Fugees 'killing me softly' lol." Alexander, a DJ and radio show host as well, did not know that Hanouneh was an actual word before the interview with the author. Alexander told the author that he found the name fitting to Hanouneh since he believes that she is taking care of her musical talent which he believes musicians should do.

Hanna claims that if she had chosen an adjective based on qualities she possesses she would not have chosen hanouneh since being “soft, tender, affectionate” is not how she views herself. Yet she told the author that she did appreciate the fact that the name is difficult to place but that it still indicates an association with the Middle East. This is an example of when self-identity, the way a person views her- or himself, is in conflict with ascribed identity, the way other people think of and view a person (Hagström 2006: 18–19). Hanna claims not to identify herself with the meaning of her Arabic nickname but rather the fact that it speaks of the Middle East, of which her statement that Hanouneh is “a natural Arabic nickname for Hanna” is yet another example. I would state the importance of this Middle Eastern cultural identity to be an example of the authenticity production between Hanna and her musical followers. Thus the word hanouneh contains in this context both the ascribed identity given by the musical followers – being considerate with one’s musical skills and talent – and a part of Hanna’s self-identity – the Arabic link.

Double-naming into being me

Nicknames can also function as ways of integrating in a certain setting or community (Holland 2006:101). Hanna told the author on several occasions that the Palestinian family she lived with in Jerusalem gave her the nickname Hanouneh among the rest of the family members. By being called Hanouneh she was constantly reminded of her connection to the family she lived with. The fact that the name Hanouneh was given to her by the family can be viewed as a symbolic act – a new beginning in a new geographical place as a part of a new community represented by the Palestinian family (Hagström 2006:84).

After years of having Hanouneh as her nickname within the Arabic context and community, Hanna decided to pursue her music career and therefore had to choose an artist name. The person whom she acknowledges as having chosen her artist name is DJ Lethal Skillz. She got in contact with him through MySpace in 2005 resulting in her becoming a part of the 961 Un-

derground, an international hip-hop crew with roots in Lebanon of which Skillz is a member. Hanna described the naming ritual to the author as Lethal Skillz saying: “Ah, well, we need to call you something so why not call you Hanouneh?” and in that moment her Palestinian family-affiliated nickname became her artist name as well.

The double-naming of Hanouneh in the two contexts of the Palestinian family and hip-hop culture in the Middle East works as a confirmation of officially becoming a part of several new communities (Hagström 2006:84–85) which becomes a part of the construction of authenticity by granting her the possibility of representing these communities through membership. The fact that the name was given to her by other people in the Middle East is another part of the authenticity production. This is not a name she made up on her own in any way, which is the case for many artists, and I believe this is an important aspect since it adds to the impression of being more real and authentic. One example of this is when Hanna describes Hanouneh to the author as “moderately her own”:

The name chose me which is good since I’ve never thought of myself as an artist... It would have been weird to call myself by my first name and Hanna Cinthio feels very associated with the family, so it’s really nice to have a name which is moderately my own... I’m very happy it turned out this way because it would have been really tough being forced to pick an artist name.

(Interview with Hanna, Jan 28, 2011)

Claiming the name to have chosen her highlights the relationship between the name-giver and the agency of the name which is based on the above-mentioned symbolic act. By being “moderately her own.” Hanouneh becomes, with an inherent element of an artist persona, a part of her self-identity. Hanna described this artist persona as something almost forced upon her. She mentioned several times in the interviews that she never dreamed about performing on stage, and compares herself with the many people who do that throughout their upbringing as well as later in life. The

expressed resistance to dreams of performing on stage as well as the ambivalent relationship to the idea of an artist persona are parts of the authenticity production by being references to the idea of the artist role as something that chose her – not the other way around.

Representation of painful lived experiences

Hanna remembered the early beginning of MySpace in 2005 as a time when there were not that many profiles making it easy to surf around the social media site which is how she discovered DJ Lethal Skillz from Beirut. She added him as a MySpace friend and they started collaborating through the internet by him sending her a lot of beats³ to write lyrics and record vocals for. This is when the internet collaborations started for Hanna. She received beats from producers to which she recorded vocals. She said that she initially did not know how to go about the home recordings on her own computer but that she taught herself by trial and error.

With time DJ Lethal Skillz introduced her to his hip-hop crew 961 Underground which consists of eight other members who are geographically located in Lebanon, other parts of the Middle East and Europe. Hanna told the author that it all began in late 2006 when she was given the beat to the song that was later named “Lost at midnight.” At the time there was no song title and DJ Lethal Skillz did not tell her what the song was about. The only instruction she received was to interpret the beat on her own and write lyrics from there.

It felt as if everything clicked between us when I [Hanna] a couple of days later sent him [DJ Lethal Skillz] my recorded lyrics: he told me that the beat came about in the midst of Israel’s heaviest bombing of Beirut, that the war made him feel despondent and desperate, and that I had completely captured his feelings in my lyrics (...) In 2007, Skillz entered the song to a Polish competition, but it reached them too late and could therefore not be accepted in the competition,

but one of the members of the jury who listened to the song was so fascinated by it that he invited the crew to perform at Vena Festival in Lodz, Poland, that year. The guy told us that he was willing to pay living and travel expenses for all the members of the crew despite the fact that we had to travel from Lebanon, Cyprus and Sweden. At first we didn't think it was for real, but in October we ended up meeting at Warszawa airport for the first time and had a couple of days festival and performance ahead of us. I became an official member of the crew the following year when I went to Lebanon.

(Hanna, personal communication, Jan 13, 2012)

In her description of how she became a part of 961 Underground there is also a story about how Hanna passes something similar to a test as a songwriter and a musician by “hearing” war and pain in the beat Lethal Skillz made in the midst of war in Beirut years after her own experiences of Israeli attacks on Gaza City. She wrote the words that Lethal Skillz felt when he made the beat, which is the beginning of the musical bond between them. Sara Ahmed, professor in Race and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London, argues for emotions to move between, “get stuck” on and shape the surfaces of both individual and collective bodies (2004). Ahmed suggests that “while the experience of pain may be solitary, it is never private. A truly private pain would be one ended by a suicide without a note.” (Ahmed 2004:29). I interpret this as pain being something that is always shared with other people. Ahmed discusses a sociality of pain based on an ethics that starts with your pain but most importantly “acts about that which I cannot know, rather than act insofar as I know” (2004:31). Hanna’s ability to “hear” war and pain in the musical piece by Skillz speaks to Ahmed’s sociality of pain in the sense that Hanna did not know exactly what the pain was about but she felt it conveyed in the music. She acted on that which she did not know, with the difference that she once did know having lived through similar experiences during her time in Gaza. I would describe this as applying a recollection of previously experienced pain in a new situation.

Hip-hop scholar Imani Perry (2004:6) argues that artists within hip-hop culture should be understood within the context of a community. Through the name Hanounch, the Palestinian family she lived with for years, membership in the Lebanese-oriented hip-hop crew, and her own experiences of war and destruction in a specific geographical place her music often focuses on, Hanna became a part of a particular community through which she was understood.

This situated community in a Middle Eastern context is the reason why most of the musical followers were either not quite sure of Hanounch's ethnic background or simply assumed that she has roots in the Middle East. In reality her ethnic background is Swedish and Sweden is the country where she was born and lived most of her life apart from a period in her late teenage years when she moved to the Middle East. Yet on her Hanna Hanounch Cinthio Facebook profile (Cinthio 2011) it says that she is from East Jerusalem, which Hanna explains as being an expression of her longing for the place. She mentions several times to the author that the years she spent there shaped her as an individual. Perry (2004:21) argues that the origin of an artist is important in hip-hop, but "more so as a symbolic affiliation rather than as a clear and specific historical truth" which is the case here.

The fact that Hanna has Western citizenship matters more. There is an evident awareness of the associations linked with this citizenship: Luxurious first-class treatments are made possible in the context of war and conflict enabling the one with the Western/Swedish passport to be taken to safety. This is expressed in the song "Mad respect to the 961" where Hanounch sings:

Got brothers n sisters all over the world / but while I ride first class
they stuck in third/ Political crisis, another attack / One step forward
and two steps back/ I try to relate to my boys and my girls / Truth is
we be living in separate worlds/ I'm a different species / a privileged
class / I know that my passport is saving my ass

(Cinthio 2008)

Feelings of discomfort and anger with her own “privileged class” position and experiences compared to the members of her family in the Middle East resulted in a double-edged sword when she was given the choice to leave the conflict area while they were not, as Hanna told the author. For Hanna these feelings of “privileged guilt” turned into feelings of responsibility to speak on behalf of people who are not able to speak for themselves. As told to author:

I chose to be in that situation. I experienced it and lived in the middle of it, but it was my own choice. My sisters and cousins down there have never had a free choice to actually leave it as I have. I have seen up-close how some people very dear to me have suffered tremendously because of it, and this has pushed me to become involved in matters that concern structural oppression both within families but also societies, the situation in Palestine, both internally and politically, the occupation, Israel (...) These experiences cause a feeling of obligation. There is a huge privilege to view this from the outside and actually choose to leave it. I'm not subjected to the honour-norms if I don't want to, I'm not subjected to the occupation and stuck in fucking misery like the family down there... I have the possibility of being here and then I have to speak about it. No matter if the lyrics are about girls and their situation or Palestine, no matter the level I'm convinced that the drive comes from there. Even if it's an enormous privilege it is also a difficult feeling to be the one who can get out of there, that doesn't feel good. It's weird how the world works that just because I have my passport and I happen to be born here enables such an enormous freedom of choice regarding what I want to do with my life (...). This has turned into a responsibility that has come naturally. If my sister Nadja can't rise up and say what she feels then I have to say it instead of her in a song.

(Interview with Hanna, Jan 28, 2011)

In the case of Palestine, there are two sides to this privilege. Hanna has the freedom to leave and seek refuge whenever she wants, but also to go to

Palestine whenever she chooses. Musical follower Aisha, who has both Palestinian and Swedish citizenship, told the author that her Swedish/Western passport does not help her when traveling to Palestine because she claims that the Israeli authorities on the border to Palestine would not let her enter because of her Palestinian citizenship, despite the fact that she has never been there. Aisha told the author that she wishes to change places with Hanna in order to be granted the opportunity to travel to Palestine which she refers to as her home country. Aisha's wish to switch places with Hanna demonstrates the power relations imbedded in this "privileged guilt."

The guilt is also based on living with someone else's pain, as vividly articulated by Ahmed (2004) through her own experiences of growing up with a mother diagnosed with a serious illness:

It is my mother who has pain. She has to live with it. Yet, the experience of living with my mother was an experiencing of living with her pain, as pain was such a significant part of her life. I would look at her and see pain. I was the witness towards whom her pleas would be addressed, although her pleas would not simply be a call for action (sometimes there would be nothing for me to do). Her pleas would sometimes just be for me to bear witness, to recognise her pain. Through such witnessing, I would grant her pain the status of an event, a happening in the world, rather than just the "something" she felt, the "something" that would come and go with her coming and going. Through witnessing, I would give her pain a life outside the fragile borders of her vulnerable and much loved body. But her pain, despite being the event that drew us together (...) was still shrouded with mystery. I lived with what was, for me, the unliveable.

(Ahmed 2004:29-30)

This description of living with someone else's pain, I would argue, contains elements of how Hanna might feel with regards to the pain of the Palestinian family she has lived with, but also the Palestinian people as a whole who are often associated with political struggle. By recognizing the witnessed

pain through her music, Hanounch is granting their pain the status of a real experience. Witnessing in the sense of telling the story of ones surroundings and experiences is another important aspect of hip-hop which can be applied to Hanounch (Perry 2004:88). Hanna feels obliged to tell the suffering stories of the Palestinian people. These stories are about various kinds of oppression: honour-based norms, war and occupation forces. This is also connected to a specific kind of representation found in hip-hop culture: “to scream for the unheard and otherwise speak the unspeakable” (Chang 2005:328). Representing others by speaking for them results in a production of authenticity by linking Hanounch to this view of authentic suffering and struggle. Gary Alan Fine (2004:275) states in his study on self-taught artists within the art world that “the claimed authenticity of objects rubs off on the purchaser, particularly in a society that values diversity and an expansive tolerance as expressed through commodified markers of taste.” I believe this to be comparable with Hanounch’s construction of authenticity in the context of speaking for others. The claimed authenticity associated with the specific emotions and experiences of the specific physical place “rubs” in the same way “off” on Hanounch.

A “Love and War” kind of fighter

During the interviews the author conducted with the musical followers after the release of Hanounch’s album in February 2011, we discussed the imagery used on the album cover and the official Hanounch website. Musical follower Mr B used the pink gun-shaped bag on the album cover when talking about the message behind Hanounch’s music:

The bag itself says “I’m a rebel!” (chuckle) “I’m gonna fight this war” (...) She fights a war for freedom, freedom of speech, against oppression. The message is that people are valuable, that they should have the guts to express themselves, say something!

(Interview with Mr B, Feb 17, 2011)

Fig. 1. The album cover of Hanouneh's debut album "Love and War".

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Aisha continues along the line of Hanouneh being a rebel but takes it further and uses the word terrorist when telling the author:

Terrorist, but in a good way... A terrorist doesn't really look like this, and I don't know how one looks like, but propaganda, media, everything is based on the idea of terrorists looking like this, you know what I mean, so I think that she's probably trying to show that "I'm a terrorist, but I'm not the one you think I am"...

(Interview with Aisha, Feb 15, 2011)

Musical follower Bob mentions the imagery's association with Islam through the connotations of terrorism:

...the bag looks like a gun or something like that and I think that's a way of reflecting about what Islam is today because she looks like a Muslim woman, and her scarf and her bag is like a weapon. It's the image that a lot of people have of the Islamic reality today, they are all terrorists putting bombs everywhere...

(Interview with Bob, Feb 21, 2011)

The link between Islam and terrorism as described by Bob is a common one in the post-9/11 era – a term alluding to a world where terrorism and the war against it play an important role. Historian Richard English mentions the possibility of interpreting the terms “terrorism” and “terrorist” in a pejoratively and obscure way in this era (English 2009:1). Despite its common usage the loaded term “terrorism” lacks a clear definition and “has been used in so many ways, to refer to so many different (though often partially overlapping) kinds of act, that it has become rather blurred in its usage” (English 2009:2). English continues by suggesting that the literal meaning of the word “terrorism” – derived from the Latin “terrere” meaning to frighten, terrify and scare away – inaccurately proposes to be linked to the meaning of the word “terror” (2009:5–7).

According to English, this ambiguous meaning of the word terrorism makes it possible for Bob and Aisha to compare Hanounch's imagery to one of a terrorist. Aisha alludes to this ambiguity when stating that she “[doesn't] know what one looks like, but propaganda, media, everything is based on the idea of terrorists looking like this” when referring to Hanounch carrying the gun-shaped purse and wearing a Palestinian scarf (keffiyeh/kufiya in Arabic) covering her face except for her eyes. The link to the Middle East becomes evident through the scarf in two ways. The first is the political meaning attached to the scarf itself since it has been a symbol for the Palestinian people since the 1930s making it pro-Palestinian, even if it during the last couple of decades has become a fashion statement among hipsters and left-wing youth across the world (Kim 2007). The second is the possibility of interpreting it in a militant way because of the way it is worn. Hanounch

is using it to mask herself allowing only the eyes to be visible. The latter interpretation is what Aisha referred to in her reading of Hanounch resembling a terrorist.

Bob pointed out a third possible interpretation of the way the scarf is worn – as a hijab – when addressing her gender and potential religious affiliation in the statement that “she looks like a Muslim woman” and claiming the imagery to be about what Islam is today. Both musical followers Noah and Alexander pointed out to the author the possibility of interpreting Hanounch’s scarf as a hijab, but also as a ‘fighter,’ a revolutionary. The focus on women, Islam and revolutionary ambitions was in the limelight at the time of the release of “Love and War,” which came out in the midst of the Arab Spring (Booth, Chrisafis, Finn, Marsh, Rice and Sherwood 2011). The discourse of women in the Middle Eastern countries being depicted as having an important role in these revolutions is found in the musical followers’ statements as well as the Hanounch imagery connoting a female activist (or terrorist) on her debut album released in the midst of the demonstrations and protests in the Middle East. The important role of the protesters was supported by Time magazine appointing The Protester as the person of 2011 (Stengel 2011).

The protester metaphor resonates in the debut album title “Love and War” which Hanna stated as being representative of its content: a mix of the private represented by stories of relationships and the political being represented by “angry social criticism” (Svereggae 2011). This emphasis on emotions runs through the imagery of Hanounch as well as her music as previously discussed with regards to anger and pain. Hanounch described her music to the author as emotion-driven focusing on pain, anger and self-therapy with regards to personal relationships. Gender theorist Ann Werner suggests in her doctoral dissertation about teenage girls’ uses of music and their constructions of gender that songs about social problems are viewed as more real and authentic compared to songs about lust, money and joy in spite of the fact that there is nothing claiming the longing for money to be less of a first-hand experience than agony (Werner 2009:189). A certain

type of authenticity based on writing about personal experience and feelings has served as a defining quality for rock music for several decades, argues gender theorist Hillevi Ganetz (2008:62-63). She continues by stating that this kind of authenticity has found its antithesis in pop music defined by inauthenticity based on production and image, which is the focus in her study about a Swedish reality talent show, Fame Factory (Ganetz 2008:63). The show aired on TV3 on Swedish Television for four seasons from 2002 to 2005 and was portrayed as a school for future artists with their own staff of teachers and a principal (Ganetz 2008:28). Håkan Hellström, a Swedish pop singer, has expressed strong negative opinions about Fame Factory referring to it as “a disease” he hopes will “die out” because of its extreme commercial approach (Ganetz 2008:63-64). This strong opposition to commercial success is common among artists who want to keep themselves as far away from the label “sell-out” as possible (e.g. Huss 2009).

Necessary skills

In her study of how a band creates hip-hop music and culture, Dankić (2008) examines their version of hip-hop music to include various knowledge and skills such as singing, rapping/emceeing, free-styling, beat-boxing, sms-battling and song/music writing. Skills played an important role for Hanounch as well. They are the medium used in her production and consumption of authenticity.

Most of the informants have described Hanounch’s voice as strong and powerful. Musical follower Matsimilian used following adjectives when telling the author about Hanounch’s voice: “beautiful, cute, pure but yet very strong.” Several of them also claimed not to be able to pinpoint exactly what they like about her voice. Noah described to the author that there is something in her vocal pitch which Matsimilian agrees with and gets even more specific about: “Her voice is pure... she has an infallible sense of pitch.” The word strong is often used when describing Hanounch and especially her voice, just like in Matsimilian’s description. This goes along the line of the participants in Werner’s study on music usage who viewed a powerful

voice as a positive quality and part of authenticity production in rock music unlike the high-pitched voice many women are associated with (Werner 2009:190). Hanouneh is depicted as a strong woman with a strong voice proclaiming strong messages.

The musical followers who were either currently still into hip-hop or who grew up with it have all associated Hanouneh to hip-hop in a positive manner. Musical follower Mr B claimed to the author that he could “hear hip-hop in her voice.” This positive link with the “important” hip-hop is a part of the authenticity production of Hanouneh (Werner 2009:187). Hanna used her voice as an instrument which has traditionally been considered to be the only instrument women have been viewed as having a special talent for (Ganetz 2009:131). To musical follower Alexander it was very simple. He expressed to the author that the power in Hanna’s voice is based on training.

The simplicity of the lyrics is another of Hanouneh’s skills. Singing strong messages with a powerful voice seems to be proclaimed best when done in a way which is easy to understand. Hanna explained to the author that she uses her own lyrics to express a strong opposition to the hip-hop tradition of building lyrics based on overly complicated wordplay. While she finds such lyrics impressive from a skills perspective, she explained that they rarely move her. She went on to assert that this complicated lyrical style was a front fuelled by a fear of using simple words and sentences. Instead, Hanna wanted to be able to express the way it feels as opposed to seeking protection in irony or cleverness. She claims that lyrics based on simple words can in fact be stronger by being unprotected. I interpret this unprotected to mean honesty. When speaking to the author, musical follower Alexander stressed the importance of using a style of language that everyone can understand especially when one is part of a modern political movement like Hanouneh is. He believes that Hanouneh does it the way it should be done.

Several of the musical followers pointed out the importance of Hanouneh’s collaborations with certain producers and artists. The choice of these

collaborators and other people she chose to work with seemed to be noticed by the followers as something Hanna did well, making it another one of her skills. Musical follower Big H called her smart for knowing who to “build with” when speaking with the author, and mentioned her collaboration with DJ Lethal Skillz as an example since he introduced her to the Middle Eastern hip-hop scene. Hanna was in Jamaica at the time for the author’s interview with Alexander which was mentioned to him to which he replied: “Great! That’s important connections. When you’re doing reggae music you need Jamaican connections (chuckle). Yeah, it’s crazy because no one’s producing in Jamaica anymore but you still need connections from there. Why I don’t know.”

Alexander and another musical follower, Caleb, both mentioned the producer Doobie Sounds and Mr Sloap as a reason how they found Hanouneh’s music, alluding to the importance of knowledge about producers in reggae music. This is also noticed on the album cover of “Love and War” where the songs are presented along with their producer. Hanna mentioned to the author that her musical framework has often been based on her musical collaborations – through Lethal Skillz she ended up doing hip-hop music and through the band she was in alongside her brother it was reggae.

The pink twist

Social anthropologist and gender scholar Fanny Ambjörnsson (2011:11) depicts the history of the colour pink’s association with femininity in a Western setting as approximately sixty years old. Ambjörnsson views the colour pink as “a contemporary key symbol creating feelings, commitment and devotion while simultaneously marking, maintaining and challenging various borders in society” (2011:11). Pink speaks of structures based on cultural ideas about masculinity and femininity (Ambjörnsson 2011:11) which is also a part of Hanna’s use of the colour. Hanna described how she used the common associations of pink as girly and cute in the Hanouneh imagery:

Hanna: I can understand one might think that it's aggressive in some way "eeh, using a mask" but the fact that it's pink works as a contrast to that... Despite it all there is humour in it (chuckle). I have never meant for these pictures to look tough... For me this is a way of playing with this aggressive expression, that everything actually is pink... It's a twist somehow.

The author: Why did you choose the colour pink?

Hanna: Because I think that it's a great colour (chuckle) and because it's a colour that's often linked with the opposite of everything that that picture signals and stands for...

The author: This kind of girlie...

Hanna: Yeah, exactly, this girlie, feminine and cute thing. I thought that it would be nice to mix it somehow... And then I found this gorgeous purse in Amsterdam and thought "I have to have this!" (chuckle)...

(Interview with Hanna, Jan 28, 2011)

The cute femininity described by Hanna is used to make the symbolism of war and political activism less serious, which supports the argument shared by some gender theorists that masculinity is viewed as serious, hard and authentic, while the kind of femininity Hanna is playing with is seen as this conception of masculinity's inauthentic opposite (e.g. Ganetz, Gavanas, Huss and Werner 2009). Hanna's claim that her intention was never for the imagery to come across as tough imparts a deliberately humorous aspect, which prevents the imagery from being viewed as a legitimate threat (Werner 2009:160) while allowing for possibilities of reading it differently. Despite the fact that Hanna claimed her music to be emotionally driven and fuelled by anger, the question remains whether she would feel okay with the imagery of Hanounch being depicted as angry without any possibility of reading it differently. Queer feminist activists are an example of when pink is used as an "anger tool" for making resistance against the society they

are critical of (Ambjörnsson 2011:175). They, along with the rest of the feminist movement, use a specific shade of pink – the darker vivid cerise pink used in the Hanounch imagery. (Ambjörnsson 2011:173).

Hanna expressed to the author that she saw a contradiction in the fact that the women who live up to the Western ideal of what a woman should look like are the ones encouraging girls and women to be strong, to “be themselves” and that they are fine just the way they are. The author believes that self-irony and humour as evidenced using statements such as “I am whatever you think I am” a strategy for Hanna to cope with this contradiction she identifies. In line with the work of philosopher and feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti, the choice of the cute and girly femininity in the imagery can be viewed from the perspective of the concept of “woman” as a set of options which Hanna chooses from and plays with in order to create new meanings and femininities (as cited in Sundén 2002:22–23). Braidotti states self-distance and humour as a means of imagining new gender identities by applying traditional gender definitions (as cited in Sundén 2002:22–23). The author would argue this to be what Hanna is doing through the imagery of Hanounch containing masculinity (black, leather jacket, terrorist and rebel associations, war) and femininity (pink, heavy eye make-up, love) resulting in a gender twist. During the interview with the author, Aisha depicted this twist in Hanounch’s imagery by stating that she has the looks of a woman and behaviour of a man which to Aisha is defined by being straightforward and very strong. The strong link between rebelliousness and masculinity can be complex for girls and women to negotiate since by the virtue of their gender they are associated with the very opposite of being rebels (Werner 2009:190). The paradox of Hanounch’s imagery highlights this.

Another mix of traditional gender definitions can be found in the study on female DJs in the electronic music scene by social anthropologist Anna Gavanoas (2009). Gavanoas describes the importance for women within the DJ community to be tomboys (more aggressive and confident) rather than “girly-girls” since masculinity in a certain dose provides credibility while too much feminine behaviour and looks results in no credibility (Gavanoas

2009:104). This inferiority associated with femininity is thoroughly examined in feminist scholarship while the various resistance strategies against women's inferiority and with them also feminine identity are still unexplored making them somewhat invisible (Ambjörnsson 2011:183). Ambjörnsson states that as a part of the queer feminist movement, femmes acknowledge femininity as something worthy of their time and attention using it as a resistance strategy towards the society which undervalues it (2011). This focus on emphasising the importance of femininity in a positive light can be found in the Hanounch imagery. By the strong symbolism of being a clear feminine marker in contemporary Western society, the colour pink gives feminine authority to the gender twist represented by the Palestinian scarf, the heavy make-up and the gun-shaped purse. Thus the feminine symbolism highlights the toughness associated with the masculine and takes on the function of the overall filter through which the resistance is carried out.

Musical follower Alexander told the author that he laughed the first time he saw the images of Hanounch wearing the scarf and the gun-shaped purse because it represents the way he thinks of her. He refers to this representation as girlie style resistance which he explains in the following way:

Alexander: If you're forced to carry a weapon, what would it look like when a girl would do it? A pink gun-shaped hand bag (chuckle). No comment needed, says it all... And it's also this Palestinian stuff, I guess she's Palestian-based or her parents are from there, I'm not sure, and it's like, yeah so what you expect... what do the people think when they hear "Palestine," they expect guns and this Palestinian scarf (...) and she's playing with it in a way a man would never do...

(...)

The author: You think it's radical to use pink in this way?

Alexander: Yes, totally! And I'm totally sure that she knows this...

The author: But in what way is it radical? I'm not sure if I understand...

Alexander: Ok, my point-of-view... There's a shift in the Arabic world, I guess we can see it on TV at the moment and this has a lot to do with women taking part in it, without women in Egypt, Tunisia or Libya there wouldn't be any revolution at all. I think that these, especially the young women, that it's the first time they have a part in a thing like this and this is I guess for some people there still taboo... They let it happen, I think so, I'm not sure, I have some friends from Iran and Egypt and they told me about it... There are a lot religious leaders there who have a lot of problem with this and this is also like our blue and pink stuff is based in the heads of the people living there... And there are a lot of other things like wearing a scarf... But I'm not sure, I'm not an expert, I just go with what I see and Hanounch is with her connections to this part of the world a sign for this new independence of women... With this strong base you can do women-like stuff and you can play with it and she's doing it really good!

(Interview with Alexander, Feb 21, 2011)

The link to Palestine and the Arab Spring is evident in Alexander's discussion of the symbolism in the imagery. In light of her gender and her use of symbols like the scarf and purse Hanounch is described as being a part of the revolutions which were taking place in the Middle East at the time of the interview with Alexander. This combination of symbolism based on traditional gender, religious, and political markers ascribed to a female body are important parts of the production and consumption of authenticity associated with Hanounch. Through the humour, self-irony and usage of the colour pink, Hanounch is at the very least suggestion that this is what a "real" female activist and revolutionary fighter might look like, while at the same time she claims that such a thing does not exist. Thus the result becomes a reference to the inauthentic which is the closest thing possible to an imagined authenticity: women and revolutionaries are too complex to be portrayed as symbolisms in an imagery. Through this imagery she leaves several versions for its reader to interpret. The imagery could be read as

representations of traditional female symbolism associated with the success of how convincing the gender performance is (Ganetz 2009). Through the gender performance her gender twist is based on, Hanouneh performs a quiet provocation producing authenticity by questioning the clear borders and divisions between femininity and masculinity but also what it means to be a “real” and a “fake” revolutionary. Criticism, provocation and humour inform the only possible way of dealing with authenticity in this situation.

Discussion and conclusion

This article depicts the importance of Hanouneh’s Middle Eastern cultural identity as a part of the construction of authenticity. This cultural identity is signified by the name Hanouneh which contains both the ascribed identity, focusing on personal qualities, given by the musical followers and the Arabic link which is a part of Hanna’s self-identity. The Middle Eastern cultural identity is also found in the double-naming of Hanouneh in two communities in the Middle East granting her the possibility of representing them through her membership. This is one of the factors that enable Hanouneh to speak for and represent these specific communities through which she also should be understood.

The article discusses the interplay of ethnic backgrounds and citizenships resulting in the privilege associated with some of them and the oppression associated with others exemplified with the case of Aisha’s double-citizenship. Hanna’s feelings of “privileged guilt” along with her ability to “hear pain” are argued to be parts of the construction of authenticity. Music is suggested to be Hanna’s way of dealing with the felt agony of living with the pain of the Palestinian family and also, on a wider scale, that of the Palestinian people in general.

Resistance strategies found in the imagery and the music such as the protester metaphor, the humour, self-irony and criticism of representations of women and “revolutionaries” are, by their deconstructing nature, suggested as being part of the authenticity construction. Hanna’s description of her

music as emotion-driven is supported by the driving forces of anger, struggle, humour and radicalness which has been highlighted and discussed in this article. Hanna Hanounch is depicted as constructing authenticity by deconstructing the expected connections between a particular background or origin and a certain appearance, style, use of language, values and behaviour (Bäckman 2009:218). When discussing her own view of authenticity in a hip-hop context with the author, Hanna provided two possible options for constructing it: “Either you are skilled and talented in what you do making your background and past experiences of less importance, or you have experiences of war and get credibility based on that resulting in your music not having to be as good.” This study shows how Hanounch aims to strike a balance between these two options.

Global and transnational perspectives play their part in the authenticity construction. The name Hanounch, the Hanounch imagery and her music are examples of such perspectives. Through this, the artist Hanounch and her music become a part of a storytelling about the multiculturalism wind spreading through Western Europe and the rest of the world. The collaborations as well as the musical creation process often take place in an online context in the case of Hanounch, which I would claim to be a reality for most contemporary musicians. Their musical networks are found online where communication is enabled with likeminded individuals world-wide who might eventually meet up (offline), which proved to be the case with Hanounch and the 961 Underground. This oscillation between the online and offline was depicted as a part of the Arab Spring where “the oldest of techniques” was combined with “the newest of technologies” (Stengel, 2011) making it a common way of being a protester in the year 2011.

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Notes

¹ Hanouneh's audience is referred to as musical followers because of their interest and support shown for the music and the artist. See Dankić 2012 for the complete study and especially pp. 70–87 for a further discussion on the topic of musical followers.

² The musical followers which are interviewed throughout this article have selected their own pseudonyms to protect their identities. Their freedom to select their own names explains why they are at times very different from one another.

³ The common term for a hip-hop instrumental.