FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS: DESPERATION OR WEAPON OF CHOICE?
THE CASE OF PALESTINE

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By

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Female suicide bombing is relatively a recent trend, but an increasingly disquieting one. Although utilized by both religious and secular groups, female suicide bombing has become a frequent *modus operandi* by the groups in the Muslim world. As a terrorism expert, Rohan Gunaratna estimates, “about thirty percent of Islamic suicide bombings have been conducted by women.” It has particularly been the case in Palestine where female suicide bombing had been a routine occurrence since the first “official” female suicide bombing of 2002. This phenomenon has created a dilemma in applying ‘culturally competent’ counter-measures -- measures that are designed based on understanding the cultural background, religious beliefs, and gender of a particular society. Hence, the question that one ought to ask is this; how can effective counter-measures be designed and implemented to combat this problem?

It is true that Palestinian female suicide bombing has been on a relative remission since 2006. However, given the history of the conflict, and the present turmoil in the Arab world, it will be difficult not to think about the possibility of a rising wave of female suicide bombings which could result in devastating consequences extending well beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict zone.

As a step in addressing this problem, the thesis will analyze three fundamental questions: First, what is the logic behind using women as suicide bombers from the perspective of the groups that utilize this *modus operandi*? Second, why are women
increasingly able to engage in such a mission considering the patriarchal nature of the Palestinian society? Third, what are the different motives responsible for Palestinian female suicide bombings, and are these motives any different than their male counterparts? In addressing these questions the thesis identifies some inaccurate stereotyping of the motives of Palestinian female suicide bombers which can potentially mislead policy makers in formulating effective counter-measures and make efforts of combating this threat an intricate task.

Although published books and articles are the basis of this research, information gleaned from the internet and the social media (i.e., video, YouTube, Facebook, etc.) were instrumental. Holy scriptures – primarily the Qur’an and the Hadith (a collection of Prophet Muhammad’s sayings and teachings) are also used as primary sources. For consistency purposes, all the Qur’anic citations were taken from Yusuf Ali’s English translation of the Holy Qur’an; and all the Hadith citations were taken from al-Bukhari’s collections. The term ‘suicide bombing’ is interchangeably used as ‘suicide attack,’ ‘suicide mission,’ or ‘suicide operation’ on purpose to show the different uses of the phrase by different scholars and alike. For lack of valid and objective information, attempted and failed suicide bombings are not included in this research. The thesis’s main focus is rather on ten documented and successful female suicide bombings.

Results obtained include: Unlike some sensational generalizations, each female suicide bombing case is exceptional rather than routine. Second, the motives of Palestinian female suicide bombers are generally not different than their male counterparts. Third, unlike the common wisdom, religion bears less weight in Palestinian female suicide bombing. Fourth, like the rest of the Palestinian population, occupation,
not religion or personal and gender-specific motives are the primary reasons for Palestinian women to engage in suicide missions. Fifth, using women for suicide operation may be a weapon of choice for groups that employ this tactic; however, the thesis reveals that very little achievements were gained by the organizations in terms of fulfilling their strategic goals. This would only leave us to think that female suicide bombing in Palestinian is more likely a result of an utter desperation than being a weapon of choice.

The thesis concludes by recommending states to formulate policies which are primarily based on addressing the root cause of the problem. As we all know, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the longest; most complicated and protracted conflicts of our time. Palestinian women are, as such, veterans of this long-term conflict resulting in widespread human suffering, mayhem, violence, destroyed economies, weakened political abilities and cultural fragmentation. Thus, a sensible resolution in addressing these problems would have multiple positive outcomes extending well beyond the territories of Israel and Palestine. Now is especially the time while the political landscape of the Arab world is being radically transformed to a degree that has never been seen before.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late father, Yaregal Taffere. He has been an extraordinary father that any child could have hoped for. His love, inspiration, encouragement and prayers were the air that I gulp every day. He is the reason for my existence, and all my successes in life. Although he did not get a chance to see me at the finish line, it brings warmth to my heart knowing that he left with awareness that I made it. I look up, and imagine him looking down at me with his infectious smile, saying - Yene Woin (as he used to call me) you made me proud! And in my mind, I say back to him, well, Dad - you made me WHOLE!
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INTRODUCTION

To better understand female suicide bombing, it will be useful to have some knowledge on the concept of suicide attack and its historical context. What is a suicide attack? and how did it come to existence and eventually become a form of ‘conventional weapon’ in today’s conflict zones?

Suicide attack is a type of attack in which the attacker expects or intends to die in the process.\(^1\) The sacrifice of one’s life for a cause has a historical origin that goes back to ancient times. Robert Pape in his book titled *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* explains that “the first official suicide attacks were said to be committed by the Jewish zealots of the present day Israel -- Zakari in particular, in the first century AD. It is believed that those Jewish zealots wanted to rebel against the Roman occupation by attacking Roman soldiers at a close range.”\(^2\) The way those Israelis would perform their suicide attacks, as Pape states, was “by directly attacking the Roman soldiers who always patrol in groups at plazas or squares. They would cut their throats using carving knives, and then kill themselves before they were captured by other Roman soldiers who might be in the vicinities.”\(^3\) “The Ismaili Assassins of the Middle Ages also fought their enemies by committing suicide attacks.”\(^4\) “In early1300 A.D during the Crusades, a group of Christian crusaders called the ‘Knights Templar’ used a form of suicide tactics in battles with Muslims. They would have a handful of their own

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\(^3\) Ibid.,11.

\(^4\) Ibid.
knights break through a battle field serving as human shields and open up a voyage for their other fellow soldiers to initiate fights.\textsuperscript{5}

With the advent of dynamite in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, the use of bombs in suicide attacks had begun to surface. However, suicide bombing attacks as political and military tool first appeared in 1881 when the Russian Czar Alexander II was assassinated by a suicide bomber who detonated himself with hand-made grenade.\textsuperscript{6} Similarly, during WWII the Japanese have utilized suicide bombing attacks against the United States. “They would fly their planes each carrying five hundred pounds of bombs over the American Naval ships and crash their planes and exploding shells around those ships. The Japanese were able to sink seventeen U.S. ships and damaged fifty more before the war ends in 1945. It is believed that some three thousand Japanese Kamikazes died in the mission.\textsuperscript{7} Kamikaze is a Japanese word meaning ‘divine wind.’\textsuperscript{8} Apparently, when Japan was at war with Mongolia in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century a strong typhoon wind was said to have prevented the Mongolian army from breaking into Japan, and the Japanese took advantage of the extra help from Mother Nature advanced their army and won the war.\textsuperscript{9} It seems as though that the Japanese wanted to apply the same concept in deploying their suicide bomber pilots, but what was different is that they used human bombes instead of a ‘divine wind.’


\textsuperscript{7} Elaine Landau, \textit{Suicide Bombers} (Brookfield: Twenty-First Century Books, 2006), 87.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
The Germans also used a sort of similar suicide mission during the WW II when they would develop a ‘smart weapon’ in attacking strategic targets such as bridges, command centers, etc. “They called it Selbstopher – a German word for self-sacrifice. They would use those ‘smart weapons’ basically using converted V1 flying bombs with a small cockpit on top and a pilot in it. Although those German pilots were trained to abandon those planes before the impact materializes, it was practically impossible for them to depart from the cockpit, as those cockpits were confined and were located directly under the aircraft’s engine making it difficult for the pilots to instantly take off from the aircraft. The pilots were basically ordered to stay in them to make sure that those bombs were aborted properly. As a result, it is believed that a number of pilots have perished in that suicide mission.”

But, suicide attacks pretty much went into remission until they were picked up again by Hezbollah in the 1980s followed by Hamas, then by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Russian-Chechen conflict, and recently by al Qaeda. An example of such an attack was the suicide truck bombing of 1983 in Beirut which killed over 241 US Marines. In Northern Ireland, during the 1990s the IRA (Irish Republican Army) used similar tactics, but called it the ‘proxy bomb.’ In this case, the person who would commit the suicide mission would randomly be kidnapped and be forced to drive a car loaded with explosives and delivered it to the targeted areas and completes the mission by detonating the bombs, and perishing in the car.

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10 Madeleine Bunting, “Honor and Martyrdom: Suicide Bombing Isn’t as New or Alien as Westerners Imagine,” The Guardian/UK, May 14, 2005, World News section.
The assassination of India’s former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 by a female suicide bomber named Thenmuli Rajaratnam - a member of LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) separatist movement is also another prime example.

Suicide attacks as an act of warfare have, therefore, passed through stages throughout history from being used as simple retaliation tools using whatever weapon is at hand, to a much bigger category of ‘conventional weapons’ using human bombs, and increasingly women in them. From the suicide brigades in the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, to the war-torn Lebanon of Hezbollah, to the Palestinian intifadas, to the civil wars of Sri Lanka in the 1980s, to Kurdistan, the Irish Republican Army of Northern Ireland, to Russian – Chechen conflicts, and presently to al Qaeda in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Southeast Asia, suicide bombings have increasingly become frequent phenomena.

Whether we call this recent use of females in suicide bombings a desperation, weapon of choice, or a mixture of both, history has taught us that those who have used and are using this method of attack are trying to use the resources they have at hand no matter how unconventional these tactics may look. It is also important to note that what appears to be a recent phenomenon now has actually been there for quite some time. However, with the advent of regionalism, occupation, and other political, economic, social, as well as religious instabilities, suicide bombing has become a potent weapon for offence by the perpetrators who seem to claim to have specific strategic objectives. Obviously, one might wonder what makes anyone in their right mind wants to blow

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themselves up with a determination to inflict widespread damage on others. Is it desperation at its best resulting in an absolute self-hatred? Or is it just pure rage for the other group, because it is sometimes hard to imagine how one can overcome survival instincts in committing this type of attacks.

Dr. Boaz Ganor, a leading expert in terrorism, in his article called *Suicide Terrorism: an Overview* defined suicide bombing as “an operational method in which the very act of the attack is dependent upon the death of the perpetrator.”

This is a form of attack where the attacker is very much conscious of the fact that she/he has to perish in the process in order for the mission to succeed. “The guaranteed and preplanned death of the perpetrator is a prerequisite for the operation’s success,” says Ganor. Jacqueline Rose, in her article of “Deadly Embrace” also defines suicide bombing as “Suicide bombing is an act of passionate identification – you take the enemy with you in a deadly embrace.” Unlike any other forms of attacks, the impact from suicide bombing very much influences the public understanding of it. Yoram Schweitzer explains, “since the effect from this form of attack is generally dramatic, it tends to attract attention and stir up curiosity and anxiety among the public.”

Although it is implausible to our sensibilities the effect of suicide bombing also generates empathy, right or wrong, for the

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13 Ibid.


people who carry out the mission. Regardless of its distinctiveness, as it relates to influencing public opinion, suicide bombing is definitely a weapon where protection may not be always possible, and to which there may not be a clear-targeted response.

The recent focus by scholars on female suicide bombers, however, fails to fully recognize the long history of female involvement in political resistance or violence in general. The fact is women have been participating in insurgencies, revolutions, as well as conventional warfare for quite some time now. Women have taken part in suicide attacks since at least the nineteenth century, and have also played a role in modern era conflicts that have gained momentum since the 1960s. “Women have played prominent roles in the Russian Narodnaya Volya in the nineteenth century, in the Battle of Algiers by FLN (Front de Liberation Nationale), in the Irish Republican Army, in the Baader-Meinhof Organization of Germany from 1968-77, in the Italian Red Brigades of the 1970s, as well as in the different resistance movements and organizations under the umbrella for the ‘Liberation of Palestine.’”

It is understandable why incidents of female suicide bombings seem to gain more extensive media coverage today. Historically, women have mostly played supporting roles in their participations in resistance movements. To learn that women would engage in such a lethal mission makes the story worthwhile, as the perception of women has been the gentler sex, whose instinctive maternal nature makes them far less likely candidates for suicide bombings. Mia Bloom explains this fact as follows:

Society through its body of rules and its numerous institutions, has conventionally dictated [women's] roles within the boundaries of militancy. Assisting in subordinate roles is welcomed and encouraged.

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Actually fighting in the war is not. Most often, the primary contribution expected of women has been to sustain an insurgency by giving birth to many fighters and raising them in a revolutionary environment.\footnote{Ibid., 96.}

Like any other suicide attacks, female suicide bombings have also been viewed to be inspired by religio-cultural tradition. As such, Islam has been the center of attention, and often times blamed for a number of these attacks. Incidentally, quite a number of female suicide attacks happen to be originated from Muslim communities. However, a significant number of women suicide bombers have also come from non-Muslim areas of the world. In fact, “almost 85% of female suicide bombers committed their acts on behalf of secular groups or organizations; and many of these female attackers have originated not necessarily from Muslim communities, but also in Christian, Hindu, and other religious backgrounds.”\footnote{Lindsey O’Rourke, “Behind the Woman Behind the Bomb,” The New York Times, August 2, 2008, \url{http://www.nytimes.com} (accessed June 20, 2010).} For instance, the LTTE’s (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) female Black Tigers are from a secular Marxist group, not Muslims. The Black Widows of Chechnya’s terrorist squad is from Chechnya’s separatist secular group that wants independence from Russia. The IRA’s female militant members were Christian. Robert Pape argues that religion is not the main driving factor for this form of attacks. He maintains a data-base of all suicide bombings from the early 1980s when the first female suicide bombing emerged to 2004, and revealed that of 315 completed suicide bombings, 45% of these attacks were performed by females and 80% of which were none-Muslims.\footnote{Pape, Dying to Win, 13.} He noted that the number of female suicide bombings performed by
Tamil Tiger separatist groups of Sri Lanka was far greater than the number of similar attacks done by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad of Palestine combined."\(^{20}\)

Islam has been around for thousands of years, and looking at the history of the Muslim world’s participation in the recent surge of female suicide attacks could only provide us with limited knowledge as to what extent religion is responsible. For instance, the French confronted strong terrorist’s attacks in Algeria which included bombings, but not suicide bombers. British colonizers experienced ferocious resistance by the Palestinians, but suicide bombings were never used. There have been wars and resistance movements in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict since the creation of the State of Israel, but there were no known Muslim suicide bombers until mid-1980s. Islam is a worldwide religion, but elsewhere in the world, away from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict or the Middle East where Islam is a prominent religion, no known female suicide bombings exist. The point is, if suicide bombings in Palestine and in other Muslim area conflicts are only religiously mandated choice of weapons, as many suggest, they would not have made a sudden appearance and continued to flourish within the last two or three decades. This isn’t to say that religious elements have no place in the motives of female suicide bombings, because they have. It is rather to suggest that investigating the general dynamics governing these attackers’ motives would better provide useful characteristics in combating the attack. Clearly, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict reveals a perfect opportunity to study the phenomenon, and that is exactly what the subsequent chapters of this thesis will attempt to address.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.
Using females as suicide bombers in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a relatively new trend, but an increasingly alarming one which has evidently become a prominent phenomenon since the late 1990s. This new trend has also created a dilemma for states in formulating and applying ‘culturally competent counter-measures’ - measures that are designed based on understanding the cultural background, religious beliefs or gender of a particular society. The fundamental questions that one ought to ask are: What is the logic behind in using females as suicide bombers by the Palestinian militant groups? Why do Palestinian women become increasingly willing to engage in such a mission in view of the matriarchal nature of their place in their society, and considering the conventional wisdom that woman as the bearers and nurturers of life lack the natural inclination to carry out violent acts resulting in death? How can other states implement effective counter-measures to defend their population from these attacks?

This thesis will try to find some answers to these fundamental questions by examining the different motives and circumstances leading woman, Palestinian women in particular, to volunteer for these attacks and asks if these motives are really any different than the motives of their male counterparts. This is done by examining the profiles of some of the actual female suicide bombers who have perished in these missions, as well as those who survived their failed attempts. The thesis will also make a concerted effort to identify some of the common misrepresentations and inaccurate stereotyping of the motives of these women which could potentially make efforts to combat this menace an intricate task. Although published books are the primary sources of literature in writing this thesis, information from the internet, i.e. online articles, journals, chats, etc. are also utilized extensively.
CHAPTER ONE

PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS: A BRIEF HISTORY

Although accounts of history as well as its interpretation have been used to justify claims or to counteract claims by the people who lived it, it is clear that the history of the Palestinian resistance movements evolved from a civil obedience, to a simple stone throwing acts of resistance, and finally to a full armed resistance undertaken mostly by organized groups with various ideologies.

Palestinians have been resisting occupation throughout their lives as they go through periods of occupation by outside forces. Therefore, their historical quandary is a point of departure for almost all resistance activities in the entire political as well as social sphere of this society. Their initial resistance was mostly in the form of civil defiance, especially during the periods of the Ottoman rule from 1878-1917 to the British period of 1917-1935, to that of the Arab Revolts of the 1936-1939. However, they have been resisting occupations increasingly in the form of armed struggle that began to intensify between the beginning of WWII and the establishment of the State of Israeli in 1948.¹ The resistance continued to evolve in a more organized fashion following the disintegration in the population to the neighboring countries – Egypt, Jordan, and Syria due to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the subsequent possession of additional land by Jewish settlers. In recent history, however, outcomes from three major events have contributed a great deal to shaping the form of resistance movements in Palestine. The first intifada (uprising) of the 1987, followed by the period of the Oslo peace process of

¹ Kermit Zarley, Palestine is Coming: The Revival of Ancient Philistia (Hannibal, MO: Hannibal Books, 1990), 97.
the late 1990s, and finally the recent uprising of the 2000 Al-Aqsa unrest, as it is famously known as the second *intifada*; all three events have played major roles for spiraling all forms of resistance, notably the armed struggle.

This chapter does not attempt to give the full account of the history of the Palestinian resistance movement. It is rather devoted to presenting a synopsis of the history to signify its relevance and the participation of Palestinian women in it. In this chapter, the word “resistance” is not used in its broadest meaning of the word - the power to resist something. It is used to elucidate the Palestinians’ form of resistance which could be better defined as: “resisting through underground organization composed of groups of private individuals working as an opposition force in a conquered country to overthrow the occupying power, usually by acts of sabotage, guerrilla warfare, etc.”\(^2\) The hope is to provide a general understanding of the origins of the different resistance movements that have directly or indirectly played a role in female suicide bombing of Palestine, which is the subject matter of this thesis.

The resistance movements in Palestine were initially characterized as a way of bringing about social changes in the society which were basically marginalized by the 1917 decision of the British Government’s support to establish a Jewish State in Palestine. This formal statement of policy from the British, as it is famously known as the 1917 Balfour Declaration- named after the then British foreign secretary Arthur James Balfour, was an open letter written to Baron Rothschild – the leader of the British Jewish community in London, basically promising the European Jewry a national home in Palestine.

The contents of this declaration say:

His Majesty's government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.\(^3\)

Historians tell us that the British had two things in mind when declaring the Balfour Declaration: one, they anticipated gaining a mandate over the land of Palestine after WWI by winning over Jewish public opinion both in Europe, and especially in the United States to support the Allies efforts; second, they also hoped that by giving this opportunity to the European Jewry, the Jewish settlers in Palestine would, in return, help in protecting the major strategic route – the Suez Canal which is a vital link to Britain’s South Asian possession.\(^4\) However, the far-reaching implications of the Balfour Declaration and subsequent British aspirations would significantly shape the future of Palestine through Jewish and Arab revolt, changing the face of Middle Eastern politics.

Although this declaration clearly stated, at least on paper, that the British government protects the land of the earlier non-Jewish inhabitants, i.e., Arab Palestinians, it failed to provide any form of regulation to control the influx of Jewish immigration into the area, and the continued take over and ownership of the land by Jewish settlers. Upon this new policy by the British, the land, especially the rural Palestine, would be rationed to the Jews. Two years after the Declaration, i.e., from 1919 to 1936 the settlement

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\(^3\) Britannica Online, s.v. "Balfour Declaration."

would go on without any form of agreement with the Arab Palestinians. This ‘unmerited’ transfer of the land would be disputed by the Palestinians in the form of general strikes from 1936 to 1939.

The resistance would continue through various boycotts of all British and Jewish institutions, refusal to pay taxes or obey military orders, refusal to vacate from the land designated by the British to be transferred to Jewish settlers, etc., until the mid-1930s. However, in the 1937 Arab Revolt Palestinians suffered a great loss, as the British would quickly crush the resistance by imprisoning over 5,000 Palestinians, killing nearly 150 people, and demolishing 5,000 homes mostly in the countryside. As a result, the resistance intensified and various small and large movements formed during the periods of 1931 to early 1940s. The nature of these movements was of less violence and more of civil resistance, though a few engaged in armed struggle which lead to the emergence of more organized and militant groups after 1948 – the creation of the State of Israel. Some of these earlier movements included: Young Men’s Muslim Association, The Palestinians Boy Scout Movement, and Youth Congress Party which was very much known for its involvement in the general strike. But, some more militant organizations such as Green Hand, Organization for Holy Struggle, Young Rebels or Avenging Youth, etc., have performed various guerilla style attacks on the British Army and Israeli forces.

5 Ibid.


particular groups were able to inflict enough damage to attract the British government’s intervention to eventually crash each of those militant groups.

The earlier resistance movements included some prominent female organizations in them which later on became forums for further formation of Palestinian women’s groups. The first officially organized women’s resistance movement called The Palestinian Women’s Union (PWU) was established in 1921 as part of the Youth Congress Party. This group, as in all other similar groups, was formed primarily to demonstrate against the Jewish immigration, but later became a voice against the torture of the Palestinian prisoners by the British authorities.\(^8\) The Palestinians’ Arab Women’s Congress which was launched on October 26, 1929 played a major role in galvanizing Palestinian women to participate in the political and social movements, and paved the way for the formation of some independent women’s movements.\(^9\) The Arab Women Executive Committee (AWE) was the off-spring of this Congress, which was established to serve as a recruiting tool to organize and form women’s groups which will be representing Palestinian women independently.\(^10\)

The 1930s were also the period where Palestinian women’s political awareness reached its highest level. In the late 1930s, a militant women's group called *Zahrat Al-Okhowan* was formed to fight the British occupation alongside with other men-dominated

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\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Ibid., 25.
militant resistance groups.\textsuperscript{11} The Arab Women’s Association (AWA) and the Arab Women’s Union (AWU) in Jerusalem were the two prominent groups who were able to organize large demonstrations in the cities such as Jaffa and Nablus where a huge number of Palestinian prisoners were detained by Israeli forces due to the 1938 Arab Revolt. They often resisted against the treatment of those prisoners and demanded their release. These groups organized massive demonstrations which resulted in some violent actions like smashing shop windows and intimidating shop owners, who did not participate in the 1936 general strike, by pouring gasoline on their produce.\textsuperscript{12}

In 1948, with the official creation of the State of Israel, came a new and renewed resistance which gave rise to the emergence of a number of different resistance movements, many of which were armed. The focus of the resistance movement has fundamentally shifted to being more of nationalistic in nature. The fundamental objectives of almost all the resistance movements during this period were based on the notion of ‘reclaiming Palestine.’ The ultimate end goal, of course, is to establish an independent state of Palestine which basically stretches from the Gaza Strip, to the West Bank and to East Jerusalem. It is important to note that this claim by the Palestinians was based on the earlier geographical division designed by the British during pre-1948 to grant Palestinians their sovereign state, which exists side by side with the Jewish state,


leaving Jerusalem to be monitored internationally with the UN’s supervision.\(^\text{13}\) However, the implementation of this draft division never materialized. Because this division was not really followed through neither by the British nor by the UN, it resulted in more and more resistance on the part of Palestinians. The resistance began to widely attract a form of armed and violent struggle among the different groups against Israel, particularly after the third Arab–Israeli war of 1967 which enabled Israel to annex an additional 21% of the contested land of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.\(^\text{14}\) This Israeli occupation and the concurrent refugee problem would become the central issue of the resistance movement in Palestine.

We will look at four major resistance groups both in Gaza and the West Bank that have played important roles in the overall Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the participation of women in it. These groups include: the \textit{Fatah, PLO, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Hamas}. Although ideology may differ among these groups, they share the same goal -- ending Israeli occupation in and around the area of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, and establishing an independent Palestinian state. But there are differences in the extent of the realization of this goal among these organizations. These differences have to do with popularity, affiliations, support from other countries, and the question of Israel, etc. For instance, there is a difference between religious-based organization such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas versus the more secular ones like \textit{Fatah} and Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The difference on the question of

\(^{13}\) Ilan Pappe, \textit{A History of Modern Palestine}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 175.

\(^{14}\) Beverly Milton-Edwards, \textit{Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A People’s War} (New York: Routledge, 2009), 120.
Israel is also vivid between Hamas which calls for or a complete destruction of Israel versus *Fatah* which supports the two state solutions.

**Fatah**

Its full Arabic name is *Harakat al Tahrir al Falastini* (Palestinian Liberation Movement). This organization was founded by Yasser Arafat in Kuwait in 1957 while he was exiled and working as an engineer there.\(^{15}\) The purpose of this organization’s formation, according to its charter, was to promote armed struggle using all sorts of resistance tactics including suicide attacks with the goal of liberating all Palestinians, and establish an independent Palestinian state, which had been the British Mandate by then.\(^{16}\) It is largely a political organization, mainly a nationalist in nature, with a military wing called the Al aqsa Martyrs Brigade under it. This military wing was responsible for a number of attacks on Israel since its first attempt of armed resistance when it attacked the National Water Carrier On January 1\(^{st}\), 1965. *Fatah* joined the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in July of 1968, and has become a prominent voice in the Palestinian politics ever since.

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\(^{16}\) Ibid.
PLO

Palestinian Liberation Organization was established in 1964 in Cairo with the help of Egypt and the Arab League under Ahmed Shukhairy as chairman. It is composed of a number of guerrilla groups and political factions, i.e., Al Fatah, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Palestine Peoples Party (PPP), and the Syrian-backed secular group called As Saiqa. Yasser Arafat who formed and led the Al Fatah group within PLO would eventually become the chairman of PLO.

The stated goal of this resistance movement is to establish an independent Palestinian state using armed forces. PLO’s initial commitment was disbanding of Israel through an armed struggle. PLO conducted various attacks on Israel and other factional groups in the region using the local PLO militants which resulted in the 1974 UN’s official recognition of PLO as an organization representing Palestinians both in the occupied territories as well as refugee camps. In the same year, all the Arab States also recognized PLO as a form of government of Palestine in exile, and by 1976 PLO was given full membership to the Arab League.

This organization was initially based in Jordan, however, in September of 1970; it was forced out of Jordan, as a fighting broke out between the young guerilla fighters of the PLO called the Fedayeen and the Jordanian Army. Taking advantage of the chaos

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18 Ibid.

caused by the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, PLO tried to attack Israel from Jordanian soil. The clash between the two, as it is famously known as the “Black September” forced PLO out of Jordan to relocate in Lebanon, as it was severely smashed by the Jordanian Army. Based in Lebanon, PLO would engage in attacks with other Lebanese internal factions who opposed its presence inside their territories. While in Lebanon, the PLO was accused of using civilian areas as headquarters for its fighters. As a result, clashes among internal factions of Lebanon brought about a civil unrest, and on April, 1975 civil war broke out in Lebanon. In the mean-time, PLO continued its resistance through guerilla style attacks on Israeli targets including its civilians on the Israeli-Lebanon border.

The most prominent one was the so called ‘Coastal Road Massacre’ of 1978 in which more than fifty Israeli civilians including children died. This attack was organized by a female PLO member called Dalal Mughrabi who detonated a hand grenade on a bus load of Israeli tourists who were hijacked by a group of PLO militant group led by Mughrabi. On PLO’s part, the timing was aimed at disrupting the peace talks that were going on between Israel and Egypt. This act promoted Israeli invasions of southern Lebanon, pushing the PLO out of its border. Shielded by the instability in Lebanon, PLO continued its resistance for the next few years until it was finally driven out of the area due to the second Israeli full-scale invasion of Lebanon in 1982. In the process,


21 Ibid.

about 800 Palestinians were massacred by Lebanese Christian militias on September 15, 1982 in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Thousands and thousands of Palestinian civilians would become displaced, again becoming refugees in the neighboring Syria and Jordan. Women and children suffered the most. PLO and its leadership were exiled in Tunisia where it would reorganize itself and continue the resistance from a distance using the local affiliated small groups under its umbrella. PLO’s armed group which called itself “Black September” was involved in executing a number of known attacks on Israeli civilians outside of the occupied territories such as: the Munich Olympic Massacre of 1972 where 11 members of the Israeli Olympic team killed while taken hostages by PLO militant squad at the Summer Olympics in Munich, Germany. Also, in 1970 Laila Kahlid, a prominent member of the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) brought the world's attention to the Palestinian struggle as she joined her comrades in the PFLP by taking over five airplanes to demand the release of Palestinian political prisoners. PLO suffered a minor set-back after Israel attacked PLO’s headquarters in Tunis on October 1, 1987 and killed 60 of its prominent members that included many of the leadership.

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In 1994, as part of the 1993 Oslo Accords, Yasser Arafat formed the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) as a governing body in the areas of self-rule. Two years later, Arafat was elected the president of the Palestinian controlled territory. PLO remained as the umbrella organization for many of the small guerilla groups who resisted Israel militarily inside the occupied territories. For decades, PLO has been anonymous with Palestinian resistance movements, but its influence began to recede with the death of its chairman, Yasser Arafat in 1994, and with the emergence of other not so secular resistance movements. A number of Islamic groups somehow managed to offer Palestinians an Islamic alternative to existing secular and local political trends and ideologies, and thus moved the Palestinian people to abandoning the old dogs such as the PLO, and join hands with more religious-based organizations such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas.

**Islamic Jihad**

Palestinian Islamic Jihad is an Islamist Palestinian nationalist organization which was founded in 1979 by three Palestinian students, Fathi Shikaki, Abdul Aziz Odeh (or Awda or Ouda), and Bashir Moussa, who were studying in Egypt.\(^{25}\) They were members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood up until the late 1970s, and their initial rationale for forming this group was that they did not believe the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood known as *Ikhwan* in Gaza was ‘Islamic enough.’ They wanted a stronger religious group which can mobilize the resistance among the younger Palestinian population. However,

the group detached itself from the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt citing its dissatisfaction with this group for not giving enough attention to the Palestinian cause. In 1981 the Egyptian government expelled Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) from the country when it learned that the organization was closely linked to the group that was believed to have assassinated President Anwar Sadat. PIJ relocated in the Gaza Strip recruiting young radical minds of the population to engage in an armed struggle in and around the contested territories up until 1987 – the beginning of the first uprising. After being expelled from Egypt a few members of the group relocated in Lebanon and sought the help of Hezbollah there, and were receiving military and financial assistance from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. However, PIJ’s headquarters found a safe haven in the Syrian capital Damascus and moved its office there permanently, although a small number of its members still remain in southern Lebanon bordering Israel. This group is not well connected with the mainstream Palestinian population and has a very limited popular support, as its method of resistance is mainly violence.

PIJ refused to recognize the Palestinian Authority as a legitimate government and did not participate in the 1996 PA election. Unlike Fatah, Hamas and other similar organizations, PIJ does not participate much on the political process. This group’s platform is restoring an Islamic region in the whole “historic Palestine” and destroying Israel through a ‘holy war’ or Jihad. PIJ is responsible for the majority of suicide bombings in Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank. Being the first Palestinian Islamic militant movement gives this organization historical significance.
Hamas

Hamas, an acronym for its Arabic name - *Harakat al-Muqāwamat al-Islāmiyyah*, which means "Islamic Resistance Movement," was established in December of 1987 by the late Sheik Ahmad Yassin, as an outgrowth of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood movement. This loosely organized movement was established following the eruption of the first Palestinian intifada (uprising). Although it’s political agenda seems to embody deep Islamic religious elements, this organization emerged as a result of the Palestinian people’s overall fortitude since the catastrophe of 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel in general and the setback of the 1967 war in particular. With the establishment of the State of Israel thousands of Palestinians had become refugees in the neighboring countries. The 1967 third Arab-Israeli war added another problem when Israel seized additional land along the Gaza Strip and the West Bank which had brought about an influx of Palestinians refugees. In addition, the lack of attention from the Arab countries to the Palestinian cause motivated the Palestinians to take matters in their own hands, and Hamas emerged as counter actor not only to resist the exodus, but also to force the ‘occupiers’ back and ultimately drive them out of the ‘historical Palestine.’

Although Hamas is an Islamic militant political organization, the majority of its resources are devoted to social and public service. Its charitable work in building schools, hospitals, mosques, helping the needy, women and children in particular, helped Hamas gain respect among the Palestinian population in disarray. However, its armed wing, the *Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades*, named after the legendary Palestinian jihadist

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fighter - Sheik Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam of the 1930s is responsible for a number of military attacks; especially, suicide bombings against Israel’s military targets and its civilians.²⁷ It is believed that Hamas is the first group to use suicide bombing attacks. Yahaya Ayyash, who was the leader of the military wing al-Qassam Brigade is responsible for introducing and perfecting the suicide bombing techniques.²⁸

Hamas published its official charter in 1988 signifying its platform to establish an Islamic Palestine state on the land of ‘historical Palestine.’ Hence, the two-state solution is not a part of the political goal for Hamas. This organization does not recognize Israel, and the only way of resisting Israeli’s occupation is through Jihad – the holy war.²⁹ As a religiously based resistance movement operating under the banners of “Allah”, the fundamental belief of this organization is that the land of Palestine is basically the land for Muslims and that it is the duty of every Muslim to protect this sacred land. It is, therefore, the ‘sacred obligation’ of every Palestinian Muslim to protect the land and keep it from being inhabited by non-Muslims.

Hamas was an active opponent of the Oslo accords - the US-sponsored peace process that oversaw the gradual and partial removal of Israel's occupation in return for Palestinian guarantees to protect Israeli security. Although Hamas is identified as a ‘terrorist’ organization by the West, it won the 2006 Palestinian Authority’s (PA) general elections. In its first run for Parliament, Hamas won 76 of the 132 seats in the Palestinian

²⁷ Ibid., 16.
Legislative Council. *Fatah* the oldest of all the factions, won 43 seats.³⁰ This landslide Hamas victory was a surprise to the United States, Israel and Hamas itself. Hamas is funded mostly by oil rich gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia. Iran has also been providing military training and funds to Hamas.

Hamas’s earlier resistance was not known for including women in it. However, the recent participation of this organization in the political process of Palestine proved that Hamas strength is also heavily depend on its women. A prime example of this was its surprising win of the 2006 election in which out of the 76 parliamentary seats won by Hamas, 6 were women. This clearly indicates that Hamas’s strategy in including women in its resistance paid off, and most likely will continue to do so in the future.³¹

Two important uprisings marked Palestinian overall resistance to ‘occupation’ in the recent history. Both of these uprisings were closely linked to bringing a number of major negotiations and grounds for action by both Palestinians and the Israelis.

“The first Palestinian *intifada*—translated either as ‘uprising ‘or ‘shaking off’ officially began on December 9, 1987 as a response to a deadly collision between an Israeli military truck and a Palestinian car in which four Palestinians were killed in the Jabaliya refugee camp.”³² However, three days prior to this incident, on December 6, 1987, an Israeli businessman was stabbed to death by a Palestinian group of young men.

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while shopping in Gaza Strip.\textsuperscript{33} Some Palestinians felt that the bus accident was intentional to avenge the death of the businessman. In any event, this uprising was a prelude to a significant form of resistance which had turned into a violent uprising claiming the lives of many on both sides, especially that of Palestinians’.

The uprising intensified with instances of harsh repression by Israeli military against growing protest and demonstration, especially in the Jabaliya refugee camp where an Israel officer shot and killed a young Palestinian demonstrator.\textsuperscript{34} The revolt spread quickly into the Gaza Strip to the West Bank, and later to East Jerusalem. This first incident is said to have been initiated by local residents involving mostly a non-violent resistance in the form of boycotting Israeli instructions, mostly in the civil administration in the Gaza and the West Bank.\textsuperscript{35} Refusing to pay taxes, ignoring curfews, and marching out on the streets would become daily activities of the residents of the area. But, it quickly progressed into some low level violence such as: rock throwing, road blocking, burning of Israeli flags, etc. Although this uprising was not planned and organized by any particular Palestinian resistance movements, it was later managed by the PLO from Tunisia, where its headquarters was located. PLO had formed a body called The United Leadership of the \textit{intifada} to oversee this uprising and provide guidance when needed.\textsuperscript{36}

The first \textit{intifada} was triggered by the culminating frustration and anger of the Palestinian people who had felt that no one was listening to their cause. The Jordanians,

\textsuperscript{34} Ruth Margolies Beitler, \textit{The Path to Mass Rebellion: An Analysis of Two Intifadas} (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 100.


\textsuperscript{36} Mark Tessler, \textit{A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict} (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press: 1994), 678.
who were not lovers of PLO, retreated from their West Bank claim, leaving Palestinians to their fate. Egypt had also withdrawn its claim on the Gaza Strip. The rest of the Arab states were watching the situation on the sidelines, as their attention was on the Iran-Iraq war at that time. The superpowers who were supposed to be looking for a peace initiative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict basically ignored the Palestinian agenda at the Reagan-Gorbachev Summit meeting, as this meeting tactically focused only on the issues of arms control. Even if the peace process continued and some form of agreement was reached between Palestinians and the Israelis, Palestinians on the occupied territories feared that they would be at a disadvantage, as they would have retained only a much smaller area of their land. These coupled with the ever-growing population of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as a lack of basic necessitates such as food, shelter, etc. had forced them to take matters into their hands. It was simply an expression of frustration and revolt by the whole generation of Palestinian people, especially the youth, who were born into the occupation and had never known anything else.

Over the course of the first intifada (1987-93), an estimated 1,100 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces and 164 Israelis were killed by Palestinians. In addition, 120,000 Palestinians were arrested, and an estimated 1,000 Palestinians were killed by Palestinians themselves as alleged collaborators. Internal factions among other similar organizations such as the Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and Fatah would intensify. The uprising lasted for three years and is recognized for some important landmark efforts in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a whole.

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This first intifada brought about three important actions in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. First, it brought international attention to the Palestinian cause, as a number of Western countries including the UN and the US started to condemn the measures that the Israel’s Defense Force’s (IDF) was using to put down the uprising. Second, it forced the two parties, Israel and Palestine, to establish the first direct face-to-face talks without going through the usual mediating neighboring Arab states. The Madrid Conference of 1991 is one prime example, which resulted in the 1993 Oslo Accords two years later. In the Oslo Accords, Israel recognized PLO as representative of the Palestinian people, and allowed its leadership return to Gaza, and Israel’s withdrawal of its troops from parts of Gaza Strip and the West Bank. However, four crucial and contested issues, i.e., the status of the Palestinian refugees, the question of Jerusalem, the Jewish settlement on the occupied territories, and security and boarder issues were untouched. Third, the PLO was forced to recognize the state of Israel and renounce terrorism in the Algiers Declaration of 1988. In return, the US and other countries joined the Arab League in recognizing PLO as a form of government representing Palestinians which laid the ground for the creation of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

The first intifada had also contributed to an unprecedented involvement of Palestinian women in the political as well as social spheres. Women participated in street demonstrations and other public spheres, often revealing their importance in the struggle of the national cause. Although the uprising was not violent and more civil obedience,

thousands and thousands of Palestinians ended up in Israeli jails. According to UNFPA, more than 8000 Palestinians were imprisoned during the first intifada and these forced Palestinian women to play the role of mother and father and provide basic necessities for their children, often having to seek work outside of their homes. The report also indicated that by the end of the first intifada, 11 percent of all Palestinian households in the West Bank and Gaza were run by women.\(^39\) While the nationalist discourse had not interfered with the changing role of women in the uprising, and the faith of women’s ‘honorable’ role in society, Palestinian women themselves put their ‘honor’ in the political nationalist context. In other words, the involvement of women in this uprising was not viewed as a gender transformation, but rather viewed as a response to a national call, so the ‘honorable’ status of women in the society was overlooked. If one can take away one surprising element of this uprising, it will be the involvement of Palestinian women both in the civil disobedience and clandestine logistical assistance to their male counterparts. However, the role of women in the intifadas will be the subject of the following chapter.

The second intifada or the Intifadatat Al-Aqsa, in Arabic, began in late September of 2000 in East Jerusalem. Although the actual ‘official’ cause of this intifada is still not well-known, it started right after Ariel Sharon, the leader of Israel’s right-wing Likud Party, who was running for Prime Minister visited al-Haram al-Sharif or the Temple Mount in Jerusalem on September 28, 2000. Al Haram, where the al-Aqsa Mosque is located, is the third holiest shrine of Islam.\(^40\) Apparently, his visit inflamed some Palestinian nationalist sentiments as it was viewed as a deliberately provocative symbol

\(^{39}\) Guyatt, The Absence of Peace, 27.

of Israeli control of all of Jerusalem, east and west. The following day, a large number of Palestinian young people demonstrated against Sharon’s visit and began clashing with Israeli police force.

As in many other aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there are differing claims, analyses, and narratives regarding the question of what sparked the second intifada. However, it is clear that this uprising erupted during the intensified Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as the situation on the ground for Palestinians could not get any worse in all aspects of their existence, i.e. economically, politically or socially. Experts believe that the escalation of the Israeli settlement in the West Bank and Gaza continued right after the end of the first intifada in 1993, nearly doubling by the beginning of the second intifada – 2000.41 Israel confiscated more Palestinian land for the settlements and closed their access roads. Israel also extended its policy of closures, which restricted movements, and its network of checkpoints, where Palestinians were often humiliated. It continued to demolish Palestinian homes and to uproot and burn olive and fruit trees for ‘security reasons’ and as a form of collective punishment for acts of Palestinian terrorism.

Any understanding of this intifada, however, must began with the historical context of the major events that have affected the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the periods between the first and second uprising. The signing of the Oslo agreement between Israel and the PLO on September 13, 1993, gave the Palestinian people hope that they would shortly see Israeli settlements dismantled, their economic conditions

41 Guyatt, The Absence of Peace, 143.
dramatically improved, and their flag raised in a sovereign State of Palestine in all of the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

Seven years later, Israeli settlements had only expanded, the average Palestinian was stuck deeper in poverty than before, and the Palestinian Authority now controls a disappointing less than half of the West Bank. When the Camp David summit meeting of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, U.S. President Bill Clinton, and Arafat in July 2000 failed to achieve the ‘final status issue’- an agreement leading to the creation of a Palestinian state, Palestinians lost their hope, and as a result, despair and heights of anger flared-up in the minds of every Palestinian.

On the other hand, the Israelis are skeptical that the second intifada was triggered by Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount. They argue that years earlier than the eruption of the second uprising, there were increases in the number of military training camps, increases in the military build-up by the Palestinian Authority way beyond the permitted number by the Oslo agreements, a lack of attempts by Palestinian authorities to confiscate illegal weapons, and frequent releases of terrorist detainees from Palestinian prisons. So they concluded that Sharon’s visit was only a pretext to the uprising.

Unlike the first intifada which consisted of popular protest, general strikes with a low level of violence mostly stone throwing and road barricading by young Palestinians, the second intifada was typified by its armed conflict, guerilla warfare, and terrorist attacks. Due to Israel’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon Hezbollah, an Iranian backed resistance movement which was operating in Lebanon, got the upper hand in providing the intifada with weapons and training. It redirected funds that it had received from Islamic states such as Iran to the different Palestinian factions, especially to the Islamic
Jihad and Hamas that were operating inside the occupied territories. The hope here was that when Israel suffered years of bloody guerilla war from Hezbollah on its southern border with Lebanon, it was forced to unilaterally withdraw its forces from the area. This was conceived by many Palestinian factions including a number of Arab states as a defeat to Israel, and if they employed the same guerilla type of attack in the occupied territories, they would perhaps be able to force out the Israeli forces and disrupt the continuous settlement unconditionally. It is, therefore, no coincidence that suicide bombings became the weapon of choice and came to define the Palestinian armed struggle of this intifada. However, this tactic of warfare was not implemented right after the eruption of the uprising. It was rather used as a last and desperate resort in response to the heavily armed Israeli force. In fact, according to Israel sources, suicide bombings were not used until a year into the intifada.42 Robert Pape described the use of suicide bombing in the Palestinian second uprising as: “Suicide attacks are always a last resort. What you see is that they almost always come later, after the ordinary violence - when you have ordinary violence that doesn't rollback the occupation.”43 The majority of the suicide attacks were carried out by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, although the military wing of Fatah – the al-Aqsa Brigades and the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine participated in a few. By the end of 2004, there had been 135 Palestinian suicide bombings which had killed 500 Israeli civilians bringing the war right to the center of Israel’s cities.44 When the intifada began to wind down towards the end of 2004, 2,859 Palestinians had been killed and tens


43 Pape, Dying to Win, 67.

44 Ibid., 69.
of thousands more injured. Israel destroyed more than 3,700 Palestinian homes and placed more than 7,300 Palestinians in Israeli prisons.45

The second resistance movement can be noted for some important outcomes which have shaped and are still shaping the overall Israeli-Palestinian efforts in achieving peace. For one, the uprising brought about unprecedented human losses on both sides. According to the summary of data by the Israeli’ Information Center for Human rights, a total of 6371 Palestinians, of whom 1317 minors, were killed by the Israeli forces. Almost half of this total figure did not participate in the uprising. The Palestinian suicide bombs and rockets have also killed 1083 Israelis inside Israel and in the Occupied Territories, of whom 741 of the fatalities were civilians, of whom 124 were minors, and 342 were members of the security forces.46 Palestinians suffered major losses in their leadership, particularly in their senior leadership, during the second intifada. Israelis had 240 targeted assignations which included the killings of prominent and key leaders of the different Palestinian organizations. For instance, the killings of the Hamas founders Sheik Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz Rantissi, in 2004, the assassination of the Abu Ali Mustafa and Mustafa Zibri, leaders of the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in 2001, killing of one of the leaders of the Tanzim Movement, Raed al-Karmi, on March 22, 2004, and the assassination of the commander of the military wing of Hamas – the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigade, Sheik Salah Shehada and 15 other people

45 Beiter, The Path to Mass Rebellion: An Analysis of Two Intifadas, 105.

46 Ibid., 104.
including his wife and children in July 2002 were among the many high profile killings by Israel.\footnote{Ramzy Baroud, The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 162.}

To conclude, since the turn of the 20th century, Palestinians have been resisting the occupation first, against the British Mandate, then the Jewish settlement, and the subsequent establishment of the State of Israel. Asking whether, after such immense resistance, the Palestinians have made any progress in their cause, or whether they have a long way to go in achieving their goal is just anyone’s guess.

After years of struggle, two major \textit{intifadas}, several negotiations, agreements, UN resolutions, etc., Palestinians still do not have a state of their own, and millions still remain in exile in refugee camps. Seventeen years after the Oslo Accords, the only legal framework of negotiations, they still engage in resistance activities to force Israel to honor its agreements. At the same time, they also fight their own authorities to make them think beyond the long-term results of the struggle and to address the immediate needs that the society faces on a day to day bases, i.e., joblessness, poverty, education, healthcare, etc. Today, although the main issue confronting the Palestinian people, both men and women, remain occupation, the mere question of survival is in the minds of many Palestinians.

\textbf{The Role of Women in the Resistance Movements}

Since the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the participation of Palestinian women in resistance activities has passed through several stages. However, the notion that women have an inherently different agenda for participating in resistance movements in Palestine
sparked different arguments. This notion is particularly prominent in the West, and as a result, it exacerbated the limitations of addressing many women’s issues, as they are viewed as issues that can only be addressed in apart from their relationship with their male counterparts. The fact is Palestinian women’s involvement in the resistance movements cannot be viewed outside of two factors - the occupation and the national resistance which are also fundamental factors for the rest of the Palestinian society.

Palestinian women have always been active both politically as well as socially. Their direct involvement in the resistance movement pre-dates the establishment of the state of Israel, going back to the Palestinians revolts against British colonialism. In the early stages of the Palestinian resistance movements the role of women was based on grassroots level activities, and was largely of nonviolent. This is not to suggest that they did not participate in the sporadic armed struggle. Ellen Fleischman described the degree of women’s participation during the early stages of the Palestinian resistance movements as follows:

Despite most historians’ reference to Palestinian women’s activity during the Mandate period as “bourgeois, politically unaware, and passive,” Palestinian women had established an organized and often militant movement that was actively involved in social, political and national affairs.48

According to Julie Peteet, the role of women in the Palestinians’ resistance movements before the two intifadas (uprisings) can be categorized into four different time periods: the 1920-1929, 1936-1939, 1947-48 and 1948-65.49


During the period of 1920-1929, women’s role in the resistance movement was generally that of supportive role. Conforming to the traditional behavior of their role in the family and society at large they provided largely logistical and moral support from the domain of their homes. However, they have also participated in demonstrations and strikes protesting the systematic takeover of their lands, particularly in the villages, and demanding the cancellation of the British government’s support, famously known as the ‘Balfour Declaration of 1917’ which confirmed the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. In addition to their non-violent street activism Palestinian women had also demonstrated their commitment in community rebuilding such as taking care of the families of the martyrdom, establishing small scale community businesses, and forming day-care and small community centers, etc. It is during this period that the Palestinian women’s participation in the resistance movement actually seeded its roots to later function in a mobilized and organized fashion. The establishment of the first Palestinian Women’s union 1929 headed by women activists such as: Melia Sakain and Zalikha Shehabi was an important first step endeavor of this period.\(^50\) The Palestine Arab Women’s Congress which was launched on October 26, 1929 in Jerusalem is another prime example of this period. More than 200 Palestinian women participated in this congress showing their organized political activism by passing resolutions to address the national problems. To execute and administer these resolutions, this congress formed, what was later known as, Arab Women Executive Committee (AWE).\(^51\)

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 54.

\(^{51}\) Ellen Fleischmann, “The Emergence of the Palestinian Women’s Movement,” 18.
During the second time period (1936-1939), Palestinian women’s involvement had tremendously increased, and for the first time women were involved in direct combat of the armed rebellion due to the outbreak of the 1936 revolt, historically known as the great Arab Revolt. Palestinian women had become more and more aware of the implications of the revolt on their day to day lives, and as such they began their involvement in the capacity of direct participation in the rebellion and guerilla fighting. In 1932, a militant women's group called Zahrat Al-Okhowan was formed to fight the British occupation of Palestine.\(^2\) However, those women who would participate in direct rebellion were mostly the women from the countryside whose homes were destroyed and their land taken by the new Jewish settlers.

The ironic perception of the participation of Palestinian women in the resistance movements during this period is that they were viewed by many, particularly by the male population in the society, as “not gender-specific” participation. This is to mean that those women were only protecting their land and properties without giving much thought to the feminist nature of the problem. But, this misconception had helped not only undermine the integral part of the Palestinian women’s struggle, i.e. feminist issues such as: women’s education, economic wellbeing, etc., but also gave rise to some of the current stereotyping of the participation of women in political and social spheres in Palestinian society in general. Surely, reclaiming their land and property was the primary focus of those rural Palestinian women; but it was also an early indication of their social and political awareness in which feminist issues played a major. “Women’s frequent

participation in demonstrations signified their willingness to engage in ‘unladylike’ and even violent behavior, thereby defying cultural norms that prescribed limited public visibility of women.” Women of Palestine conceived that their involvement in the struggle was directly linked to their feminine movements, and they were not shy of positioning their role in a political arena for the same. As such, Women’s Union of Palestine was established under a clear concept of the role of women in the struggle.

With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the world’s political dynamics had profoundly changed, and as a result, the Palestinian national movement had also gained momentum. The women’s movements in the struggle had also helped the different armed groups in and outside of Palestine recognize the importance of women’s participation in the struggle, and acknowledge that women were one of the vital resources for the revolution. Perhaps, this recognition paved the way for a little more willingness of the different Islamic factions to incorporate women in their struggle. This further affirmed that the liberation of women was fundamental to the liberation of Palestine.

The establishment of the state of Israel, and the subsequent exodus of Palestinians to the neighboring Arab countries such as: Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt forced the Palestinian women scattered into different refugee camps outside of their home land. The direct consequence of this disintegration was a retreat from their political activism for a while and going back to other social and charitable work. Many of refugee women would devote their time to the survival of their family and their community. The physiological impact of this expulsion on women was also tremendous, as they constantly have to work to heal the pains of separation, and keep the memory of their homeland

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53 Ellen Fleischmann, “The Emergence of the Palestinian Women’s Movement,” 19.
alive in the minds of young Palestinians who being raised by refugee families, and who may never see home again, but only retain a vision of it just from the memories of their mothers and grandmothers, and this wound transcend through generations to come. On the other hand, however, the disintegration gave them a sort of collective new and unique opportunity, as women of various walks of life within the Palestinian society would incidentally come together and settle in those various refugee camps. These women would re-organize themselves under a common goal of returning home and ‘reclaiming their land and identity,’ and this would lead us to the next phase of the Palestinian women’s participation in the movement.

The fourth time period of 1948-65 produced a number of organized Palestinian women’s movements such as Al-Nakbah where women would take up military trainings on a constant basis. The foundation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 gave a new meaning for women’s participation in the social and political affairs of the society. For the first time the Palestinian Women Union would represent its members in the founding meeting of the PLO in East Jerusalem, and this clearly laid a ground for more women’s activism. It was during this time period that the General Union of the Palestinian Women (GUPW) of 1965 was formed. This period was seen as a period when the women of Palestine really voiced their significance in the struggle, and perhaps made the different political factions be conscious of what was to come of this group of the society. This was truly a period where many Palestinian women genuinely believed that they would also have a stake in their government when statehood is realized.

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The growing participation of women in the resistance was, however, greatly compromised due to the 1967 war as it is famously known as the “Six-Day War” between Israel and Egypt. “This war had resulted in an acquisition of more land, i.e. the Gaza Strip and the West Bank by Israel – some 22% of more land to the 78% already acquired.”55 As a result, millions of Palestinians were displaced both internally and outside the occupied territories. Having lost control of their land and their livelihood in general, Palestinian women were forced to become the sole providers and support to their families and their communities under horrific living conditions in refugee camps, as their men are either engaged in armed struggle, lost their lives in it, or were under Israeli incarceration within the territories. The women would take up more responsibilities, especially the ones that are generally reserved for men in that society. “A small number of women would participate in the direct warfare; for example, Leila Khaled, who famously carried out military operations against the Israeli forces in the late 1960’s. As a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), she was said to have volunteered to become a revolutionary in order to liberate her people from occupation, and also free herself from male domination.”56 However, regardless of this increased role of women in both public and private spheres, the perception on many gender issues had not changed, and as a result did not really contribute to a more active engagement of women in the political arena.

During the 1970’s, however, due to various experiences gained in Diaspora at the refugee camps, mainly in Jordan and Lebanon, Palestinian women had begun engaging


themselves in military operations in a number of guerilla organizations such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, and gained other official posts within PLO. On the other side, in the occupied territories, different women’s committees had been organized under each local political faction and served side by side with their male counterparts. This is not to say, however, that the existing gender issues were in any way tackled. In fact, many of the fundamental feminine issues such as: forced marriage, domestic violence, personal status law, as well as honor killings remained unaddressed regardless of the grass root activism efforts. This is mainly due to inability to reach out women in the rural villages and some of the refugee camps because of the lack of economic resources. Many of various projects established to help women in the rural areas would vanish with no further directions or guidance as to how those women would be assisted in the future. This paved the way for further confusion and more disintegration of families especially women and children. This would in turn create a situation for many of these women both in the rural and urban areas to get involved in resistance movement more than ever, notably, in the two intifadas, though their role in each of these uprisings would differ in nature from one another.

Palestinian women’s participation in the first intifada of 1987-92 is recognized for its unprecedented engagement of women in a genuine democratic activism and mass mobilization for non-violent participation. It was also a defining movement for Palestinian women to reveal the significance of their participation in their society in which their involvement runs counter to the patriarchy. This is to say, women were able to sway, although briefly, the restrictive view of female roles that prevails in traditional Muslim society. As this intifada was directly linked with the Palestinian national
movement, the women’s participation helped respond to some of the aspirations for independence and other day to day social needs. This was vividly seen in the women’s boycotting of Israeli products and establishing their own small scale community industries such as: cheese making, jam making, and community gardening as an alternative to enhance their source of income.\textsuperscript{57} Establishing of underground community schools to replace the schools that were shut down or demolished by Israeli forces, guarding neighborhoods, organizing food supplies to the needy, etc., were also some of the important roles undertaken by women during this intifada.

The first intifada not only enabled Palestinian women to assume the roles and responsibilities that had generally been preserved for men, but also made them realize the indispensability of their role in the struggle. There is no doubt that nationalism played a major role for Palestinian women to be a part of the resistance, but this also gave them a legitimate setting for their activism outside their ‘nation.’ In fact, women's participation in street actions locally has provided basis and served as a model for new types of popular committees that included mass-based organizations and women participants from all ranks and classes of society both in the contested territories and outside. Among the many popular committees, the Palestinian Relief Committee which was set up to support the Palestinian prisoners and their families largely incorporated women in its leadership. However, soon after the first intifada ended with the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), women once again faced challenges of gender division of power and resources.

Unlike the previous intifada, the second intifada (Intifadatal al Aqsa) of 2002-05 is recognized for its lack of women’s involvement. This is because, the socio-political reality of the situation on the ground created such a perplex role for women in the struggle. With the formation of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), the role of women in the resistance movement would suddenly become dubious. This is due to the emergence of the different religious factions trying to impose their own version of traditional as well as religious rules in the evaluation if the women’s role in the society. Women’s participation would again be viewed as a postscript to the men’s struggle. Women who demonstrated quite a leadership role and became willing to participate even more in the second intifada had begun to realize that their role was being pushed back to only home and family matters. The male dominated PNA would take-up all forms of negotiations with the government of Israel, but would leave almost all of the women participants and their issues away from the negotiation table. This was particularly the case for the negotiations that came after the Madrid peace talks of 1992. And this was really a step-back for women’s part taking in the political sphere. The patriarchal pattern of power clearly affected the role of women in not only resistance movement, but also in basic day to day social issues. Because of the decreased participation of women in the political and social spheres, basic women’s issues as: women’s health, women’s education, marriage, etc., would get subsumed by conflict politics. The lack of authority and the lack of a clearly defined role in the struggle coupled with the worsening of the living conditions at the ground made Palestinian women re-think their place in the society.

The resistance movement of the first *intifada* which was able to mobilize mass-based organizations that largely incorporated the participation of women who challenged and transgressed proscribed gender roles in their own way was compromised by the new gendered nationalism in the second *intifada*. Women’s participation in the political and social spheres would become censured by the political leaders of the different factions who, almost all, were men and who were interested in only positioning themselves to take control of the leadership once statehood is achieved. This was done in a deliberate fashion by constantly declaring that women’s role in the struggle or in the society was in the home. Like any other member of the society, Palestinian women also had dreams and aspirations, but their efforts and aspirations of achieving them were marginalized, and their enthusiasm and hope waned with the second *intifada*.

The Oslo Accord of 1993 or as it is commonly known as the Declaration of Principles (DOP) did nothing to advance the Palestinian women’s issues and their involvement in the political arena. Primarily, the focus of this Accord was on three fundamental issues: the withdrawal of Israeli military from some parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the affirmation of Palestinians for the right to self-governing, and the recognition of the existence of Israel by the PLO. Other pressing social issues including women’s issues were basically pushed aside and the women’s involvement in the negotiation had become insignificant.

Regardless of the efforts made by both sides and the intermediaries, the Oslo Accord failed to deliver the promised frame-work for future negotiations on other vital ‘final status phase’ issues such as: the returning of refugees, the case of Jerusalem, the Jewish settlements, security and borderer control, and of course a Palestinian Statehood.
The effect of the failure of the Oslo Accord began to thwart the entire peace process beginning with the assassination of Israeli’s Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, two years after the signing of the Accord, by a young right-wing Israeli fanatic. Scholars on the subject matter such as William Quandt believed that the real set-back to the Oslo Accord came when the Israel’s conservative Likud party won the election of 1996, and Benjamin Netanyahu became prime minister. 59 According to Quandt, Netanyahu did not really care much about the peace process, and rejected repeated requests from the West to stop the Jewish settlements in the Gaza and surrounding areas. He deliberately slowed down the Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and enhanced settlement on the disputed area. 60 The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat is also partly to be blamed for the failure of this Accord, as he intensified importing arms and building a much bigger security force than agreed upon and by setting up authorities in the parts of the West Bank that the Israelis have abandoned.

The backlash of these misdeeds on both sides would produce series of deadly suicide bombings in Jerusalem and other Israeli cities by angry and frustrated Palestinians. Hamas mobilized and recruited a number of young Palestinians including women for this mission. Consecutive suicide bombings in the cities of Afula, Hadera, Ramallah, West Jerusalem and the Dizengoff Center in Tel Aviv would shock Israel, and continued to ignite the conflict between the periods of 1996 – 2000.

Once the platform for the negotiable points on the Oslo Accord had been established later in the process, and the war for national representation was somehow


60 Ibid.
“won” with Palestinians having a body of government to represent them, the need for the use of women in the struggle has further diminished. In 1998 President Clinton stepped in to revive the peace process by hosting a meeting at the Wye River Plantation in Maryland between Arafat and Netanyahu where the two parties signed an agreement that meant to give Oslo a new life. However, when Netanyahu went back to Israel, he “again dug in his heels” and started to blame the Palestinians for failing to fulfill the bargain.\(^\text{61}\) Regardless of Netanyahu’s efforts, the peace process still had the support of the majority of Israelis; and in 1999, Netanyahu's coalition fell apart, and he was defeated in a bid for re-election by Ehud Barak. With the election of Barak came a new hope and determination on both sides including the United States. As such, in July of 2000 President Clinton again brought Ehud Barak and Arafat together for a final round of negotiations that was started between Arafat and Netanyahu two years earlier. The meeting was held here in the US at Camp David. Barak made an offer that many consider Israel's best ever. Although the details of the offer by Barak were never official, it was believed to include some important steps to be taken by the Israeli government such as: “Israeli’s deployment of 95% from the Gaza Strip and 100% from the West bank, as well as the creation of a Palestinian state and Palestinian control over East Jerusalem, including most of the Old City.”\(^\text{62}\) This move was considered unprecedented by many including some Palestinians. However, when Yasser Arafat was given a map

\(^{61}\) Ibid.

that showed a Palestinian state made up of several isolated corners of land surrounded by Israeli troops, Arafat walked away.

The already delicate peace talks came to halt when Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount complex, the site of the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque, the holiest place for both Jews and Muslims, when he was running for prime minister on September 28, 2000. He declared that the complex would remain under the control of Israel, and this had created huge anger and rage of Palestinians who came to demonstrate in very large numbers the day after his visit. The demonstration quickly turned to violent altercation between the Palestinian demonstrators and Israeli military. As a result, the second intifada broke out soon thereafter and proved more deadly than the first.

Rioting gave way to guerrilla attacks and then to the apparently endless series of suicide bombings. Israeli forces marshaled tanks, helicopter gunships and jet fighters, leaving many Palestinian civilians and gunmen dead. With the collapse of Barak's government, Israelis chose Ariel Sharon as their prime minister. In late March, Sharon launched a full-scale invasion of Palestinian territories, much of which remains occupied.63

In the first intifada of 1987 Palestinian women were actively engaged in a more aggressive resistance by participating in direct demonstrations side by side with their male counterparts; and participating as a back-up source on logistics in guerilla style resistance. The basis for this high level of participation was the condition on the ground. Living under the humiliation of identity checks, body searches, being in refugee camps for so long, etc. they could not just sit and accept the status quo. They took their anger and frustrations out on the streets demonstrating their desperation for a better life and better future, and they could do that ‘freely.’ But, the second intifada gave a sort of a different image of Palestinian women’s participation in the general political and social

arenas. In the second *intifada*, women seemed less active and somewhat less motivated both locally as well as outside the territories. Not that the situation on the ground has significantly improved, but rather more and more factions claiming to install religious values began to impose their own interpretation of Islamic rules and regulations. It had generated radicalized views among the different Palestinian organizations such as Hamas.

Dissatisfied with the outcome of the Oslo Accord, Hamas took matters into its hands by trying to impose strict social and religious rules in the society, particularly on women. Leaders of Hamas legitimized their action in the name of preserving the cultural and religious identities. As such Hamas’s view on women’s participation in the political as well as social arenas was limited mostly to the household. These limitations and social restrictions imposed on women would greatly affect the direct participation of women, especially in the political arena. As a result, this second *intifada* had inadvertently affected the participation of Palestinian women in the resistance movements. The role of women, once the essential element of the struggle which had begun to galvanize the nationalist consciousness and the fight for the path to self-determination with an ultimate goal of statehood, would become less essential and at times even irrelevant. As such, many women were relegated to the old patriarchal structure of order. Frustrated by the declined interest in counting them in the struggle and confining them back to their domestic household role, some Palestinian women took matters into their hands by increasingly looking for ways and means of expressing their frustration and dissatisfaction, and showing that not only did their role count, but also that it is imperative to the general national cause.
The role of women in the Palestinian resistance movement could, therefore, be summarized into four generational levels of participation. The first would be the women of the 1920s who formed their national union in an organized fashion to struggle side by side with their men. This was considered historic as it gave the Palestinian women a mandate to participate in the national struggle for freedom.

The second stage is the participation of women in the 1930s and 1940s. These women emerged at the height of the Arab Nationalist Movement and had gained respect and place in the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) structure. Their participation was viewed by many as a vital element in the struggle for self-determination and nationalism. Women of this era participated in leadership roles within PLO. This period is also notably important for Palestinian women, as they were able to mobilize and organize their fellow women living in the various refugee camps.

The third is the participation of women during the 1950s and 60s. Through the establishment of the General Union of the Palestinian Women (GUPW) in 1965, women challenged the nationalist movements on gender issues and were pretty much able to, at least, make a point of making women’s issues as equally important as the nationalism issues. This was also a period catalyzed by the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Therefore, the participation of women during this period was somewhat intense and dramatic. This was a period when broader activities and greater commitment were seen on the part of the Palestinian women in general. Amal Kawar argued that “this is partly because more attention was given to women by the leftist organizations like
Women’s Action Committees, and the Working Women’s Committees. Women’s struggle was no more limited to the provision of support services, as they are now engaged aggressively in political, ideological, military, economic, social, educational, and cultural arenas. It was now clear that the national cause was a question of the very existence of the Palestinian people as a whole, and this was deeply felt by women of Palestine. Their involvement during this period was, however, highly politicized by the different factions of the time like the Fatah.

The fourth time period is the period of the 1980s and beyond. This is the time when new forms of activism were seen among Palestinian women, where a number of women’s issues such as marriage, inheritance, and honor killings were the center of discussions. The establishments of Women’s Higher Council in 1988 helped people realize the importance of the participation of women in political and social arenas. However, women’s interests really only came to the forefront through the establishment of independent NGO’s and women’s centers which were founded in the 1990s. These centers have tried to address women’s issues such as, domestic violence, personal status laws, honor killings and forced marriage, etc.

With the recent reality of Hamas’s win and control of Gaza, there emerged a renewed need for participation of Palestinian women by Hamas in the fight against the Israelis. Hamas seems to change its strategies by doing what had been the undoable as far as involvement of women in its operations is concerned. Hamas seems to begin empowering the role of women in the political sphere, especially in the police force and military by deliberately recruiting female members. This is a bit interesting considering

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the improbability of Hamas’s inclusion of women in any of its political or social struggle in the past. One might wonder the level of desperation on the part of Hamas to compromise its fundamental values and beliefs on the role of women by taking steps to include women in the struggle. It will be naïve to assume, however, that this radical step taken by Hamas could somehow alleviate the burden on Palestinian women and grant equal rights and a place in the society, as the reality is still far from that.

Israel’s determination to undermine Hamas’s government, although democratically elected, made the lives of Palestinians especially women and children in the Gaza Strip face a harsh reality of living under cordon. The security fence, the network of checkpoints, constant closure of roads, the internal battle between the two political parties – the Fatah and Hamas, and just the general hardship arose from the culmination of all of the above had helped radicalize the resistance movements and the participation of women in them.65 Many women feel that life could not be any harder and they do not feel that they have a choice in life. The seemingly none attainable goals of economic opportunities, educational attainment, and political participation of women in Palestine have become far from reality for many. It seems that their best opportunity is to express their anger and frustrations of the siege, and reveal their intentions of being a vital part of the lives of the Palestinian people as a whole is by being actively involved in all forms of resistance movements including self-scarifying through suicide bombings.

To date, life for many Palestinian women continued to create confusion of roles arising from the chaotic situation of life under the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the

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societal rules that were inherently imposed on them. Yes, in addition to living in a society continuously threatened by military oppression, women of Palestine also have to constantly struggle to enhance their status in society; and in doing so they confront other forms of social oppressions. This is due to their under-privileged socio-economic background caused by some fundamentalist groups’ actions to propagate traditional roles by emphasizing strict social rules which confines the women’s role to the home. But, we need to keep in mind that the reasons for the involvement of Palestinian women in the resistance movements have primarily been the same as their male counter-parts. The shared national interest is fundamentally resisting the occupation and this should not in any way be viewed as a less immediate cause for Palestinian women’s involvement. Of course, their urge to be recognized as vital part of the struggle that have similar needs and aspirations for life as the rest of the society could be peculiar to them due to patriarchy in their society.

In summation, Palestinian women have been participating in all forms of resistance including armed resistance, for as long as the Palestinian people have fought for national liberation. Thus, more importantly, their involvement cannot be viewed independently from the history of all Palestinian people’s struggle. However, throughout the Palestinian history, the participation of women has been influenced by models of ‘appropriate female behavior’ that is designed for them by their society, but this has been changing over time undermining all the conventional expectations. This is a result of the combination of two facts: first, the desperation and hopelessness of the never-changing situation on the ground like the rest of the population, and second, the unwavering determination of these women to establish their equality in their own society.
The Concept of Jihad in Palestinians’ Resistance Movements

There is a great deal of confusion with the definition of the word jihad and the role it is playing in shaping the Muslim world and Islam as a religion today. Jihad has often times been understood, especially in the West, as a guide to radical Islamic theology. This understanding was obviously generated from the use and interpretation of jihad by different groups who designed it to fit their own particular goals. There is also a huge dilemma among Islamic scholars in defining jihad and having to defend the differing illustrations of it in the Islamic scriptures. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the teachings of Islam on jihad in its scriptures.

This chapter aims to look at some fundamental beliefs of Islam and the vindication of jihad in three original Islamic sources and Islamic history in general. These sources are: the Qur’an (Islam’s Holy book), the Hadith (Prophet Muhammad’s teachings), and the Shari’ a (Islamic Law). Based on these sources, the role jihad played in the Palestinian resistance movements will then be examined.66

Islam appeared in the 7th century in what is now known as Saudi Arabia. It established an empire that spread across three continents in a very short period of time; it expanded from Spain to North Africa, from the Middle East to Southeast Asia.67 Muslims claim that Islam, which incorporated the three monotheistic Christian teachings of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, received its last monotheistic teaching from the Prophet Muhammad. According to Muslims, Muhammad completed the Prophecy.68

68 Ibid.
emerged against the backdrop of paganism and idol worshiping which were prevalent in
Arabia, eroding the earlier monotheistic beliefs and teachings. This was particularly true
in the city of Mecca - a center for Islamic pilgrimage and trade. This period of idol
worshiping, commonly referred as the Dark Ages, is a point of departure for
Muhammad’s teachings and Islam. He declared to his community that he received divine
revelations directly from God through the Angel Gabriel. God ordered Muhammad to go
back and preach to his community about realities of existence and of all other
metaphysical realms relating to divinity, prophecy, and the hereafter. God also revealed
to Muhammad all that He enjoined, forbade, and allowed to his people with regards to
their religion and other worldly affairs. His teachings would later be recorded and
preserved; eventually became the Holy Scripture for Islam – the Qur’an. His ministry
lasted twenty-three years, during which time he founded a religion, a nation, and a state.

Like Christianity, Islam believes in the resurrection and the Day of Judgment.
According to Islam, humankind is required to lead a ‘righteous life’ on earth in order to
be prepared for the afterlife and the Day of Judgment. The path to a righteous life has no
mediators for Islam. It is the word of God, i.e., the Qur’an that will guide one’s life into
righteousness. Islam does not believe in the concept of the human form of God. As such,
Muhammad is simply his messenger. As a result, Islam places Muhammad in line with
the other Prophets like Abraham and Moses. Unlike other religions, in Islam, one only
needs to affirm Shahada, the pledging of commitment to God and the teachings of his

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69 Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Islam: An Introduction* (Selangor, Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, 2010),
357.

70 Noor Mohammad, “The Doctrine of Jihad: An Introduction,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 3,
no. 1 (1985): 381.
Prophet – Muhammad, to become a Muslim. The pledge says: “I bear witness that there is no God, but the God, (Allah) and Muhammad is his Prophet.”

Beginning at age forty, Muhammad received the revelation from God which continued until his death. Based on these revelations he continued to teach his community to build a “perfect” society based on Islamic principles, and in it, created an Islamic polity. Muhammad created this Muslim society in the city of Medina, which later on expanded his empire beyond the city. After his death in 632 A.D., his teachings were passed on and followed by his successors. However, only four of his first successors, who were described throughout Islamic history as the “rightly guided,” are credited with preserving his teachings in their authenticity. These Caliphs were: Abu Baker (633-634), Umar (634-644), Uthman (644-656), and Ali B. Abi Talib (656-661). Their primary achievement was their ability to create a formal text of the revelation which had previously only been a collection of oral texts, recited by his followers who had memorized his teachings. The practice of Islam was primarily based on the strict rules and guidelines of the Qur’an; this period is signified as the “Golden Age” in the history of Islam. The strict religious values practiced by Muslims were considered a path to “good life.” This “good life” is the life that Allah (God) wanted to see his people follow and the guide to this life is described in concrete terms in the Qur’an.

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71 Sonn, A Brief History of Islam, 81.


74 Ibid.
As Islam continued to flourish with the advent of trade, so did the emergence of different cultures and traditions. The ever changing conditions and situations of human life needed a structured spiritual legal order in which God’s revelations (the Qur’an) could be practiced rightly. As a result, the Sharia (Islamic Law) had originated. Sharia, in its literality means ‘the way to good life.’ It is also often described as rightfulness or lawfulness. The Sharia is composed of four Islamic sources: the Qur’an, the Hadith (validated stories containing Muhammad’s traditions and teachings, Ijma (consensus of the legal scholars), and Qiyas (individual reasoning by analogy). Noor Mohammad described the essence of Sharia as follows:

According to Sharia, the sovereignty resides in Allah (God), thus the organs of the state have to act within the limits of the divine law, i.e., the Sharia. This sovereignty is recognized by incorporation of Sharia in an Islamic community or Islamic state. In this sense the Sharia is the constitutional law of the Muslim society. In the Western world such sovereignty is often attributed to the members of the community or to the state itself.

Muhammad’s teachings of the monotheistic nature of God appeared on the backdrop of polytheistic and idol worshiping society. This had particularly become a problem after Muhammad’s death. Hence, it was difficult for the Islamic community to fight and change the status quo without some sort of legal rule by which every member of the community would be governed. Thus, inspired by spiritual elements, Sharia had now become the community’s legal governing body. The Sharia had to emphasize the importance of striving to follow Allah’s (God’s) path, and that striving? is jihad. In his

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75 Bonner, Jihad in Islamic History, 38.
essay of Facing the Global *jihad*: the roots of Holy War within Islam itself, Carlos explains:

The first opinions and commentary on jihad, known as Ahkam al-Jihad, appeared in the 8th and 9th centuries CE and laid out the rules of Islamic warfare. These Islamic rules came two centuries after Prophet Muhammad's death and were derived from the study of 70 war verses in the *Qur'an*, coupled with Prophet Muhammad's example, in particular his wars with the Meccans that occurred between 622 and 632 CE. The expansion of the Islamic empire led to new complexities and a re-definition of warfare and its conduct. Abdul-Rahman al-Awzaee (707-774 CE), who existed during the reign of Walid ibn Malik of the Umayyad dynasty, was the earliest scholar obsessed with jihad as warfare and considered an early commentator on the subject.78

What is *jihad*? According to Bonner, it literally means “striving.” He states that “the Arabic word *jihad* does not mean holy war or just war. When followed by the modifying phrase *fi sabil Allah* or ‘in the path of God’ *jihad* has a specific meaning of fighting for the sake of God.”79 Reuven Firestone has also described *jihad* as: “the Arabic word *jihad* has no relation with the holy war or even war in general. The word derived from the root word of *jahada*, the meaning of which is to strive, exert oneself, or take extraordinary pains.”80 *Jihad* is described in the three important Islamic sources, i.e., the *Qur’an*, *Hadith*, and the *Sharia* in slightly differing ways. This has to do with the natural circumstances involving the emergence and development of Islam both as a religion and a nation. For example, the revelations in the *Qur’an* are divided into two – the Deccan and Medina. The Meccan revelations, generally, address more religious commands, while the Medina revelations address social, political, economic and environmental

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practices. A number of collections on the Hadith were also said to have been fabricated due to the internal struggle within the Muslim community for Muhammad’s succession.

The foundation of jihad is the Islamic propagation (da`wah). But, jihad also needs to be viewed in the context of a “political community” particularly, in the first hundred years of Islamic history. Muhammad founded a nation based on an Islamic religious doctrine, and was able to assume more territorial land when Muhammad migrated to Medina and the surrounding areas. The spread of his religion eventually turned the entire Arabian land into an Islamic nation. Jihad was legislated in the context of specific circumstances, especially after the Prophet Muhammad’s migration from Mecca to Medina. For instance, in Mecca, Muhammad was said to have taught patience under attack, and no other attitude towards it was possible. This is because during the years leading to his forced fleeing in 622, there was minimal to no resistance against him and his community. But, later in Medina, when Muhammad and the Muslim community continued to assume larger territories, the right to repel attack started to appear in his teachings. Gradually, jihad became a prescribed duty of all Muslims to fight against and subdue the Meccans. So, jihad began to be understood as a religious duty placed upon Muslims to spread Islam by arms. This assertion was later argued by some scholars that Muhammad himself acknowledged and urged his followers to wage a continuous and even ‘unprovoked’ war against the non-believers of Islam until they were subdued challenging the other side of the claim by Muslims that Muhammad never preached violence. This requirement to continue jihad until the entire world is included in the

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82 Ibid., 23.
territory of Islam does not seem to imply that Muslims must wage nonstop warfare, as Muhammad allegedly had invited the non-Muslims to embrace Islam first, or else pay the poll tax in order to remain as members of the community under the Muslim polity.\(^{83}\)

After his death, the Islamic jurists also saw *jihad* in the context of conflict in a world divided between the Dar al-Islam (territory under Islamic control) and the Dar al-harb (territory of war that consisted of all lands not under Muslim rule).\(^{84}\) The inhabitants of the territory of war were divided between "People of the Book" (mainly Jews and Christians) and polytheists.

What does the *Qur’an* say about *jihad* and how is it interpreted in the world? The description of *jihad* in the *Qur’an* is limited and often times obscure. References stated in the different chapters and verses do not always relate to one another, making it somewhat difficult to come up with one unified meaning. The following verse in the *Qur’an* asserts this notion:

> Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress limits...And slay them wherever ye catch them. And turn them out from where they have turned you out; for persecution is worse than slaughter; but fight them not at the sacred Mosque unless they first fight you there; but if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of those who reject faith. But if they cease, Allah is oft-forgiving, most Merciful. And fight them on until there is no more persecution. And the religion becomes Allah's. But if they cease, Let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression. (Surah 2:190-193)."\(^{85}\)

This verse of the *Qur’an* indicates that the use of *jihad* is only necessary when Muslims are attacked, but war is not to be initiated. This is why some Islamic authorities argue

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\(^{83}\) Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History*, 12.

\(^{84}\) Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v. “Islam.”

that authentic *jihad* is not warfare waged in the world against external adversaries, but rather an internal spiritualized war against self and this is a higher *jihad*. But this notion is debatable as authenticity of Muhammad’s teachings on the higher and lesser *jihad* concept could not be verified. As such, some still argue that *jihad* is more of a collective community commitment to defend and spread Islam than individual effort. Muslims further argue that *jihad* does not promote the taking of innocent lives or committing suicide to inflict pain or death on others. The following verse on the *Qur’an* signifies this claim.

> O ye who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves in vanities:
> But let there be amongst you Traffic and trade by mutual good-will: Nor kill (or destroy) yourselves: for verily Allah hath been to you Most Merciful! If any do that in rancor and injustice, - soon shall We cast them into the Fire: And easy it is for Allah.\(^86\)

In this verse, the *Qur’an* clearly describes that *jihad* is not to be used as taking one’s life while defending Islam. This is further supported by yet another verse in the *Qur’an* which does not only discourage suicide, but also made it a punishment on the Day of Judgment. “If somebody commits suicide with anything in this world, he will be tortured with that very thing on the Day of Resurrection.”\(^87\) However, we also find the following verse in the *Qur’an*, which states quite the opposite:

> O ye who believe! What is the matter with you, that, when ye are asked to go forth in the cause of Allah, ye cling heavily to the earth? Do ye prefer the life of this world to the Hereafter? But little is the comfort of this life, as compared with the Hereafter. Unless ye go forth, He will punish you with a grievous penalty, and put others in your place; but Him ye would not harm in the least. For Allah hath power over all things. Unless ye go forth, He will punish you with a grievous penalty, and put others in your place.

\(^{86}\) *Qur’an* 4:31.

\(^{87}\) *Qur’an* 73:73.
place; but Him ye would not harm in the least. For Allah hath power over all things.88

This verse in the Qur’an clearly describes the reward of committing jihad in the hereafter. It not only promotes jihad, but also makes it obligatory for every Muslim.

Their state is like that of the people of Pharaoh, and of those before them who treated their Lord's signs as lies. We therefore destroy them in their sins, and We drowned the people of Pharaoh; for they were all doers of wrong. The worst beasts truly in the sight of God are the thankless who will not believe; They with whom thou hast leagued, and who are ever breaking their league, and who fear not God! If thou take them in war, then, by the example of their fate, scatter those who shall follow them - that they may be warned: Or if thou fear treachery from any people, throw back their treaty to them as thou fairly mayest, for God loveth not the treacherous. And think not that the infidels shall escape Us! They shall not weaken God...O Prophet! Stir up the faithful to the fight. Twenty of you who stand firm shall vanquish two hundred: and if there be hundreds of you they shall vanquish a thousand of the infidels, for they are a people devoid of understanding....No prophet hath been enabled to take captives until he had made great slaughter in the earth. Ye desire the passing fruitions of this world, but God desireth the next life for you. And God is mighty and wise.89

So when the sacred months have passed, then fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem of war; but if they repent and establish regular prayers, and practice regular charity, then leave their way free to them; for surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.90

Based on previous and other similar verses in the Qur’an, we can then attest that jihad is applied not only out of love for God, but also to seek justice for wrongs done

89 Qu’ran 8:59-70.
against the Muslims. Fighting in the path of God is a worthy response to the activity of the oppressors, especially when the wrong is inflicted upon vulnerable people who were expelled from their homes and forced off their land.\footnote{W. Montgomery Watt, “Islamic Conceptions of the Holy War,” in Thomas Patrick Murphy ed. The Holy War (Columbus Ohio: Ohio State University, 1976), 155.} According to the Qur’an, it is also appropriate to declare jihad on the non-believers. One can safely say that jihad in the Qur’an is described not only in defensive and offensive terms, but also as both conditional and unconditional undertaking. In both cases, jihad remains as a divine obligation, and a jihad that is performed in defense, in resistance against occupation, injustice, oppression, and transgression is all admissible.

Jihad is described in the Hadith in a more elaborate and at the same time ambiguous way. As a result, some of the descriptions were questionable and even considered a “false” or fabricated collection of Muhammad’s teachings, as their authenticities could not be verified by Islamic jurors. Among the many, the much debated Hadith on jihad was the notion of the presence of two types of jihad – the higher jihad and the lesser jihad. The higher jihad is the fight against one’s inner sin and self-purification of the soul. The lesser jihad is the one that is fighting against enemies of God and his religion - Islam on the outside. Inner jihad is the higher jihad, because it is necessary to stay on the straight path and strive in Allah's cause.\footnote{Qur’an 22:78; 49:15.} The lesser higher jihad concept was taken from Muhammad’s sayings supposedly upon his return from a battle with Meccans. “We have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad. A man asked the Prophet, “What is the higher jihad?” The Prophet replied “the struggle against
the evil of one’s soul. (Narrated by Abu Huraira)”93 However, in the same token, there is another Hadith that says:

A man asked the Prophet: What is jihad? He (s.a.w) replied: “To fight against the infidels when you meet them (on the battlefield).” The man asked: “What kind of jihad is the highest?” He (s.a.w) replied: “The person who is killed whilst spilling the last of his blood (Narrated by Abdullah bin Masud).”94

Here on this Hadith, the higher jihad is not the fight against one’s inner self, but rather the fight against the disbelievers. It is sharply contrasting with what was supposedly said by Muhammad on the earlier Hadith above.

The Prophet said that, the person who participates in holy battles in Allah’s cause and nothing compels him to do so except belief in Allah and his Apostles, will be recompensed by Allah either with a reward, or booty (if he survives) or will be admitted to Paradise (if he is killed in the battle as a martyr). Had I not found it difficult for my followers, then I would not remain behind any saiya going for jihad and I would have loved to be martyred in Allah's cause and then made alive, and then martyred and then made alive, and then again martyred in His cause. (Narrated by Ibn 'Abbas)95

On this Hadith, jihad is used as a glorified deed that can be applied in Allah’s cause. However, with this Hadith, came the exposition of the doctrine of martyrdom which made martyrdom a part of jihad.

Allah's Apostle was asked, "What is the best deed?" He replied, "To believe in Allah and His Apostle (Muhammad). The questioner then asked, "What is the next in goodness? He replied, "To participate in jihad (religious fighting) in Allah's Cause." The questioner again asked, "What is the next (in goodness)?" He replied, "To perform Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca) 'Mubrur, which is accepted by Allah and is performed with the intention of seeking Allah's pleasure only and not to show off and without

93 Al-Bukhari, Sahih al-Bukhari, 4:34.
94 Ibid., 4: 52: 41.
95 Ibid., 4:52: 42.
committing a sin and in accordance with the traditions of the Prophet. (Narrated by Abu Huraira)\textsuperscript{96}

Here on this \textit{Hadith}, \textit{jihad} is yet again described as an obligation which rewards Muslims on the Day of Judgment.

It has been narrated on the authority of Masruq Who said: We asked 'Abdullah about the \textit{Qur'anic} verse: "Think not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. Nay, they are alive, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord" (\textit{Qur'an} 3:169). He said: We asked the meaning of the verse (from the Holy Prophet) who said: The souls of the martyrs live in the bodies of green birds that have their nests in chandeliers hung from the throne of the Almighty. They eat the fruits of Paradise from wherever they like and then nestle in these chandeliers. (Narrated by Masruq)\textsuperscript{97}

Here we have another \textit{Hadith} which clearly promotes paradise. Unlike the \textit{Qur'an} which has limited verses on \textit{jihad}, the \textit{Hadith} has full chapters dealing with \textit{jihad}. These chapters are not always clearly or unambiguously stated, and thus create controversies among scholars and schools of thoughts on their authenticities. Generally \textit{jihad} on the \textit{Hadith} has a central theme: the propagation of the faith – Islam through combat.\textsuperscript{98}

What does the Islamic law (\textit{Sharia}) say about \textit{jihad}? As the legal religious body formed to govern Muslims, the \textit{Sharia} is focused on \textit{jihad}. \textit{Jihad} is required by the \textit{Sharia}. The \textit{Sharia} defines \textit{jihad} as, “a war against non-Muslims to establish the religion.” It is an individual duty of every Muslim and the Muslim head of state (\textit{caliph}). Only the \textit{Caliph} can wage \textit{jihad}. Muslim caliphs who refuse \textit{jihad} are in violation of \textit{Sharia} and unfit to rule."\textsuperscript{99} As an agreed legal interpretation and application of the word

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 1:2: 25.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 20:46:51.

\textsuperscript{98} Bonner, \textit{Jihad in Islamic History}, 49.

\textsuperscript{99} Mohammad, “The Doctrine of \textit{Jihad}.” 389.
of God – the *Qur’an*, and the tradition and teachings of Muhammad – the *Hadith*, the *Sharia*, prescribed *jihad* as a tool for enforcing the spread of Islam until the *Dar-al Islam* – the house of Islam come under submission.

All four schools of Islamic jurisprudence understood *jihad* as the lawful warfare against nonbelievers, and as part of the obligation of the Ummah - Muslim community to subdue these nonbelievers in the name of *Allah* and under the *Sharia*.\(^\text{100}\) There is almost complete agreement among all of them in the interpretation of *jihad*. Some even claim that it is the “six pillar” of Islam.

The Hanabali School which is popular among the current radical Islamic groups such as Palestinian Islamic *jihad* (PIJ) and Hamas argue that since “lawful warfare” is essentially *jihad* and its aim is to preserve and spread out the religion of God and God’s entirely, and God’s word is uppermost. Therefore, according to Muslims, those who stand in the way of this aim must be fought. However, if they do not resist and cannot fight, they shall not be killed, unless they fight with words (propaganda) or some acts (spying or aiding in the warfare).\(^\text{101}\) This exempted group usually includes women, children, monks, old people, and the handicapped, etc.

The Hanafi School of the 12\(^{\text{th}}\) century on the other hand states that it is illegal to inflict war upon people who had never been called to accept Islam, because the Prophet instructed the Muslims, to call upon the infidels to the faith first. As such, they will understand that they are being attacked not because of their property or land, but because of religious reasons. This school argues that the nonbelievers may then accept Islam with


\(^{101}\) Ibid.
no resistance in order to save their material belongings. However, if they neither accept the call nor agree to pay the poll tax, it will be incumbent on the Muslims to call upon God for assistance. Muslims can then declare war upon them, as Allah guides those who serve Him, and helps them destroy His enemies. As such, it will be necessary to implore God’s help upon every occasion; the Prophet also commands his people to do so.\textsuperscript{102}

The third school of thought – the \textit{Shafi} School is almost identical to the \textit{Hanafis}. They stated that the infidels of \textit{Dar al-Harb} (the arena of battle) are of two types: First are those whom the call of Islam has reached, but they refused to accept it, and take up arms against it. Those need to be fought back in every available way possible. Second are those the call to Islam has never reached. Those people, argues this school, should be very few in number, because the call to Islam would have been made exhaustively and that everyone is duly informed of the call.\textsuperscript{103} Efforts need to be made to encourage their acceptance of Islam by informing them of the miracles of the Prophet before warring them. If they still do not want to come to Islam, then war is waged, because they chose to refuse the call to Islam. Therefore, waging war on these people is not only allowed, but also an obligation of all Muslims as protectors of God’s will. So, \textit{jihad} simply means war against non-Muslims according to this school. Under the \textit{Sharia} any system of man-made law is considered illicit, where Allah and only Allah has provided the law, and Allah’s law is his word and that word is revealed to its people through his messenger – the Prophet. Therefore, it is the duty of Muslims to defend the sanctity and religion.


\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 62.
The fourth school of thought – the *Maliki* school. This school argues that in the Muslim community, *jihad* is a religious duty, because of the universalism of the Muslim mission and the obligation to convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or by force. In Islam, the person in charge of religious affairs is concerned with “power politics,” because Islam is “under obligation to gain power over other nations.”

*Jihad* is obligatory by the explicit text of the *Qur’an*, the *Hadith* and *Sharia*. But, what is important to note here is that in these entire texts jihad is described as not only defensive, but as offensive, protective, limited, and unlimited. Whether or not the true meaning of jihad is one’s internal struggle in the way of God or to fight those who are against God’s will on the outside is left for a wider debate. Some argue, even if jihad in its literality means one’s struggle within inner self, it is not always this genuine quest to become a better person but it is rather the command to become a better Muslim. There is clear evidence in both the *Qur’an* and the *Hadith* that armed struggle with the outside the Muslim community – Ummah or with non-believers has always been a huge part of the meaning and goal of *jihad*.

In the last 30 years, we have seen the rise of militant and religiously-based political groups whose ideology focuses on demands for *jihad*, and the willingness to sacrifice one's life to create a society governed solely by the Islamic law - the *Sharia*, creating a unified Islamic state (*caliphate*), and eliminating ‘un-Islamic ‘and ‘unjust’ rulers. The imposition of the modern ‘nation-state’ in today’s Middle East societies, however, made such ideas no longer applicable. Therefore, as some argue, this creates a clash of civilization.

\[104\] Ibid.
The concept of jihad in the Palestinian resistance movement is intertwined with the question of occupation, independence, and religious freedom. As such, it makes all forms of jihad including suicide bombing as martyrdom, and as such a legitimate resistance to occupation; and a need for restoration of their land and self-rule. Understanding how these groups see jihad and are employing it inequitably against their enemies can provide us with a perspective that is different from the usual rhetoric that jihad equals holy war. As far as the Palestinian Islamic resistance movements such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic jihad are concerned, the term jihad still retains its religious and military connotation well into modern times. They draw parallels between the role jihad plays in Muhammad’s time and the role that it is playing in today’s world. They base their resistance on what they believe is a ‘noble cause’ with determination to protect their land – the Muslim land and its communities.

The goal of Hamas, for instance, is to establish an Islamic Palestinian state in place of Israel, through whatever method possible, including peaceful political activity.\textsuperscript{105} However, Hamas argues that the current situation of Palestinians, whether living under Israeli occupation or dispersed from their homeland, is part of an ongoing conspiracy by Israelis to take the Holy Lands out of Palestinian hands altogether.\textsuperscript{106} According to them, this is a threat not only for Palestinian people who are at the forefront of the problem, but to the entire Muslim community. As such, it requires jihad, and not in the sense of expanding the territory of Islam, but of reclaiming and restoring the land than conquering it.


\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
Here is the dilemma: according to the Islamic law – Sharia, jihad can only be waged by a ruler – a caliph or in modern terms, by an Islamic government. This is an important concept because it negates the basis on which these Islamic organizations justify their acts. Therefore, in the Palestinian case, since organizations such as Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic jihad (PIJ) do not have an ‘established government’ per se, they cannot technically declare jihad. But, these organizations argue that the Israeli occupation and the Western powers’ invasion of Islamic territories in general has created an emergency situation where Muslims cannot wait for authorization other than the one that is given directly from God, so that makes jihad an allowed and required duty for all conscientious Muslims. This situation also means a change in the nature of Muslim obligation under jihad, from a collective responsibility to extend the Dar al-Islam (the territory of Islam) to a duty for each individual Muslim to “reclaim “and restore that territory.

Although subsequent chapters of this thesis will look at the relevance of the concept of jihad in the participation of Palestinian female suicide bombers, it will be useful to identify the relationship between suicide bombing and jihad. While the role of women in jihad is not clearly stated in these Islamic sculptures, we find the following Hadith which evidently discourages women from participating in it. “Narrated by Aisha, the mother of the faithful believers: I requested the Prophet to permit me to participate in jihad,” but he said, “Your jihad is the performance of Hajj (Narrated by Aisha).” Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam. It is an annual pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the holy cities for

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Muslims, during the month of Dhu al-Hijja (the 12th and final month of the year). A Muslim is required to do the journey to Mecca at least once in a lifetime; it is the ultimate act of worship.

Suicide is considered as one of the greatest sins in Islam. The Qur’an explicitly forbids suicide. “Do not kill yourselves. Allah is merciful to you, but he that does that through wickedness and injustice shall be burnt in fire.”109 Another verse in the Qur’an states, “…make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction (Narrated by: Abu Huraira).”110 The Hadith sayings on martyrdom also demonstrate a similar, but much clearer stand on the issue.

The Prophet said, "Whoever purposely throws himself from a mountain and kills himself, will be in the (Hell) Fire falling down into it and abiding therein perpetually forever; and whoever drinks poison and kills himself with it, he will be carrying his poison in his hand and drinking it in the (Hell) Fire wherein he will abide eternally forever; and whoever kills himself with an iron weapon, will be carrying that weapon in his hand and stabbing his abdomen with it in the (Hell) Fire wherein he will abide eternally forever.”111

The Prophet said, "The person who participates in (Holy battles) in Allah's cause and nothing compels him to do so except belief in Allah and His Apostles, will be recompensed by Allah either with a reward, or booty (if he survives) or will be admitted to Paradise (if he is killed in the battle as a martyr). Had I not found it difficult for my followers, then I would not remain behind any sariya going for Jihad and I would have loved to be martyred in Allah's cause and then made alive, and then martyred and then made alive, and then again martyred in His cause.”112

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109 Qur’an 4: 29.


111 Ibid., 7:670.

112 Ibid., 1:35.
But on the other hand, martyrdom is carried out by a person who sacrifices himself, deeming his life less valuable than Allah’s message. By sacrificing his soul in the cause of restoring the land and preserving the dignity of his community, he then becomes a martyr and has accomplished the highest jihad. A Qur’anic verse supports this assertion: “And of mankind is he who would sell himself, seeking the pleasure of Allah; and Allah hath compassion on (His) bondmen.”

We also find almost identical sayings in the Hadith which address in great detail the opposite concept of martyrdom.

I heard Abu Huraira saying while facing the enemies: "The doors of Heaven are opened through jihad.' A poor man asked: 'you heard the prophet saying that?' Abu Huraira said: 'yes'. The man went to his companions, and said: “peace be upon you, broke the sheath of his sword and fought to death.” (Narrated by: Abu Baker Bin Abi Musa)

Al-Kasem Bin Mukhaimara said, “It is allowed to fight the enemy alone if you seek Al-Shahada (Martyrdom) and you are strong enough to do it. This is obvious in the Qur’an 'Some people would give away their lives to gain Allah's contentment.'"(Narrated by Iban Al-Qurtubi)

Suicide bombing involves also a similar paradox within Islam. On the one hand, Islamic law clearly states that fighters must not take the lives of noncombatants, such as women, children, the sick, or the elderly. At the same time, anyone who dies while fighting the ‘unbelievers’ is considered a martyr and guaranteed the highest rank in the hereafter. There is a lucid contradiction here; one cannot commit suicide, as suicide is a sin, but killing oneself in order to harm non-Muslims or non-believers is an act of deep piety. In reality, it will be difficult to reconcile these two opposing concepts. However,


114 Al-Bukhari, 3: 181.

115 Ibid., 3:251.
the Islamists seem to get away with it by applying various interpretations of their own to fit their particular goal.

The concept of \textit{jihad} is multi-faceted, bringing into its sphere such diverse considerations as violence, politics, power struggles, military history, and theology that are used as pretext by religious groups represented by the orthodox Islamic movements, such as the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and Islamic \textit{jihad} Palestine to justify their political causes. In the case of Islam where religion is the primary dimension of human existence, \textit{jihad} and martyrdom in defense of the nation are considered religious acts. Thus, dying in the course of fighting for God, even if it is a voluntary death with an intention, is therefore, not suicide. Although the majority of Muslims reject suicide as an honorable pursuit, it is fully installed and vibrantly alive in the hearts of Islamists initiating a zeal for fighting "in Allah's way" and attaining martyrdom.

In summary, there is a danger in simplifying \textit{jihad} into sentences for academic debate, when the truth is, \textit{jihad} is such a complex notion, even for Muslim scholars who often negate each other on the concept, in which one single explanation would not be possible to delineate the role that it plays in the history of Islam and in the Palestinian resistance movements in particular. There is no doubt that Palestinian resistance movements are the products of Palestinian nationalism. However, today these resistance movements have indoctrinated Islamist thoughts into their struggle as much as, if not more than, their nationalist strivings.
To affirm this notion, it would suffice to look at Hamas’s Article One of its Covenants which says: “The Movement’s program is Islam. From it, it draws its ideas, way of thinking and understanding of the universe, life and man. It resorts to it for judgment in all its conduct, and it is inspired by it or guidance of its steps.”

It would, therefore, be naïve to think that their nationalist struggle is “the” origin of their resistance in today’s Palestine. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the concept of jihad in Palestinian resistance movements is a deeply-embedded religious notion that is used as a viable form of struggle against injustice and oppression.

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CHAPTER TWO

WHY SUICIDE BOMBING? WHY USE WOMEN?

Suicide attacks once considered barbaric and rare have become one of the most commonly used weapons in Palestine. Suicide attacks are used by a number of organizations, especially in the Islamic world as a means of retaliation. In particular, they are commonly used by a number of different religious, secular, and radical organizations worldwide including groups such as: the Palestinian organizations of Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ); as well as secular groups such as The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, the Al Aqsa Martyr Brigades, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Kurdish PKK in Turkey.¹

In the past, those that commit suicide attacks have been accused of suffering from psychological illnesses. It is a common misconception that suicide bombers are mentally ill or irrational, and as a result suicide attacks became labeled as a desperate acts committed by lone individuals. However, contemporary studies reveal that there is a “strategic logic” to suicide attacks which makes them rewarding to the groups that utilize them.² These groups have adopted and refined suicide bombings as their “strategic weapons” against their enemies. Using suicide bombs, particularly in Palestine is considered the most powerful and dramatic way to express resistance against the occupation. The principles behind suicide bombings are closely linked with nationalist ideals.

¹ Debra Zedalis, Female Suicide Bombers, (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), 15.

² Pape, Dying to Win, 4.
This chapter attempts to answer the question, why is suicide bombing increasingly becoming the weapon of choice for many organizations in Palestine, while other technological advancements, such as remotely controlled explosives are as readily available and can cause more damage quicker? Why would anyone volunteer to be a human bomb? Is it pure loyalty to their leaders and their cause, or strong beliefs in their religious causes, or is it simply human nature to seek revenge against “evil doers?” The more concerning question addressed in this chapter asks, why women are increasingly being used for suicide bombing missions in this particular part of the world. In the next few paragraphs, the different advantages for targeting women to partake in such missions and the incentives that are offered to Palestinian women will be closely analyzed.

Suicide bombings are personal acts. Scholars have presented various explanations on why it is that suicide bombings are increasingly being carried out by different organizations in the world today. However, Robert Pape presents the argument of why it is not always helpful to understand suicide attacks based solely on conventional reasoning, i.e. religious, social, or economical. He explains:

Suicide terrorism is rising around the world, but the most common explanations do not help us understand why. Religious fanaticism does not explain why the world leader in suicide terrorism is the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, a group that adheres to a Marxist/Leninist ideology, while existing psychological explanations have been contradicted by the widening range of socio-economic backgrounds of suicide terrorists. In contrast to the existing explanations, suicide terrorism follows a strategic logic, one specifically designed to coerce modern liberal democracies to make significant territorial concessions. Moreover, over the past two decades, suicide terrorism has been rising largely because terrorists have learned that it pays. Suicide terrorists sought to compel American and French military forces to abandon Lebanon in 1983, Israeli forces to leave Lebanon in 1985, Israeli forces to quit the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 1994 and 1995, the Sri Lankan government to create an independent
Tamil state from 1990 on, and the Turkish government to grant autonomy to the Kurds in the late 1990s. In all but the case of Turkey, the terrorist political cause made more gains after the resort to suicide operations than it had before. Thus, Western democracies should pursue policies that teach terrorists that the lesson of the 1980s and 1990s no longer holds, policies which in practice may have more to do with improving homeland security than with offensive military action.3

Suicide bombing has been used both by secular and religious groups alike, regardless of ethnic origin. It has especially become an attractive *modus operandi* to various radical religious organizations for a variety of reasons.

The first advantage in employing suicide bombings is that it can result in large causalities and extensive damages to the targeted area. Julian Madsen in her scholarly article expresses that, “In the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, suicide bombing operations carried out during the second *intifada* - between 2000 and 2002 alone caused about 44 percent of all Israeli casualties, despite only representing 1 percent of the total number of attacks during the period.”4 The designated bomber inflicts the maximum damage because the bomb is mobile, meaning it can be adjusted in almost any direction until the moment it is detonated.

Suicide bombing is easily available and inexpensive. It is a cheap operation to execute, but very expensive to prevent. Bruce Hoffman in his article entitled “The Logic of Suicide Bombing” states that, “The cost of a car, explosives, and a volunteer fighter, whose only skill is his determination to die, is small compared to training and providing resources for a paramilitary fighter in a lengthy guerilla campaign. According to a recent

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3 Ibid., 2.

estimate, a suicide bomb in Palestine cost less than $150.”⁵ In our recent memory, on September 11, 2001 nearly three thousand people died at the hands of only nineteen hijackers (suicide attackers). Damage on this scale would have been unlikely to have been achieved by a conventional attack. Bruce Hoffman further illustrates this point, “A suicide bombing, like all other terror attacks in the modern era, is meant to magnify the ‘power image’ of the perpetrating organization. The psychological effect – the shock effect on the public has been recognized by the groups using this form of attack.”⁶ The damage caused to the morale of the rival population is grave. 

Another great advantage of suicide bombing is the lack of fear that the bomber will reveal damaging information to the enemy, as his death is almost certain. In addition, the perpetrator does not have to have an exit strategy, which can be very complicated if the mission is to fail. It is almost certain that the bomb will detonate before the bomber is apprehended. Efficiency is a crucial advantage of suicide bombing. Julian Madsen elaborates on this notion as follows:

Suicide bombing provides the guarantee that the attack will be carried out at the most appropriate time and place with regard to the perpetrator’s objectives. This ensures the maximum number of casualties, which most likely would not be achieved via other means such as the use of a remote controlled charge or timer bomb.⁷

The strategic advantage for using suicide bombing is primarily associated with the fulfillment of political objectives of the organizations that deploy them. Suicide

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⁷ Madsen, “Suicide Terrorism: Rationalizing the Irrational,” 3.
bombings coerce governments to withdraw their troops from lands perceived to be the
homelands of the warring forces. The wave of suicide bombings in Palestine erupted
after the outbreak of the second intifada in 2000, which forced the Israeli government to
partially withdraw from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Although some argue that
suicide bombings also instigate backlashes. The suicide bombing attacks brought about
the legitimacy of some of Israel’s security measures, like the building of long fences
across the Israeli-Palestinian boarders and was responsible for the loss of international
sympathy, traditionally a core element to Palestine’s national strategy.

In Islam, suicide is literally perceived as a private act condemned by society and
religion, while martyrdom is understood to be a public act exalted for the greater good.
Problems arise when the two are fused together by theological explanations. Such
explanations are given by different organizations in order to rationalize their motives for
using suicide bombings. Although suicide is a private act, Islamic beliefs perceive it as
collective, rather than individualistic. There is a strong correlation between the concept
of martyrdom and suicide bombings in Palestine. Sacrifice many believe is a key element
deeply embedded in suicide bombings. It is perceived as selfless to die for others and for
a cause greater than self. Suicide has earned the label of being a righteous act by the
larger community in the Muslim world today. Islam believes that Allah will reward those
who die for the cause of God. This religious premise has made suicide bombing

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8 Pape, Dying to Win, 6.


acceptable and even desirable. It is clearly stated in the Qur’an that those who die in the
name of Allah are martyrs and will be rewarded in the hereafter:

Indeed Allah has traded with the believers their lives and wealth in return
for paradise if they fight for the cause of Allah whether they are martyr or
victorious and this is a promise from Allah which he has made a duty upon
himself clearly recorded in the Torah, the Bible, and the Qur’an. And
who is more faithful in his promise than Allah; so enjoy this good news
for your allegiance and loyalty to your Lord, for this is the greatest
achievement.11

In the case of Palestine, suicide bombings are considered socially acceptable and
legitimate. This is because they are seen as heroic and as holy acts resisting the
“occupation.” The support for suicide bombings increased dramatically after the first
intifada of 1987. Palestinians used suicide bombings to retaliate, express anger and to
oppose the Israeli occupation and treatment of Palestinians in the “occupied territories.”
Interpretations given by radical religious organizations such as Hamas and Palestinian
Islamic Jihad (PIJ) on the concept of “who is the martyr” helped popularize suicide
bombing among Palestinian population. Suicide bombing provided Palestinians with a
sense of ultimate sacrifice for the cause of God. This principle gives organizations the
opportunity to exercise such forms of attack without reservations.

Suicide bombings are, therefore, desirable for many fundamental reasons. They
are cost-effective and require minimal to no training or logistics; they have dramatic
effects on the targeted population; they present an overwhelming sense of helplessness on
the perpetrator’s part; they are used to gain supremacy among rival groups; they are
committed for religious reasons in God’s name; lastly, suicide bombings are used as

11 Qur’an 9:111.
strategic tools to achieve political objectives. Most importantly, suicide bombings are done for effect, as the more dramatic the outcome, the stronger the message.

**Why Women?**

Although the participation of women in suicide bombing is a relatively new phenomenon, a growing number of religious as well as secular organizations have been utilizing women in their suicide bombing missions. Women have participated in about 30 to 40 percent of Sri Lanka’s Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam’s (LTTE) overall suicide activities. In Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) about two thirds of the attacks have been undertaken by women. Similarly, in Russia-Chechnya conflict women play a major role in suicide missions. In Palestine, however, it wasn’t until 2002 that the Islamic organization, Hamas, first employed a woman suicide bomber.

Sana’a Youcef Mehaidli a sixteen-year old Syrian and member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party was said to be the first known case of a female suicide bomber in the region. On April 9, 1985 Mehaidli drove an explosive loaded truck into an Israeli Defense Force (IDF) convoy killing two soldiers and injuring another two. Since 1985, the number of known successful female suicide bombers in the world has increased to over two hundred and sixty-two.

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13 Madsen, “Suicide Terrorism: Rationalizing the Irrational.”

14 Ibid., 5.


16 Ibid.

The crucial question that must be considered is why such an increase is happening in the first place. What is the fundamental reason for the escalation of female faces in suicide bombing? Does this *modus operandi* provide a tactical advantage to the groups that utilize it? Are female suicide bombers really more effective than their male counterparts? Lindsey O’Rourke, in her article of “What’s special about female suicide terrorism?” argues that, “The superior effectiveness of female attackers led both secular and religious terrorist organizations to employ women at the service of the groups’ strategic goals.” The average number of victims as a result of individual attacks conducted by women is 8.4%, compared to the 5.3% killed per male attack.19

### Average Casualties per Individual Attack by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>PKK</th>
<th>LTTE</th>
<th>Chechen</th>
<th>Palestinian Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage (Female: Male)</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>164%</td>
<td>116%</td>
<td>157%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Shows using women for suicide bombing mission has a reasonably tactical advantage. Source: Lindsey O’Rourke, “What’s Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?” Security Studies 18, no. 4 (December 2, 2009): 687.

Lindsey O’Rourke claims that a number of religious organizations in Palestine like Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) liberalized their recruitment policies; traditionally they excluded women from all organizational engagements. Women were typically confined solely to their household roles. Religious organizations in Palestine

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18 Lindsey O’Rourke, “What’s Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?” *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (December 2, 2009): 681.

19 Ibid., 683.
began adopting the employment of women by opening the stage for entry to female combatants and encouraging them to join ranks with their male counterparts. On its website, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs quoted Abd al-Aziz Rantissi’s (one of the influential leaders of Hamas) interview with Abu Tibi television in which he said, “there is no reason that the perpetration of suicide attacks should be monopolized by men.” In addition, Article 17 of the Hamas Charter, published in 1988 also declares, “The Muslim woman has a role in the struggle for liberation that does not fall from that of a man in that she is the one who produces the men.” Similarly, she says, secular groups who were less committed to the established gender roles began using more and more women in their missions. This, she argues, reveals that strategy trumps ideology.

The desirability of using women in suicide bombing operations can be explained by the notion of ‘the gentle sex.’ Women are perceived as harmless creatures who are not capable of doing any wrong. Particularly in Palestine, they are considered rather as victims of violence and of society. They are widows and mothers, who typically play as operational facilitators if they ever participate in any form of organizational activities. Women symbolize the guardians of tradition, symbols of motherhood and life; so it is always appalling when they give their lives to violence. A woman engaging herself in a suicide bombing is, therefore, inconceivable by any measure. As such, they attract less suspicion than men.

20 Ibid., 688.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 678.
When a woman blows herself up, it shakes the world wide awake. In the process, it awakens some sense of responsibility on the rest of the world. When those we have stereotyped as tender, introspective and sensitive resort to killing themselves while harming others, we have no choice, but to put a face on the mission. We are compelled to look at the root cause that is driving these women to engage in such murderous acts.\footnote{Courtney E. Martin, “Female Suicide Bombers,” \textit{The Huffington Post} (August 4, 2008), \url{http://www.huffingtonpost.com/courtney-e-martin/female-suicide-bombers_b_116773.html} (accessed on December 3, 2010).}

Another advantage of using women as suicide bombers is also attributed to their anatomy. Women can conceal explosives around their belly under their dress pretending to be pregnant, enabling them to easily pass through security inconspicuously. Muslim societies consider invasive physical searches as threatening a woman’s honor, as such; this makes females less likely to be thoroughly searched. In the case of Palestinians and in the Islamic world in general, attire plays a major role. In many of these places women are dressed in loose, long gowns and head-to-toe covering veils which could help when hiding bombs and other explosive materials. The combination of the stereotype that women by nature are non-threatening along with their dress code and the taboo associated with woman’s bodies gives the Palestinian woman a unique advantage to infiltrate into the targeted destinations. Thus, it makes them the perfect weapon.

Katharina Von Knop summarized the tactical advantages of using women in suicide bombing as follows:

Radical organizations use women as suicide bombers because they provide many considerable advantages. First, they provide a tactical advantage: stealthier attack, an element of surprise, hesitancy to search women, and the stereotype of females as being nonviolent. Second, the inclusion of women as suicide bombers increases the number of
combatants. Third, this increases the publicity of an attack and, finally, this bears a much greater psychological impact. Media images of women suicide attackers serve as powerful propaganda tools. Suicide bombers provide a low-cost, low-technology, low-risk weapon that maximizes target destruction and instills fear - women are more effective with their increased accessibility and media shock value. Female suicide bombers tend to garner more media attention than men because the thought of those who bring forth life actually destroying it is disturbing. The idea of women acting as agents of violence runs completely counter to expectations of femininity; images of female bombers thus attract widespread publicity, and disseminate the organization's message to a wider audience.  

There is clearly an instrumental logic for using suicide bombings and for using females to carry out such acts in particular. They seem to be a viable resource for a number of militant organizations. Using women in this mission provides an even greater advantage, as they generally do not match the stereotype of any terrorist attackers; they are, therefore, less likely to arouse any public suspicion. As such, they outwit counterterrorism measures. It has also been proven, at least in the case of Lebanon and Palestine, that increased female suicide bombings compel states to reconsider their counter measures and reexamine the future costs of conflict, often by satisfying the demands of the perpetrators.

Concisely, suicide bombing, particularly female suicide bombing, has tactical, strategic as well as operational benefits. Because it is highly fatal, it has a powerful psychological and social impact on society. It is highly targeted, precise, easy to maneuver, and it is less costly.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE DESIRE TO BECOME A SHAHIDA – A FEMALE MARTYR

It is imperative to first understand the true meaning of the word Shahida in Islam and how the word is conceptualized with regard to female suicide bombers in Palestine before addressing the reasons for desiring to become one.

The word *shahida* is derived from the Arabic verbal root word *shahada*, which is directly translated as: to “witness” or to “see.”¹ However, in the Muslim world it has traditionally been interpreted as martyrdom. It is has also been inferred as a divine reward for giving up one’s life for the benefit of a movement. A *shahid* is a person who ‘sees’ or ‘witnesses,’ as witnessing the truth through the eyes of the martyr who gives up his or her life for truth.² A *shahida* is a female who ‘sees’ or ‘witnesses’ the “truth.” The concept of *shahada* - martyrdom, like all other Islamic concepts, can be fully and wholly understood only through the light of the Islamic doctrine of *tawhid* - or the absolute unity of Allah- God and full submission to His will and command.³ In the Qur’an, a *shahid* is stated both as “witness” and “martyr.” For instance, the following verse defines *Shahida* meaning witness.

And strive to Allah as you ought to strive. He elected you, and did not impose on you any hardship in religion – the faith of your father Abraham. He called you Muslims before and in his (Qur’an) that the Apostle may bear witness against you and you may be witness against mankind. So,

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³ Ibid.
perform the prayer, give the alms and hold fast al Allah. He is your Master; and what a blessed Master and a blessed supporter!  

Another verse in the Qur’an summarizes the use Shahida to convey its meaning of “martyr.”

And do not think of those who have been killed in the way of Allah as dead; they are rather living with their Lord, well-provided for. Rejoicing in what their Lord has given them of His bounty, and they rejoice for those who stayed behind and did not join them, knowing that they have nothing to fear and that they shall not grieve.

A shahida, therefore, sacrifices herself for both religious and community commandments when she becomes a martyr. It is rarely possible to clearly distinguish the two meanings of shahida, as they are both used alternatively and subjectively throughout the history of Islam. In fact, regardless of its meaning in the Qur’an, the recent phenomenon of female suicide bombing is closely and directly linked to the concept of martyrdom.

The concept of martyrdom originated during the era of the Prophet Mohammad. When the Prophet Mohammad died, he did not leave a successor. As a result, there were disputes in the Muslim communities over the question of succession. Most of the people wanted the community to determine who would succeed their Prophet. However, another group within the community felt that succession should come from direct descendants of Mohammed.

Those who believed the successor should come from Mohammad’s family favored Ali – the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law to be the one. This group of Muslims

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4 Qur’an 22:78.
5 Qur’an 3:169-70.
6 Cook, Martyrdom in Islam, 45.
has come to be known as Shi’as. The majority of people who felt that a successor should be a “rightly guided caliph” from the community, not someone who is strictly an heir of the Prophet by virtue of blood relations, chose a religious leader - Abu Bakar who was a close companion of the Prophet. This group of the community would be known as the Sunnis.\(^7\) In the end, the Sunnis won the final argument and chose Abu Bakar as their first caliph. Two more caliphs - Umar (634-644) and (Uthman 644-656) succeeded Abu Bakar before Ali finally became the fourth and last “rightly guided” caliphs.\(^8\) However, the Shi’as have always felt that Ali should have been the first caliph and that the caliphate of the Prophet should have been passed down only to his direct descendants. It was this division that started the Sunni/Shi’a split in Islam.

Ali’s caliphate was challenged at many fronts. One of his rivals was Mu'awiya Ummayad, the cousin of Uthman (the third caliph) who refused to accept Ali’s leadership. In 661 a war broke out between Ali and Mu’awiya where Ali was forced to give up his power and to compromise with the Ummayad dynasty. This infuriated Ali’s die-hard followers, because they felt he had let them down. Eventually, Ali was killed in 661 by one of his disappointed followers.\(^9\) However, soon after Mu’awiya was also killed by a rival caliph and his son Yazid assumed the caliphate. Apparently, the conflict continued with Hussein - Ali’s eldest son and Yazid – Mu’awiya’s son and the new caliph. Hussein and only a hand full of his soldiers unsuccessfully fought Yazid’s much larger army. Although Hussein was out-numbered by Yazid’s army, he refused to give

\(^7\) Ibid.


\(^9\) Ibid.
up and continued to fight to protect his Shi’a community. Before he was captured and killed, Hussein was said to have ordered his small army to flee and save themselves, but they refused to leave. They decided to stay with him and fight until the end, and for this, they were all slaughtered by Yazid’s army. Hussein is regarded by the Shi’as as a martyr who has sacrificed his own life for the survival of his fellow Shi’a Muslims’ community. Every year Shi’a Muslims participate in the celebration by carrying out symbolic acts of self-sacrifice called Ashura. This act of self-sacrifice has also a central importance in the whole concept of suicide. This is where the Shi’a Islam draws its strong theme of martyrdom. The phenomenon of martyrdom, therefore, raises important questions concerning death and what really is worth living and dying for.

The interpretation of suicide bombing as martyrdom has been a highly contentious issue among scholars of Islam and others. Although, suicide in general is haram – (i.e. prohibited) in Islam, suicide bombing is justified as a permissible act with some textual support for martyrdom. Because suicide (Al-Intihaar) is against Islam, but martyrdom (Ash-Shahaadah) is not, suicide bombing is often referred to as “martyrdom operations” by the groups that utilize this modus operandi so that the term lessens the impermissibility of it. Furthermore, according to Islam, suicide is not allowed if it is done for the sole purpose of some “worldly personal motives” such as: loss of wealth, divorce, and rape, etc. Clearly, permissibility and impermissibility of suicide bombing

10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
depends on the motivations. However, whatever the private motivation of the suicide bomber is, his or her action is rooted in much broader national, communal or religious demands, pressures, and desires. One might think that if Islam generally condemns suicide, then willfully taking one’s own life on or off the battlefield regardless of the intention should be *haram* or prohibited; but it is not always the case. This is because the scriptures of Islam provide very limited clear distinction of the two terms. As a result, the often entwined meaning of the two has created a dilemma on the concept of martyrdom; specifically, in relation to suicide bombing. Therefore, suicide bombing itself involves a paradox within Islam.

Both the *Qur’an* and the *Hadith* – Muhammad’s sayings are responsible for providing a platform for flexible interpretations of martyrdom that legitimize suicide bombing. For example, a verse in the *Qur’an* says: “Verily, Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their wealth, in return for Heaven being theirs. They fight in the path of Allah and they kill and are killed.”\(^{13}\) This is one of quite a few ambiguous verses that have created two interpretations of self-sacrifice. Proponents of suicide bombing interpret this verse in its literality to advance their act of killing. On the other hand, opponents of suicide bombing argue that in order for the phrase “...and they kill and are killed” to justify suicide bombing, it should have said, “...they kill and are *killed by themselves*.” They further argue that because suicide bombers are not killed by the enemy, but rather take their own lives with their own hands in order to kill others; their act is suicide not worthy of martyrdom and should be considered *haram*.

\(^{13}\) Qur’an 9:111.
Similarly, the following Hadith also describes self-sacrifice as follows:

Our sustainer (Allah) marvels at two men: a man who stirs from his bed to pray and a man who fights in Allah’s Cause, his companions are defeated and he realizes what awaits him in the defeat and what awaits him in returning (to combat), but he returns (to combat nevertheless) until his blood is spilled. Allah says: “Look at my servant who went back (to combat) hopeful and anxious for what is with Me, until his blood was spilled.” (Narrated by Ibn Mas’ud in Musnad Ahmad)\(^\text{14}\)

Suicide is generally viewed as a state of disbelief and considered a loss of faith in Islam and is condemned throughout the Qur’an. The following verses from the Qur’an clearly describe just that. “You shall spend in the cause of GOD; do not throw yourselves with your own hands into destruction. You shall be charitable; GOD loves the charitable.”\(^\text{15}\)

The believers are commanded to never despair or lose hope. “O my sons! Go ye and enquire about Joseph and his brother, and never give up hope of Allah's Soothing Mercy: truly no one despairs of Allah's Soothing Mercy, except those who have no faith.”\(^\text{16}\)

Because suicide is forbidden, but martyrdom is not, suicide bombing or ‘martyrdom operation’ as it is often referred to presents a unique underpinning and pretext for participating in it for both men and women in Palestine.

A number of theories have emerged on why Palestinian women desire to become Shahidaat (plural for shahida). However, there seems to be no single or complete theory capable of fully explaining this phenomenon. Mia Bloom in her book Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror explains, “when men conduct suicide missions, they are

\(^{14}\)Cook, Allison and Djerejian, Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks, 127.

\(^{15}\)Qur’an 2:195.

\(^{16}\)Qur’an 2:87.
motivated by religious or nationalist fanaticism, whereas women appear often motivated by very personal reasons.”¹⁷ She states that these personal reasons coupled with the one unifying issue - nationalism, inspire women to become *shahidaat*. However, at the end of the day, she argues, it is the social and political motivations that carry the greatest weight when choosing the path of martyrdom. She emphasizes that religious factors, poverty, or lack of education alone cannot explain the phenomenon.¹⁸ 

Ever since Wafa Idris, the first successful Palestinian female suicide bomber, detonated a bomb in Jerusalem killing herself and an Israeli, the urge for participating in this mission among Palestinian women has grown. Idris’s act has undoubtedly placed her into martyrdom in the Palestinian history. She became an inspiration to many women who would follow in her footsteps, such as: eighteen-year-old honor student Aayat al Ahras, Palestinian attorney Hanadi Jaradat, Reem El-Reyashi - a mother of two, Darin Abu Issa, Andleeb Suleiman Taqtaqah, Faiza Amal Juma’a, Hiba Azeem Daraghmeh, etc. They are all praised and glorified as female martyrs who sacrificed themselves for Allah.

Barbara Victor in her book “Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers” identified two major reasons why Palestinian women desire to become martyrs. These factors, according to her, are: the exploitation of women by their male counterparts and the “culture of death” that is entrenched in Palestinian society.¹⁹


¹⁸ Ibid.

She says these two factors began to overlap once Wafa Idris paved the way. According to her, many of those women martyrs who came after Wafa were either divorced, unmarried, alleged to have been raped, committed adultery, or had been impregnated out of wedlock. She states that Palestinian women are trained from an early age by their male counterparts both at home and outside to avenge by killing as many Israelis as possible. Her study reveals that Palestinian women desire to become martyrs mainly because they are persuaded by men and they are promised a better life after martyrdom, the life that they were denied here on earth. In an interview with Dr. Shalfic Masalqa, a Palestinian psychiatrist who has spent a great deal of time studying the motivations of suicide bombers for Victor’s study is quoted saying: “For those recruiters who use religion for the suicide missions describe what happens after death in Paradise, and they make it very attractive compared to this life under occupation. To be tempted to go to Paradise means that life on earth is not worth living.”

Yoram Schweitzer, a researcher at Tel Aviv University’s Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies conducted extensive research in which he interviewed Palestinian women in Israeli prisons who were intercepted before they had completed their missions. In his findings, he partly shares Victor’s view of “culture of death” to be one of the primary motivational factors and writes:

A great example of a “culture of death” is the story of the Palestinian bomber, Thouria Khamour, who stated she attempted a suicide attack “because I wanted to become a shahida and sacrifice myself for Palestine by killing many Jews…I calculated how many Jews I should kill for it to be considered a success, and for it to be worth my death. How many? As

20 Ibid., 173.
21 Ibid., 175.
many as possible – wherever there was a crowd… I closed my eyes, and dreamed of injuring more than 100 or 200 Jews. A large number. I thought only of that. To sacrifice myself, and that hundreds of Jews would die.”

He quoted another interviewee, Wafa al-Bas, whose beliefs also addresses the “culture of death” concept. She was recorded saying: “I believe in death. This is a privilege for us, especially death in the way of Allah. I’m also a victim of my country. I’m willing to sacrifice myself a thousand times.” Schweitzer seems to underscore that Palestinian women, for the most part, reflect their genuine need to take part in fighting the occupation, and are motivated by the need to defend their nation which, he argues, are the same factors urging men, but he said, some are particularly religious. In his concluding arguments, Schweitzer stresses that Palestinian women’s inferior social status, the reluctance of their traditional societies to include them in the struggle, coupled with their own personal motives are the primary factors of their desire to become martyrs.

A similar theory is offered by Lindsey O’Rourke of the University of Chicago who has written scholarly works on female suicide bombing. In her article titled, What’s Special about Female Suicide Terrorism? she claims that “the primary motivation for both men and women to become martyrs in Palestine comes from a loyalty to their community. The difference resides in how the organizations tie political motivation to


23 Ibid., 26.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 29.
certain personal experiences when recruiting female attackers.”

She argues that the desire to become a *shahida* has originated from traditional instincts.

Women who realize they have deviated, intentionally or unintentionally, from the gender behavior norms of their society may feel pressure to reaffirm a connection to it. They have lost their rightful place by being raped, or divorced, or infertile, or failing to get married and bombing restores them to a place of honor in their community.

In line with the theory centering on personal motives, another current paradigm of thinking suggests that the reason for becoming a female martyr lies on a desire for glory and legacy. Female martyrs are honored and admired within the Palestinian culture and society. Fawzia Sheikh in her article titled *Number of Women Suicide Bombers Expected to Grow* quoted Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas, director of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling in Jerusalem as saying, “Palestinian society regards female suicide bombers the same way as they regard the men, which is they are heroines. They have sacrificed their lives for the public good. They have made a statement about the inhuman and intolerable situation.”

The glorification of female suicide bombers dramatically increased after Wafa Idris suicide mission. She is considered a hero. She has become an icon and is in the children’s text books, films, poems, etc. Reverence of martyrs through posters, mass funerals, and even the naming of babies and public streets in honor of them have become prominent. When explaining why the Palestinian society

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26 O’Rourke, “What’s Special about Female Suicide Terrorism,” 33.

27 Ibid., 34.

venerated suicide bombers – martyrs, Mohammed Hafez of the National Institute of Justice describes it as follows:

Three conditions must converge for suicidal terror to be accepted and honored by society: (1) prevailing cultural norms and mores encompass belief systems, symbolic narratives, and historical traditions that justify and celebrate martyrdom; (2) legitimate authorities promote or acquiesce to extreme violence; and (3) groups or communities feel a deep sense of victimization by external enemies in the course of political conflict. 29

Yet, other theories suggest that the desire to become a shahida primarily comes from a culturally defined religious duty. Women feel equally obligated to sacrifice themselves in the name of Allah and for the greater Muslim community. Therefore, martyrdom, the divine reward for giving up one’s life for the benefit of a community or a movement, has taken on greater significance. In the Qur’an martyrdom is stated as the ultimate act of sacrifice by a believer. Death in the name of God is considered holy; therefore it is viewed as martyrdom (istishhad) rather than suicidal (intihar). 30 According to Islamic tradition, he who gives his life for an Islamic cause will have his sins forgiven and a place reserved in paradise.

For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in Charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for


30 Benjamin T. Acosta, “The Suicide Bomber as Sunni-Shi'i Hybrid,” Middle East Quarterly xvii, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 13-20.
men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward.\textsuperscript{31}

This religious imperative would disqualify the notion that personal factors are the reasons for desiring to enter martyrdom. Personal reasons such as: infertility, divorce, rape, etc. may be the causes for women to martyr themselves. However, if their volunteering to martyrdom is based on their own personal reasons, then it is considered suicide not martyrdom; and suicide is haram – prohibited in Islam.

These types of views emerge mostly from a generalization of a western discourse and could undermine the complexity and rampant nature of the decreased levels of human security among Palestinian people. Women and children who suffer the most due to occupation, limitation in movements, lack of healthcare and education and loss of national identity are particularly affected by these generalizations. Robert Pape, argues that the “presumed connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism is misleading.”\textsuperscript{32} He emphasizes that religion was rarely the root cause, but instead, a desire for foreign occupying forces to leave their respective homelands.\textsuperscript{33} Israel’s policy of closure, which imposes severe and frequent arbitrary restrictions on freedom of movement in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, contributes to a serious humanitarian crisis marked by extreme poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity. Restrictions of movement have severely compromised Palestinians’ access to health care, education, and other services by which women and children are prime targets. Women

\textsuperscript{31} Qur’an, 33:35.

\textsuperscript{32} Pape, “Dying to Win,” 79.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 89.
have psychological and financial responsibilities in order to maintain the well-being of their families, as their male counterparts often times are out of work or are incarcerated.

Debra D. Zedalis identified five fundamental motivating factors for women in Palestine to become suicide bombers. These factors, according to her, are: religious, nationalistic, economic, social and personal rewards. She states that, “religion provides moral satisfaction while nationalism is perpetuated through hatred of enemy and feelings of oppression.” According to her, suicide bombers are in valuable positions which have the potential to enhance their families’ social status and their own reputations. She further emphasizes that they could also successfully avenge the loss of their loved ones.

It is not always possible to make an accurate generalization about the reasons behind Palestinian women’s desire to become martyrs. This is because it is difficult to develop a universal profile, as the common denominators greatly vary. However, three fundamental and powerful mobilizers help to make some sense of this trend.

The first is the profound sense of victimization among women. Women see their male counterparts’ desire for a better life, independence, national identity, honor, and pride as a sign of restoring their own political rights. They claim that as women, they feel strongly that their lives are threatened by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) on daily basis. Many identify with a stress overload faced by the daily humiliations at checkpoints, at work, and just the limitations of movement in their day to day lives in general.

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34 Zedalis, Female Suicide Bombers, 20.

35 Ibid., 21

36 Ibid.
Their drive is so strong that they have transcended traditional and societal obstacles by volunteering to become suicide bombers. There is this strong belief that to become a *shahida* is justified as the only alternative to end the deplorable condition that they are in. It is that great sense of desperation and hopelessness that motivates Palestinian women to defy all the traditional social norms. These traditions preclude them from participating in most of the activities that require close contact with men to whom they are not married. The aspiration for the embodiment of the Islamic ideal is already instilled in the society. Such ambition coupled with a great sense of powerlessness situates Palestinian women at the center of it all.

The second factor is revenge. Most of the women in the Palestinian territories have had at least one member or close relative of their family killed, kidnapped, or incarcerated by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) during the two *intifadas* and beyond. These women develop an interest in becoming martyrs from their losses and grief. Many have heard horrific stories from their incarcerated relatives which provide further motivation for revenge. Therefore, survival guilt is so rampant among the Palestinian women that they strongly feel it is a burden not to act. For example, Hanadi Jaradat, a 28 year-old young woman from Jenin, detonated herself in the Maxim restaurant in Haifa in October 2004 killing 21 people and leaving dozens more wounded. She was said to have had her fiancé and brother killed by the Israeli forces.³⁷ The 28 year-old Wafa Idris who is famously known as the first Palestinian female suicide bomber was a paramedic at the Palestinian Red Crescent. Apparently, she saw a number of dead and wounded

Palestinian bodies on daily basis. In a BBC online article published on January 30, 2002, the mother of Wafa Idris told reporters that although she does not quite know why her daughter had become a suicide bomber, she said that, “Maybe it was because of all the wounded people she saw in the ambulances every day. She wanted to help her people by sacrificing herself. She was a daughter of Palestine.” Her close relatives and friends testified that she was happy whenever martyrdom attacks were carried out against the Israelis; she told her friends that she wished one day to carry out such an attack.

The third factor was the legitimization of female suicide bombings by prestigious Islamic religious authorities, and the society that produces them. Schweitzer writes about this endowment of legitimacy as follows:

Many women who approached militant groups were initially rejected because Palestinian society was reluctant to condone the violence. But after Idris's death, radical religious leaders were quick to applaud suicide bombing as an equal opportunity venture for all, although some terrorist groups still oppose the idea.

When Wafa Idris’s bombing occurred, the news was given a great deal of attention within the Palestinian territories and around the world. It was particularly jubilating and glorifying news among Palestinian women. She was celebrated as “heroine.” The former Iraqi president, Sadam Hussein is said to have named a street after

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39 Ibid.

40 Schweitzer, “Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?” 47.

her.42 Fatah’s Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade which deployed this mission realized the benefits to be so great as to justify the action. This has a lot to do with the fact that her actions were widely accepted and legitimized by the society as a whole. Barbara Victor argues that the legitimization of female suicide bombing, not only by radical Islamic groups, but also by moderate groups like the Fatah has increased the justifiability of the suicide mission.43 She writes:

> During the symbolic funeral for Wafa held by the Fatah, one of the council members eulogized her as: Wafa’s martyrdom restored honor to the national role of the Palestinian women, sketched the most wonderful picture of heroism in the long battle for national liberation.44

Movies were made in Wafa’s honor. Giant posters of her remain erected on main streets of the city of Ramallah. Billboards full of her pictures are on every corner of the city. Songs and poems were written glorifying her actions. The amount of attention and glorification that she received dramatically boosted the morale and desire of her fellow women. Her act has empowered seven other women to blow themselves up all in the name of defending their community, expressing their pain and making sure that their “wrong doers” feel their pain and suffering as well. Like Wafa, they will find meaning to their suffering by engaging in an “honorable” act – suicide bombing. Their final goal is to obtain justice where no other means of seeking justice is an option for them. All of this is justified as a rightful act by the groups that dispatch the mission. Consequently, this helped the Palestinian society to solidify the legitimacy of female suicide bombing as a community-wide message of defiance directed at their “wrong-doers.”

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42 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 54.
In closing, the convergence of ostensible feelings of victimization, revenge, and the popular support for suicide bombing as an act of martyrdom by organizations and the society at large seem to be the key motivators for desiring to become female *shahida* in Palestine.
CHAPTER FOUR

HOW DO SOCIAL RELATIONS, RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL NORMS AND BELIEFS FACTOR IN THE CONTEXT OF FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBING?

Background: Women in the Palestinian Society

Like many other Arab societies, the Palestinian society is a patriarchal society where religion and culture are intertwined. Palestinian society is not an individualistic society. It is a society founded upon community well-being, tribalism, and social homogeneity. Individual security, well-being, and survival are guaranteed by the group or communities. Relations among nuclear and extended family members are highly valued and each member has a duty to care for the welfare and safety of other family members.

Family is a vital unit in a Palestinian society. Relationships between families and between individual family members within the immediate and extended families are dominated by religious and traditional norms and values passed down from generation to generation. 1 Palestinian society has undergone a range of economic and political changes over the last few decades. Although such changes have transformed its social and family organization, certain core cultural characteristics that impact expectations among women have remained the same.

Women in a Palestinian society have a very distinct and specified role – the domestic sphere of life. Like most of other Arab societies, their exposure to the public domain is very limited. Their primary role is with the family and at home. Even that is

further specified based on the type of family and locale. Najah Manasra in her article entitled, “Palestinian Women: between Tradition and Revolution” stated that there are three structurally different types of families in Palestine. The first, she says, is the family of the refugee camps, second is the family of villages, and third is the family of cities.\(^2\)

The camp families were formed in 1948 with the official creation of the state of Israel. Women from families formed in refugee camps are essentially the result of the creation of the state of Israel on the “Palestinian land.” Families in the villages of the West Bank and Gaza, on the other hand, have existed since the beginning of the society. City families are a hybrid of the two.

Gender identities are generally based on the hierarchy of these family settings. Women in the camps and villages tend to willingly accept the patriarchy and their socially designated roles. Women in the cities, on the other side, seem to reject traditional and cultural discourses and better understand and value their contribution to the society. However, this is not to suggest that the basic common role as ascribed by the society in general varies geographically. Because, most core cultural characteristics that impact expectations about women can be identified in all three family settings. The division is specified rather to point out the roles of women within the framework of each of these three family settings that are distinct among each other. For example, women in refugee camps and villages are more enthusiastic or obedient to the patriarchal way of things. They are very much dependent on kinship (extended family). Their identity and loyalty rely on the kinship, and are very much concerned about their locale – origin of

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birth. On the other hand, women in the city family setting are socio-economically advantaged, and are better educated. Therefore, they are likely to be more socially aware, and potentially more sensitive to the plights of their communities and society at large. Nonetheless, many varying members of society feel and even resent some of their socially assigned roles, yet they feel obligated to perform them.  

The structure of a family determines the role of a Palestinian woman in the society. Honor rises above all else in the Palestinian family and, in particular, in the women of the family or, more accurately, in each woman’s sexual integrity. The social and psychological pressure on girls to adapt to their traditional female role starts at a very early age. Obedience to one's father or husband is one of the highest indicators of honor in a Palestinian woman's life. All women are expected to preserve the family's reputation and "honor," which in Arab society is primarily connected to women's sexual behavior. If a woman is immodest or brings shame on her family by her sexual behavior, she brings shame and dishonor on all her kin. Whether it is wearing indecent attire in public, for example, or being seen without a head scarf by a male who is not related to her in any way, shaming one’s family by bearing a child out of wedlock, etc., these are all highly valued social and cultural burdens that a woman faces and must not ruin.

Women represent half of the Palestinian society (49.5%). The Palestinian society is similar to other Arab societies where the traditional idea of women and their

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role is a common value. However, the Palestinian women's situation is a lot different than the rest of the Arab world. For the most part they enjoy relative ‘freedom’ in the sphere of political movements and uprisings. This is due to the fact that their participation is clearly defined by the Israeli occupation. The occupation has undeniably created unique roles in the society amongst Palestinian women which sets them apart from other women in similar traditional Arab societies.

Palestinian women have to embark upon life on two fronts – internally and externally. Internally, they have to confront constraints of their highly traditional society which puts a tremendous amount of pressure on women in general. Externally, like the entire Palestinian nation, they have to face the occupation and its wide range of effects on their daily life. Consequently, the social order of Palestinian society, its cultural codes regarding gender relations, and expected gender-specific behavior have contributed to creating a setting in which Palestinian women are involved in suicide bombing missions.

**Socio-cultural Factors**

Identity is an inherent social phenomenon. Cheryl Rubenberg describes the Palestinian society and the role of women as: “In the Palestinian society, identity involves your growing connection with your kin, assuming responsibility for them and, most of all, willingness to subordinate your personal wishes for the good of the family.”

The identity of Palestinian women is defined by the specific roles that are assigned to them by their society. The Palestinian society and culture are an integral part of the larger Islamic-Arab tradition. The status of Palestinian women in the society should,
therefore, be studied and interpreted within the broader context of the Islamic-Arab
tradition. Like other Arab traditions, the socio-cultural beliefs and practices of the
Palestinian society places high emphasis on family honor (Sharaf). That honor is
essentially a men’s property. Women do not own that honor. They are its custodians;
and their only obligation is to preserve it for the sake of their family and for their men in
particular.

When women do not fully meet the defined roles given to them, they are then
considered ‘menaces to society,’ Scholars have suggested that resultant feelings that
stem from not being able to fulfill such ascribed roles produce feelings of hopelessness,
despair, shame or humiliation among women. It makes women feel as if they are living
worthless lives, particularly in the Palestinian/Arab culture, which places much weight on
honor.7 Palestinian women generally accept their responsibilities as wives and mothers
and are willing to function under these roles in the extreme conditions of conflict and
occupation. Many women realize that they also have a responsibility not only to their
families and communities, but also to their nation. Their realization emerges from a
commitment to communal solidarity, something which women, as much as men, feel
obliged to defend.8

7 Ibid., 251.
8 Maria Holt, “The Kitchen or the Battlefield? Women's Experiences of Violence and 'Suicide
Terrorism' in the Palestinian Territories,” Middle East Monitor,” February 28, 2011,
http://www.middleeastmonitor.org.uk/articles/guest-writers/2090-the-kitchen-or-the-battlefield-womens-
Mohammed Hafez in his book entitled, “Manufacturing human bombs: the making of Palestinian suicide bomber” describes it as follows:

Becoming a female suicide bomber is a social process; it involves socialization, and it is subject to rules and exhibits patterns. The opportunity to engage in it is likewise socially determined. Suicide bombing requires three major elements: motivated individuals, access to organizations that utilizes them, and a community that praises perpetrators as heroes and embraces their acts as a noble form of resistance.9

Women’s place in the Palestinian society is limited primarily to the household arena, while men, as sole providers, are granted all other activities outside the home. As such, Palestinian resistance movements and their leaders in particular have long emphasized the domestic aspects of women's contribution to the national cause. The future of Palestine depends on women to bear and raise children. Producing children and caring for the family - the basic unit of the nation are the two primary responsibilities of women. Yasser Arafat was quoted saying, that his best weapon is the Palestinian mother's womb.10 Tamara Chapman in her article of “Beyond the Veil” quoted from Rebecca Otis’s Ph.D. dissertation work entitled “Palestinian Women: Mothers, Martyrs and Agents of Political Change” talked about the importance of women in the production of children.

From the very beginning, the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has been characterized by a demographic race, with each side attempting to ensure existence through population growth. That makes the womb ground

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9 Hafez, Manufacturing Human Bombs, 55.

zero in the battle for statehood. It makes bearing children an act of defiance.\textsuperscript{11}

The divide created by providing a domestic sphere for women and a public sphere for men has naturally contributed to heightening women’s desire to join activities which are primarily performed exclusively by men. Hence, women in the aforementioned different family settings use varying strategies to maneuver within their socially defined roles to achieve their own individual yearnings. The power of dynamics among the women of villages, refugee camps and cities explains their ability to accept and act upon their ascribed duties.

Rural and camp women are more traditional in a sense that they accept the norms and traditions of the society with less defiance, while the city women seem to contest their defined roles. Although they are strongly nationalist, village women are also culture loyalists, and are mostly careful not to upset the status quo of gender relations. This is due to limited opportunities provided to women of villages and camps with regard to access to information. In urban/city family settings, women are better situated and have access to information, education as well as employment opportunities outside home. But, they also have to deal with some urban-specific issues that affect their lives. For instance, housing shortages in the West Bank cities of Ramallah, Nablus and Jericho has created delays in marriages and increased the number of unmarried people. It is important to note that in the Palestinian society unmarried women are not viewed the same way as unmarried man. As women increasingly become single, it raises

a concern in the society. They are viewed as tarnishing their family's reputation and bringing shame to their families and the entire community. Women are then pressured to get married, or else be outcast from the society. The urban women are well aware of the situations on the ground and feel compelled to get involved in the struggle for a better life. Nevertheless, it will be a demanding balancing act for these women to be a mother, a wife, and a sister on one hand; and participate in the struggle for the national cause on the other hand.

The bulk of Gaza Strip’s inhabitants are refugees. Radicalized by the dismal conditions of life in the refugee camps, women under this family setting often resort to more revolutionary means of expressing defiance. The identity of these women has been severely tarnished, restricting them - the presumed ‘preservers of the culture’ to pass on their culture and tradition to the next generation. Expressing their despair in whatever means available including suicide bombing becomes the way out for these women. In fact six of the ten known female suicide bombers of Palestine came from refugee camps. But, this was clearly observed among women of all the three population segments during the two intifadas. In the first intifada of 1987, village women took a central role, courageously confronting the Israeli army. Nearly one third of the overall causalities of Palestinians from this uprising were women. The participation of urban women was obviously greater. Their involvement in direct retaliation is a testimony to their awareness of the issues facing the Palestinian people as a whole.

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The family is the foundation for any social, cultural, economic, and religious spheres of life in the Palestinian society. Thus, it serves as a source of support in all of these spheres of life. Anat Berko and Edna Erez describe this as follows:

The family plays a crucial role in providing assistance and services that in the modern state are expected from formal social services, for instance, mutual support in protection, financial support, employment, and child rearing, and so on. Family members are expected to be totally committed to the values of family protection, unity and reputation, which may require putting aside their own personal, needs, aspirations, and desires in favor of the group. The collectivist orientation stresses self-sacrifice of individual members for the "common good," and lays out expectations to put the community's welfare and interests beyond one's personal happiness. For women, this means placing the family welfare before their own, demonstrating an unconditional devotion to and continuous care for the family, support for members of the family of origin (if unmarried) and the husband (if married). For mothers, whose own happiness is determined by their children's happiness, growth, and achievement, their success or failure in personal behavior and life choices, in marriage and child rearing, is considered as the failure or success of the family. Symbiotic relations between parents and children, particularly the mother, result in a complete erasing of the mother as a person and as a woman. Her role as a mother becomes a "master status," overshadowing every other aspect of her life.\footnote{Anat Berko and Edna Erez, “Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women's Liberation or Oppression?” \textit{Studies in Conflict and Terrorism} 30, no. 6 (June, 2007): 493-519.}

Palestinian women must stick to the directions and guidance from members of the society who possess a higher rank on the society scale. These members of the society are the elderly, which for the most part means elderly men. Women and children are placed at the base of the ladder. Young women must not only obey their elders and men, but also younger males. Challenging the authority of a father, husband, or other male figures is a serious offense for women. Every individual is expected to behave according to the gendered values of the honor code. The traditional, cultural and patriarchal elements of
Arab society emphasize the importance of customs and traditions, while maintaining stability and harmony in the hierarchy of social relations. ¹⁴

In Palestine, martyrdom is a culturally embedded social phenomenon. It is perceived as a community and individual response to the circumstances in which people find themselves in. ¹⁵ Implications generated from this culture of martyrdom have had a considerable influence on the participation of women in suicide bombing. It has been instrumental in awakening the individual’s obligation to take matters into his or her hands for Allah, “Palestine,” or the community. Palestinian society has widely adopted suicide bombers in general as "heroes" of the resistance and "martyrs" to their cause. In a society where the popular culture supports and embraces suicide as “martyrdom,” there is little doubt that women suicide bombers can easily find comfort and even encouragement in it. As Robert Pape puts it, “suicide bombing requires significant community support for three fundamental reasons: First, it enables the group to reinforce its membership. Second, community support is critical for the organizations to avoid detection by the enemy, although this depends on the popularity of the groups among the population. Third, community support is necessary for the notion of martyrdom.” ¹⁶ According to Pape, this is by far the most important aspect of having high positive social responses to suicide attacks.


¹⁶ Pape, Dying to Win, 81.
In Palestine, sacrifice for one’s community is a social construct. Thus, groups that utilize this *modus operandi* will have to make sure that their attackers are glorified through elaborated ceremonies, high profile funerals, martyr videos, naming streets and schools after them, etc. According to Pape, such propaganda certainly boosts the popular support for the act. Evidence reveals that since the mid-1990, Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza have shown an increased level of popular support for suicide bombings against Israel. The numbers have risen from one third to two thirds of the population since the beginning of the second *intifada* in 2001.

In closing, the social order of Palestinian society, its cultural codes regarding gender relations, male privileges, and female-expected behavior create the perspective for Palestinian women's individual motivation in suicide bombings. However, suicide bombings would not have had burgeoned, if it was not for the society’s full support. And, a number of reasons can be cited for the Palestinian society’s support of this mission. These reasons include, but are not limited to: excessive brutality and civilian casualties by the “occupying” force – Israel, the length and severity of the conflict, the growing joblessness and hopelessness among the youth, and most of all, lack of an alternative way of tackling all of these problems. Nevertheless, it still may not be necessarily possible to identify how much weight each of these reasons possesses in order to objectively evaluate the actual influence of the socio-cultural factors in female suicide bombing of Palestine.

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17 Ibid., 82.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
Religious Factors

Although the scope of this thesis does not allow an in-depth analysis of the status of Palestinian women in Islam, it will be prudent to understand the treatment of women in Islam in general in order to identify the religious dynamic influencing female suicide bombings.

Religion plays a most important role in the way individual members of society respond to harsh realities from which there seems no escaping from. Debara Zedalis described this verity as: “Religiously motivated acts of retaliation are a particularly potent form of violence; as religion offers the moral justification for committing seemingly immoral acts.”

Islam has not been an entirely neutral force in the definition of “gender” in the Palestinian society. This is because Islam is not a homogenous religion. Rather, it is a set of beliefs and values that are designed to address the day to day life of the community. Islam is a very family-oriented religion. As such, the primary way of transmitting the faith is through the family. Parents, both mothers and fathers have, therefore, a huge responsibility in passing on their religious teachings when raising their children. This family orientation also translates into a community-oriented way of life.

Women in Islam are generally granted the same fundamental rights as men, as most of the rulings of Islam apply to men and women equally. When a distinction is made between the two sexes, Muslims consider it as a mercy from Allah and a sign of His knowledge of His creations. Thus, He granted both men and women with their specific roles. Nevertheless, Islam is perceived by many, especially by non-Muslims as an

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20 Zedalis, Female Suicide Bombers, 19.

21 Joseph and Najmabadi, Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures, 420.
oppressive religion that labels women inferior to men. It is often a common misconception that when non-Muslims think of women in Islam, they instantaneously envision the hijab (headscarf), burka (covering head to toe), polygamy, inheritance, forced marriage, honor killing, etc. It is true that there are a number of Muslim countries in the world that do implement many harsh rulings against women, but not all of them are necessarily Islamic. These rulings are state-based and not necessarily religious. While most of these things are also strictly cultural, they are often times incorrectly associated with Islam.

A number of these countries have cultural differences that go against the teachings of Islam. Local tribal or cultural traditions and practices that govern the status of women in some Muslim countries today have actually little to do with Islam. Consider the Taliban controlled Afghanistan and the tribal areas of Pakistan. Cutting off women from any societal role, implementing forced marriages, denying women education, female genital mutilation, honour killings, throwing of acid into a woman’s face for refusing to marry a man arranged by her family, disputes over dowry or marital issues, etc., these are all practices that are being implemented both by the Taliban and the tribal Pakistan areas. But unfortunately, all of these practices have come to be seen as Islamic.

Islamic historians tell us that in pre-Islam Arabian societies, women had very limited social status, and were often considered inferior to men.\textsuperscript{22} For instance, the birth of a daughter in a family was considered humiliating and, as such, the practice of female baby killings was allowed.\textsuperscript{23} In fact, this horrific practice is still applicable in some

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 387.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
countries today. Muslims claim that when Islam came to existence, Arabian women were granted back all of their human rights and more. Although it will be practically impossible to analyze all the issues involving women in Islam, some of the fundamental issues such as: the right of marriage/divorce, polygamy, inheritance, education, dress code, and spirituality will be briefly discussed. Because, it is important to know how religion (Islam) views women in all these aspects of life, as that may help us conceptualize some of the reasons given on why women engage in suicide bombing operations.

Much of the debate about women's rights in Islam begins from the basic question of the creation of men and women as equals. Muslims believe a woman to be equal to a man as a human being and as his partner in this life. This is exemplified by the tenet that women have been created with a soul of the same nature as men. The following two sayings from the two Islamic Scriptures the Qur’an and the Hadith describe the equality of men and women in the eyes of Allah – God. “O Mankind, be conscious of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate (of the same kind) and from them twain has spread a multitude of men and women.”

Narrated Abu Huraira: A man came to Allah's Apostle and said, "O Allah's Apostle! Who is more entitled to be treated with the best companionship by me?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man said, "Who is next?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man further said, "Who is next?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man asked for the fourth time, "Who is next?" The Prophet said, "Your father."

\[\text{24 Qur’an 4:1.}\]
\[\text{25 Al-Bukhari, 73: 2.}\]
Unlike Christianity, Islam does not blame Eve alone for the First Sin. The Qur’an makes it very clear that both Adam and Eve were tempted, and that they both sinned and were both forgiven after their repentance.

Then Satan whispered suggestions to them both in order to uncover that which was hidden from them of their private parts (before); he said: "Your Lord did not forbid you this tree save you should become angels or become of the immortals." And he (Satan) swore by Allah to them both (saying): "Verily, I am one of the sincere well-wishers for you both." So he misleads them with deception. Then when they tasted of the tree, that which was hidden from them of their shame (private parts) became manifest to them and they began to stick together the leaves of Paradise over themselves (in order to cover their shame). And their Lord called out to them (saying): "Did I not forbid you that tree and tell you: Verily, Satan is an open enemy unto you?" They said: "Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If you forgive us not, and bestow not upon us Your Mercy, we shall certainly be of the losers." (Allah) said: "Get down, one of you an enemy to the other (i.e. Adam, Eve, and Satan, etc.). On earth will be a dwelling-place for you and an enjoyment, - for a time." He said: "Therein you shall live, and therein you shall die, and from it you shall be brought out (i.e. resurrected)."

Conversely, we also find the following verse from the Qur’an that describes men and women not having exactly the same status.

…And they (women) have rights (over their husbands as regards living expenses, etc.) similar (to those of their husbands) over them (as regards obedience and respect, etc.) to what is reasonable, but men have degrees (of responsibility) over them. And Allah is All-Mighty, All Wise.

Critics of the religion argue that there is a clear distinction of rights between men and women in this verse, i.e. men are still granted a higher degree of rights than women. But the Muslims argue that the reason behind granting men a higher degree of rights than women is simply for the sake of emphasizing practicality. Taking care of the family in the household is a prime responsibility of men. Therefore, men are practically required to

26 Qur’an 7:20-25.

27 Qur’an 2:228.
make decisions on things regarding household issues. According to Muslims, this is not a ranking of rights by Islam, but rather recognizing the nature of the division of gender based on responsibilities. They argue that men and women are not adversaries; they rather complement each other according to their biological make ups.

Islam defines rights and duties in the overall social structure. With this understanding, we are going to look at Islam’s stand on some fundamental social issues concerning women. It is obvious that social conditions differ from one community to another and from one period of time to another. But it seems that Islam provides certain broad guidelines, and basically allows every community to conduct its life the way it likes as long as it is within the framework provided by its general guidelines and principles.

**On marriage and the Right to Divorce**

A Muslim woman has the right to reject and accept any man for marriage, though marriage is vigorously pursued in Islam.

And among His Signs is this that He created for you spouses of your own kind, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy for one another: verily in that are Signs for those who reflect.  

28 Qur’an 30:21

Ibn Abbas reported that a girl came to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad, and she reported that her father had forced her to marry without her consent. The Messenger of Allah gave her the choice... (between accepting the marriage and invalidating it).  

29 Al-Bukhari, 32:12.

A Muslim woman has also the right to initiate divorce. But, men have an easier process in divorcing their wives. For instance, although not a practice in Shi’a Muslims, the Sunni Muslims use a divorce procedure called triple *talaq* - uttering of the phrase “I divorce you” three times in one setting for a man to divorce his wife. And that could be

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29 Al-Bukhari, 32:12.
considered as a legal ground for finalizing the divorce.  

Whereas for a woman, although she has a right to divorce her husband, she has to go through different steps before she is granted the divorce. It will start first with her father, brother, or any close male family relative’s arbitration attempts advising the couple to reconcile, and if the family mediation fails, (there could be several attempts) then she goes to court seeking for a divorce. The state of being single is, however, highly discouraged in Islam. The verse below from the Qur’an states the importance of family mediation and how divorce could be the last resort. “If a couple fears separation, you shall appoint an arbitrator from his family and an arbitrator from her family; if they decide to reconcile, GOD will help them get together. GOD is Omniscient, Cognizant.”

Women are entitled to keep their dowry money that they received from their husbands at the time of marriage as well as their inherited wealth that they brought in to the marriage.

O ye who believe! Ye are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should ye treat them with harshness, that ye may take away part of the dower ye have given them,-except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If ye take a dislike to them it may be that ye dislike a thing, and Allah brings about through it a great deal of good.

You shall not covet the qualities bestowed upon each other by GOD; the men enjoy certain qualities, and the women enjoy certain qualities. You may implore GOD to shower you with His grace. GOD is fully aware of all things.

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30 Saud Joseph and Afsaneh Najmabadi, Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures, 659.

31 Qur’an, 4:35.

32 Qur’an, 4:19.

33 Qur’an, 4:32.
Women have much better rights on finance and personal property. These rights were certainty not the case for women in many other civilizations, including many Western societies. A Muslim woman possesses independent legal and economic rights.

**On Polygamy**

This is one of the most commonly debated issues about women in Islam. Muslims claim that polygamy is permitted in the *Qur’an*, but under strictly observed circumstances, and for good reasons. Islamic historians tell us that polygamy was a common practice before the advent of Islam.\(^{34}\) According to Muslims, when Islam came into existence, Muhammad placed restrictions on polygamy and made it even punishable by law. The only time that a Muslim man can have more than one wife is when he is trying to alleviate pain and suffering of a widow who is in need of assistance. During Muhammad’s era, because of recurrent battles in Arabia, a great majority of men lost their lives causing a huge shortage of the male population. Widows, their orphans and their daughters of marriageable age were all left behind with no one to look after them. As a result, men were required to support the women population by providing basic necessities for more than one woman. In addition, staying unmarried is not only desirable but also discouraged in Islam. The only way a man can provide this is by marrying two, three, or four women, as any form of man-woman relationship without marriage was considered *haram* – forbidden.

If you deem it best for the orphans, you may marry their mothers you may marry two, three, or four. If you fear lest you become unfair, then you

\(^{34}\) Saud Joseph and Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*, 657.
shall be content with only one, or with what you already have. Additionally, you are thus more likely to avoid financial hardship.\textsuperscript{35}

The \textit{Qur’an} emphasizes that even though a man can marry more than one wife, he should be able to give equal attention and love to all of his wives. If he cannot provide that, then he should remain with one wife.

If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, Marry women of your choice, Two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice.\textsuperscript{36}

Muslims stress that since it is practically difficult for a man to be able to provide equal attention to more than one wife, the practice is rarely attainable. Therefore, polygamy is mostly impossible in practical terms. It is also forbidden in Islam for a man to have more than one wife for the sake of pleasure.

\textbf{On Inheritance/Property Rights}

The \textit{Qur’an} gives the parents total freedom to give their children as much inheritance as they see fit. \textit{Qur’an}, however, commands that if a will is not left, then the estate is distributed in such a manner that the son gets double what the daughter gets. The logical explanation given by Muslims about this practice is that generally, the son is responsible for a family, while the daughter is taken care of by a husband or her family. So, they claim that this difference is merely due to the disparity in the duties and costs that each sex has to cope with. The Islamic interpretations also suggest that the \textit{Qur’an} recommends a will shall be left to conform to the specific circumstances of the deceased,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Qur’an 4:30.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Qur’an 4:3.
\end{itemize}
when distributing inheritance. For example, if the son is rich and the daughter is poor, one may leave a will giving the daughter everything, or twice as much as the son. The following verse in the Qur’an describes that: “It is prescribed, when death approaches any of you, if he leaves any goods that he makes a bequest to parents and next of kin, according to reasonable usage; this is due from the God-fearing.” In further elaborating this fact the verse below states a more detailed distribution of wealth:

Allah enjoins you concerning your children: The male shall have the equal of the portion of two females; then if they are more than two females, they shall have two-thirds of what the deceased has left, and if there is one, she shall have the half; and as for his parents, each of them shall have the sixth of what he has left if he has a child, but if he has no child and (only) his two parents inherit him, then his mother shall have the third; but if he has brothers, then his mother shall have the sixth after (the payment of) a bequest he may have bequeathed or a debt; your parents and your children, you know not which of them is the nearer to you in usefulness; this is an ordinance from Allah: Surely Allah is Knowing, Wise.

A woman in Islam has the right to own property, to control her own money to buy and sell, and to give gifts and charity. She also has a right to work and earn an income. However, as long her husband ensures a decent standard of living for her and the family, according to his means, she is not required to work and even advised to stay home. Some ownership rights given to women in Islam are even remarkable compared to the women’s property rights in the Western world which are really a recent phenomenon. For example, women can run their own business and generate their own income, and no one can control their earnings including their own husbands without their consent. Women are able to manage their assets in any way they wish. Whereas in the West until the mid-

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37 Qur’an 2:180.

38 Qur’an 4:11.
19th century, married women were considered possessions of their husbands and had virtually no control over their money or property. Muslims always offer the historical reference of the Prophet Muhammad’s merchant wife Khadijah who hired him to work for her before they were married. Women are generally allowed to enter into legal contracts without anyone’s consent, and that certainly includes their husbands.

**On Education**

Women in Islam have the right to education. Seeking and acquiring knowledge is an obligation on all Muslims, male or female. Women as much as men are obligated to seek knowledge and it is even considered a sin if she refuses. The following two *Hadiths* refer to this: “To seek knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim, men or women, (Declared Authentic By Shaikh Muhammad Naasir-ud-Deen Al-Albaani).”

Whoever follows a way to seek knowledge, Allah will make easy for him a way to paradise, (Declared Authentic By Shaikh Muhammad Naasir-ud-Deen Al-Albaani).

The following verse in the Qur’an also describes the importance of knowledge for all Muslims:

> Is one who is obedient to Allah, prostrating himself or standing (in prayer) during the hours of the night, fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the Mercy of his Lord (like one who disbelieves)? Say: "Are those who know equal to those who know not?" It is only men of understanding who will remember.

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39 Al-Bukhari, 1.28.

40 Ibid., 1:32:2.

41 Qur’an 39:9.
It is the responsibility of both parents to provide good education to children. Women play a very important role in Muslim societies with regard to their children’s education. Women are allowed to seek knowledge outside of their home. They have basically the same right to education as their male counterparts.

**On Dress Code**

A Muslim women’s attire is another commonly contested issue with respect to women and Islam. Although traditions and customs of individual societies have a huge role in the women’s dress code, the Qur’an provides specific guidelines, but basically left it for the individual societies and the women themselves to decide. It should be noted that morality is a huge part of the faith in Islam. And, the Qur’an has the following specific verse about women and morality:

> And tell the believing women to subdue their eyes, and maintain their chastity. They shall not reveal any parts of their bodies, except that which is necessary. They shall cover their chests, (with their Khimar) and shall not relax this code in the presence of other than their husbands, their fathers, the fathers of their husbands, their sons, the sons of their husbands, their brothers, the sons of their brothers, the sons of their sisters, other women, the male servants or employees whose sexual drive has been nullified, or the children who have not reached puberty. They shall not strike their feet when they walk in order to shake and reveal certain details of their bodies. All of you shall repent to GOD, O you believers that you may succeed.  

Critics of Islam argue that this verse is somewhat vague, as the word “necessary” is very subjective. A woman may feel it necessary to take off her cloth and wears a swimming suit while at the beach, or a woman may feel it necessary to wear shorts in hot weather.

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42 Qur’an 24:31.
conditions. Therefore, how is the word “necessary” to be evaluated? Muslims would argue that Allah in a very general term gave women the freedom to decide according to their own circumstances. However, God also teaches women to be righteous and modest, hence a righteous woman would have no problem to define “necessary” and dress accordingly. They believe that by covering her body a woman simply retains her dignity.

**On Spirituality**

In Islam men and women have the same religious responsibilities, and both genders will receive rewards or punishment on the Day of Judgment. Both are commanded to believe in God and to worship Him. The same duties are assigned to both men and women with regards to their faith. The following verses in the *Qur’an* demonstrate the various responsibilities regarding spirituality for both men and women.

> Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily to him will we give a new life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to their actions.\(^{43}\)

> And whoever does righteous good deeds, male or female, and is a true believer in the Oneness of God, such will enter paradise; and not the least injustice, even to the size of a speck on the back of a date stone, will be done to them.\(^{44}\)

> Allah has got ready forgiveness and tremendous rewards for the Muslim men and women; the believing men and women; the devout men and women; the truthful men and women; the patiently suffering men and women; the humble men and women; the almsgiving men and women; the fasting men and women, the men and women who guard their chastity; and the men and women who are exceedingly mindful of Allah.\(^{45}\)

\(^{43}\) Qur’an 16:97.

\(^{44}\) Qur’an 4:124.

\(^{45}\) Qur’an 33:35.
And wish not for the things in which Allah has made some of you to excel others. For men there is reward for what they have earned, (and likewise) for women there is reward for what they have earned, and ask Allah of His Bounty. Surely, Allah is Ever All-Knower of everything.\footnote{Qur’an 4:32.}

The concept of \textit{Jihad} as a spiritual struggle from within applies equally to both men and women. However, in \textit{Jihad} as in externally fighting the enemy, women have a slightly different role. The following \textit{Hadiths} signifies this: “Aisha, wife of the Prophet, asked ‘O Messenger of Allah, we see jihad as the best of deeds, so shouldn't we join it?’ He replied, “But, the best of jihad for women is a perfect hajj--pilgrimage to Makkah.”\footnote{Al-Bukhari, 9: 2784.}

It has been narrated on the authority of Yazid b. Hurmuz that Najda wrote to Ibn Abbas inquiring of him five things. Ibn Abbas said: If I had not the fear of committing (sin) for concealing the knowledge I would not have written to him. Najda wrote to him saying (after praising the Almighty and invoking blessings on the Prophet): Tell me whether the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) took women to participate with him in Jihad; (if he did), whether he allotted them a regular share from the booty; whether he killed the children of (the enemy in the war how long an orphan would be entitled to consideration as such) and for whom the Khams (fifth part of the booty) was booty. Ibn Abbas wrote to him: You have written asking me whether the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) took women with him to participate in Jihad. He did take them to the battle and sometimes he fought along with them. They would treat the wounded and were given a reward from the booty, but he did not assign any regular share for them.\footnote{Ibid., 9: 4456.}

How much is then Islam a factor in women’s participation in suicide bombing?

According to the Holy Scriptures of Islam, the deeds of male and female are of equal value and each will receive due reward for it. Therefore, there is no doubt that a religious
doctrine that promises redemption both personal as well as collective and offers a reward in the form of eternal life for good deeds could be a motivation. The concept of *jihad* as individual obligation and the culture of martyrdom in the society have greatly contributed in female suicide bombings.\(^4\) For the society that places high emphasis on redemption and martyrdom, suicide could be the way to accomplish the mission. However, we have come to learn from a number of studies and testimonies of the participants of the mission that religion alone is not necessary or sufficient as a motive, and when it is, it is often mixed with either nationalism or communal solidarity. In short, Islam, though central because of the indoctrination power of religion and central focus in Palestinian society, cannot be considered alone the sole and exclusive key behind the culture of "martyrdom."

**Political/Nationalist Factors**

Palestinian women are way ahead of their fellow Arab women, and women in much of the Middle East in their involvement in politics. Their long history of political activism is born out of a legacy of occupation that has not been experienced by many of the women in the rest of the Arab world.

The political activism of Palestinian women began in the late 1920s and 1930s during the British Mandate years. But then again, due to the cultural and traditional demands that they still have to satisfy, women’s participation, particularly in those initial years was limited to grassroots activism only. This activism was mostly in the areas of providing logistics, caring for the wounded and incarcerated, etc., through feminist

organizations like Women’s Committees. Even so, it paved the way for the establishment of much larger and organized women’s gathering like the first Palestine Arab Women’s Congress that was held in 1929 in Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{50} These gatherings played a major role in galvanizing Palestinian women to participate in the political arena, and set a stage for the formation of some independent women’s movements. The Arab Women Executive Committee (AWE) was the off-spring of this Congress, which was established to serve as a recruiting tool to organize and form women’s groups which will be representing Palestinian women independently.\textsuperscript{51} The 1930s were also the period where Palestinian women’s political awareness reached its highest level. In the late 1930s, a militant women's group called \textit{Zahrat Al-Okhowan} was formed to fight the British occupation alongside other men-dominated militant resistance groups.\textsuperscript{52} The Arab Women’s Association (AWA) and the Arab Women’s Union (AWU) in Jerusalem were the two prominent groups who were able to organize large demonstrations in the cities such as Jaffa and Nablus where a huge number of Palestinian prisoners were detained by Israeli forces due to the 1938 Arab Revolt.\textsuperscript{53} They often resisted against the treatment of those prisoners and demanded their release. These groups organized massive demonstrations which resulted in some violent actions such as: smashing shop windows.


\textsuperscript{51} Fleischmann, “The Emergence of the Palestinian Women’s Movement,” 19.


\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 95.
and intimidating shop owners, who did not participate in the 1936 general strike, by pouring gasoline on their produce.\textsuperscript{54}

The involvement of women in the political arena had become absolutely essential when the majority of the population was expelled from their homeland with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Palestinian women found themselves on the run with their families and became refugees in countries that had no empathy for their plights. There was little that the neighboring Arab nations could do for refugees of Palestine, as they were dealing with their own severely fractured situations that they inherited from their colonial legacies.

The outcome of the displacement brought unimaginable hardship on women and children. While Palestinian men were engaged in resisting the occupation directly, women were left to assume responsibilities on two fronts: Primarily, they have to fulfill their role as care givers to their families, kinship, and to the community at large. At the same time, they participate in the struggle for a Palestinian home land and return of refugees. Sonja Karkar, in her article entitled, “Palestinian Women and the violence of Israel’s occupation” described the situation as follows:

The enormity of this mass human uprooting would be unimaginable for women in the West where the sanctity of home is protected by law. No such laws came to the aid of Palestinian women who saw their homes razed to the ground or taken over by Jewish immigrant families. It is still mind-boggling to think that any Jewish woman fresh from the horrific experiences of the Holocaust could have contemplated setting up home amongst the still-warm belongings of a Palestinian family. Even today, no such laws come to the aid of Palestinian women as they again have to watch bulldozers tear apart their houses and their private memories to make way for the Jewish settlers coming from abroad. In just the last eight

\textsuperscript{54} Fleischmann, \textit{The Emergence of the Palestinian Women’s Movement}, 23-25.
years, more than 7,000 family homes, and also vast tracts of farming land, have been destroyed for Israel’s illegal housing developments high on the hills of Palestine. Palestinian women can see these brand new housing complexes rise up on the rubble of their own homes and stolen land while they must struggle to survive in pitiful circumstances below.\textsuperscript{55}

The level of political participation for Palestinian women has increased with the 1967 Arab-Israeli war that left Palestinians with further loss of land and brought a mass exodus. Once again, women faced dire consequences of the war, and were positioned in a situation where they could no longer hold on to their dual responsibilities. But, this time women not only undertook the usual social and charity work in the refugee camps and gave support to political prisoners and their families, but also began to engage in direct political activism through the different Women’s Committees. Each of these committees was affiliated with the four major political groups of Palestine, namely: The \textit{Fatah}; Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine; Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine; and the Palestinian People’s Party.\textsuperscript{56} With establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), women’s role in politics has even gone further enabling them to gain a few seats at the National Council.\textsuperscript{57}

The 1980s were the period where new forms of activism were seen among Palestinian women. A number of women’s issues such as marriage, inheritance, and honor killings were the center of discussions. Their increased activism led to the mass political protest of 1984 when hundreds of Palestinian women and children broke through


\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.,

\textsuperscript{57} Joseph and Najmabadi, \textit{Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures}, 658.
the Israeli checkpoints and barricades erected to stop Palestinians from moving between the West Bank and Jerusalem. The establishments of Women’s Higher Council in 1988 helped people realize the importance of the participation of women in political and social arenas.

Their engagement was further intensified throughout the outbreak of the two intifadas, particularly with the first one. During the first intifada (1987-1993) their participation was highly charged with demonstrations and street activism. In a relatively short span of time, women moved from thoroughly secondary roles as backup to men and having been primarily preoccupied with provision of services to major actors in the field of politics and the resistance to military occupation. With the establishment of independent NGO’s in the West Bank and Gaza during the 1990s, local women’s centers attempted to address women’s issues such as, domestic violence, personal status laws, honor killings and forced marriage, etc. Palestinian women didn’t just become mobilized to bring about change in their gender-specific issues, but also began forecasting their political role in the new, free and independent Palestine.

Nevertheless, during the second intifada, especially after the failure of the Oslo Accord of 1993 which failed to resolve any of the final status issues with Israel such as: the faith of Jerusalem, borders, water issues, settlements, return of Palestinian refugees, and prisoners; the participation of women in politics has significantly decreased. Like


59 Ibid.,

60 Ibid., 51.
the rest of the population, their hopes and dreams of an independent Palestinian State was once again shattered. Failure of the Camp David peace summit in 2000 also brought an empty promise to the people of Palestine. Having had nothing to look for, women have sought to contribute to the national struggle by embracing suicide bombing and becoming active players in it.

Also, dissatisfied with Accord’s outcome, radical groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) began to mobilize and intensified their resistance through a religious tantrum. Hamas and PIJ’s ploy of mixing the religious discourse with occupation and nationalism agenda provoked the ‘culture of martyrdom’ to be entrenched in the society. Due to restricted religious practices implemented by Hamas and PIJ, women’s role was also relegated to its old traditional values - the domestic sphere. Their efforts to be a part of the struggle for national identity became marginalized. Their involvement in the framework of the national discourse began to be measured only by their degree of productivity - their ability to produce the future Palestinians. Their identity and value began to be defined by their ability to bear and rear children.

Historically, the nationalism factor is the foundation for their resistance for all Palestinians, men and women. However, the value of the nationalist cause and whether or not this cause has adequate moral authority to justify the killing of innocent people is another topic for another day. After an in depth analysis of over 300 cases of suicide bombing attacks worldwide, Robert Pape concluded that for many of those organizations

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62 Ibid.
that deploy suicide bombers, a desire for foreign, occupying forces to leave their respective homelands is the primary factor.\textsuperscript{63}

Palestinian women heightened their engagement in the nationalist rebellion by joining the ranks of men who use themselves as human bombs, especially after Arafat’s plea to women on the aftermath of the first female suicide bomber of 2002. “You are the hope of Palestine. You will liberate your husbands, fathers, and sons from oppression. You will sacrifice the way you, women, have always sacrificed for your family.”\textsuperscript{64} But is this call for self-sacrifice the same self-sacrifice that women have been paying based on their typical social role? Marilyn Friedman argues otherwise:

In a society in which women are largely excluded from political or public life, women are not routinely called upon to make sacrifices at a level of high public heroism. This sort of role is left to men who are held responsible for the crucially important defense of the nation or people and who are usually the only ones to share in the glory and public adulation that most societies confer on those who achieve political or military heroism.\textsuperscript{65}

The society’s glorification of female suicide bombers as national heroes not only maximizes the values of volunteering in it as a higher calling, but also helps in legitimizing it. Nationalistic self-sacrifice brings a level of cultural honor and esteem that is beyond anything normally available to women in severely female-subordinated societies.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{63} Pape, \textit{Dying to Win}, 3.
\textsuperscript{64} Victor, \textit{Army of Roses}, 20.
\textsuperscript{65} Marilyn Friedman, ed., \textit{Women and Citizenship} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 57.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
Again, one might argue that nearly all Palestinians are nationalist, but not all go to carry out a suicide mission to defend their nationalism. More importantly, not all Palestinian women become human bombs. The short and quick counter argument to this would be; it is not always the case where nationalism alone is the sole factor for female suicide bombing in Palestine. It is rather that a great sense of desperation generated from the luck of any reasonable solutions to the problems caused by a combination of all the three factors, i.e., social/cultural, religious and political that could be a thrust for participating in the suicide bombing mission for women of Palestine.
Since the inception of ‘the first’ Palestinian female suicide bombing in 2002, Palestine has waged ten successful suicide bombing missions against Israel. Although Dalal al-Mughrabi was born in Palestine and was a member of the Fatah party, she was not considered the first Palestinian women to participate in suicide bombing because she was not born in the occupied territories (Gaza and the West Bank). In addition, her actual involvement in the bombing is still a contested issue between the Israelis and Palestinians, as the latter maintain that the bus that exploded was fired on from the air by Israeli helicopters. However, for analytical purposes, her profile is included in this chapter to provide some perspective on the overall trend of female involvement in suicide missions.

Each of these incidents is recorded and documented. However, neither full descriptive reports nor testimonies are abundantly available for thorough objective analysis. Assessing this phenomenon was, therefore, somewhat challenging. In any event, this chapter will provide brief descriptions on the social background, organizational affiliations, and general commonalities among these women in an effort to construct a logical explanation on the trend. The cases are described in their chronological order. In analyzing these cases, emphasis is placed on the women’s social background so as to understand this phenomenon from a personal perspective which is all too often shadowed by political issues.
Dalal Al-Mughrabi (1959-1978)

Figure 1. *Left,* Dalal Al-Mughrabi; *center,* Dalal in her militant uniform; *right,* Ehud Barak, the then commander in the Israeli Army was photographed shooting at the dead body of Dalal al-Mughrabi after the explosion. Pictures copied from the Web: [http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2011/03/475833.html](http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2011/03/475833.html).

Nineteen year old Dalal Al-Mughrabi may not go into the history books as the first suicide bomber in Palestine, but her mission is worth recognizing as it laid a foundation for what has become a fairly common phenomenon.

Al-Mughrabi was born in a refugee camp called Sabra in Beirut, Lebanon. Her father was Palestinian and her mother was of Lebanese descent. Her parents left their home in Jaffa, Palestine and immigrated to Lebanon after the 1948 war and the subsequent formation of the State of Israel.

A nurse by training, Al-Mughrabi was very much interested in politics, and began her official involvement by becoming a member of the *Fatah* movement in Lebanon. Her interest was said to have further developed even more during the Lebanese Civil War.

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of 1975. She joined the Fatah party as a communication officer and worked her way up to attain the rank of lieutenant. In her first assignment of direct combat, she took part in fighting against the Syrian army when Syrians entered Lebanon in 1976. Fatah offered Al-Mughrabi a position as a political officer to work at its offices in Italy; however, she allegedly declined the offer opting instead to be involved in military operations locally.3

The Costal Road Massacre, as it is commonly known, was one of many incidents in which Dalal al-Mughrabi was a direct participant. It was March 11, 1978, when Al-Mughrabi and eleven to thirteen (depending on the source) Palestinian militants arrived at the coastal plain area near Tel Aviv by rubber boats from Lebanon and hijacked two Israeli buses loaded with tourists and Israeli soldiers. They allegedly ordered the second bus to unload its passengers and then merged them with the first bus, cramping about seventy two passengers hostage in one bus before heading to downtown Tel Aviv. The mission of Al-Mughrabi and the crew was to enter the Ministry of Defense building in Tel Aviv and take hostages as collateral for the release of Palestinians in Israeli prisons. The timing was very important, as the then President Manheim Begin of Israel and Anwar Sadat of Egypt were about to declare peace. The planned agreement was later exposed to have neglected the issues concerning Palestinians and their quest for self-rule which was the key element in the peace process.4

2 Ibid.

3 Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, Women and Terrorism: Female Activities in Domestic and International Terror Groups (New York: Routledge, 2008), 97.

Al-Mugrahbi and her group had a fierce gunfire exchange with the Israeli security forces led by the then commander and former Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Barak. Unable to escape, the hijackers shot and killed a number of passengers. Finally, Al-Mughrabi allegedly threw a hand grenade at the bus and killed 39 people including women and children and wounded seventy two others. This remains, however, as a highly contested issue between the Israelis and Palestinians. Although eyewitnesses testified that the bus was bombed, Palestinians still maintain that it was hit by the Israeli forces from the sky. Al-Mughrabi and seven of the hijackers were killed in the incident. They were also buried in Israel.5

Al-Mughrabi’s is regarded as a ‘shahida’ in Palestine, schools and public squares are named after her. As part of the recent prisoners exchange between Hezbollah and Israel, Al-Mughrabi’s remains were returned to Palestine where a heroine’s reception was held in her honor by the Palestinian Authority as well as the public.

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5 Ibid.
Wafa Idris (1975-2002)

Figure 2. Wafa Idris graduated as a paramedic. Picture copied from the Web:
http://www.thisiswhataterroristlookslike.com/?p=1

Wafa Idris entered in the history books by becoming the first Palestinian female suicide bomber. The twenty-eight year-old Idris was born in 1975 in Am’ari, a refugee camp near the West Bank city of Ramallah. Her family fled from their home in Ramallah during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and became refugees in Gaza. Her father died when she was thirteen years old and she was, therefore, raised by a single mother. Idris was married at age sixteen to her first cousin. Apparently, she had been forced into this marriage by her elder brother.6 At age twenty three, Idris delivered a stillborn baby and was left unable to conceive due to complications from the delivery. She was divorced by her husband due to her infertility and was sent back to live with her mother, her older brother, his wife and their five children.7 It is very customary in Palestine society for an

6 Victor, Army of Roses, 70.

extended family to live under one roof. One can imagine the societal pressure that Idris must have endured for being a divorcee and a barren young woman.

During the first intifada of 1987, Idris was just thirteen years old. However, she apparently volunteered in the uprising by helping in food distribution and assisting prisoners’ families in her neighborhood.\(^8\) According to her family and friends, Idris was better known for her strong nationalism than her religious zeal. In a BBC online article published on January 30, 2002, her childhood friend told reporters that Idris loved her homeland and often talked about her wishes to sacrifice her life for her country. She also told reporters that Idris was happy whenever martyrdom attacks were carried out against the Israelis.\(^9\) Idris was trained as a paramedic and worked as a volunteer at a local Palestinian Red Crescent Society. She helped care for large numbers of wounded Palestinians during the second intifada. According to sources, she was injured twice by rubber bullets while treating the wounded.\(^10\) She also tutored local children in her refugee camp.

She was said to have been traumatized by her exposure to blood and death as an emergency medical worker at the Palestinian Red Crescent. Three of her brothers are members of Fatah. Her eldest brother, whom she lived with until her death, was in Israeli prison for a number of years for his involvement in the first intifada.\(^11\) In the same

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\(^8\) BBC, “Female Bomber's Mother Speaks Out.”

\(^9\) Ibid.


\(^11\) Ibid.
BBC article, the mother of Wafa Idris was asked why her daughter would sacrifice her life in such a way. She told reporters that, “Maybe it was because of all the wounded people she saw in the ambulances every day. She wanted to help her people by sacrificing herself. She was a daughter of Palestine.”

On January 27, 2002, an Israeli man was killed and one hundred fifty people were wounded when Wafa Idris’s suicide bomb exploded outside a shoe store in the busiest shopping district of downtown Jerusalem. As a volunteer for the Palestinian Red Crescent, she was able to bypass Israeli security and enter Jerusalem in a Palestinian ambulance. The Fatah military wing Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for the attack. Reports indicate that since Wafa Idris’s bombing, Israelis implemented precautionary measures by delaying Palestinian ambulances entering Jerusalem at security check points.

Wafa Idris is highly celebrated by the people of Palestine. She has become an inspiration for many young women to volunteer in suicide bombing missions. Schools, streets and public places are named after her; plays, poems, dramas also written about her. At Wafa Idris’s symbolic funeral (there was no body to be recovered, as she was burned down into ashes) one of Fatah’s female Revolutionary Council member spoke about Idris and said, "Wafa's martyrdom restored honor to the national role of the Palestinian woman, who sketched the most wonderful pictures of heroism in the long battle for national liberation. Wafa came today to complete the path of the martyr Dalal

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12Ibid.

13Ibid.
Al-Maghribi and her comrades started.”14 Sadam Hussein was said to have built a memorial in one of Baghdad’s streets in Idris’s honor.

Idris’s action had also become a subject of discussion and debate among religious leaders and radical organizations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The issue was whether Islam allows women to participate in carrying out such a mission. Acceptance and authorizations began to surface from various religious leaders and religious organizations allowing women to participate in the mission. This is quite a dramatic shift for the conventional Islamic ideology which does not encourage women to participate in direct combat with the enemy.

Various interpretations from the Holy Scriptures of Islam were used to justify the action. Among the many religious clerics that came out and legitimatized female participation in suicide mission was Hamas’s spiritual leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi. He was quoted saying, ”There is no reason that the perpetration of suicide attacks should be monopolized by men.”15 Saudi Arabia who was initially opposed to using women in suicide missions has issued a fatwa – a legal decree endorsing the action.16

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16 Ibid.
Dareen Abu Aysheh (1980-2002)

Twenty year old Dareen Abu Aysheh was born and lived in the village town of Beit Wazan in Samaria, the West Bank. She was an English literature student at Al-Najah University in Nablus.¹⁷ Not much is known about her family’s background, but reports indicate that she did not come from a well-to-do family. She is a divorcee without any children. Her ex-husband and her older brother were killed in a clash with Israeli security forces.¹⁸ Right after the death of her ex-husband and her brother, Abu Aisheh had allegedly contacted members of the Hamas organization asking them to recruit her for a suicide mission; but she was rejected. Eventually, her wishes were granted when she was contacted by the Fatah operatives for the mission. Consequently she became the second female suicide bomber of Palestine. In her farewell video, she explained that she wanted to be the second shahida following Wafa Idris. She said she wanted to take revenge for the earlier martyrs who came before her. Abu Aysheh was

¹⁷ Berko, The Path to Paradise: The Inner World of Suicide Bombers and Their Dispatchers, 4.
¹⁸ Victor, Army of Roses, 75.
known for her strong religious convictions and feminist beliefs. On her video she emphasized the importance of Palestinian women’s role in the struggle for independence. “Let Sharon (the then Prime Minister of Israel) the coward know that every Palestinian woman will give birth to an army of martyrs, and her role will not only be confined to weeping over a son, brother or husband instead, she will become a martyr herself.\(^\text{19}\)

On February 27, 2002, Dareen Abu Aisheh detonated herself at the Maccabim roadblock near the city of Ramallah wounding two Israeli policemen. Apparently she and two other Fatah members who were travelling with her were stopped by Israeli security forces and were asked for their identifications. When it was Abu Aisheh turn to show her ID she activated the explosives that she had strapped around her waist. She was killed instantly by the blast and wounded three Israeli security offers.\(^\text{20}\) The Fatah party claimed responsibility for this attack.


Eighteen year old Ayat al-Akhras was born in Dehaishe refugee camp near Bethlehem, the West Bank from an economically well to do family.\(^\text{21}\) She was the youngest of seven children - four brothers and two sisters. She was a straight A high school senior who was inspired to become a journalist. However, her hopes and dreams would never come to pass. She was very popular and outgoing among her peers.\(^\text{22}\) She was happily engaged to be married, and was said to have been recruited by her fiancé who was a Fatah member. One of her brothers was shot in the head during the first intifada in the late 1980s and has remained paralyzed since. In “Army of Roses” Barbara Victor described al-Akhras as:

She is described by her friends and family members as "fiercely opinionated", "the most outspoken within the family", and one who always

\(^{21}\)Ibid.

"dominated conversations.” She was also known for her intense interest in political matters. As a child, Ayat witnessed her brother being jailed twice for throwing stones at Israeli soldiers. Another brother was shot by Israeli bullets and her sister "suffered miscarriage when Israeli tanks rolled into the camp and prevented access to ambulance and hospital.” Ayat, we are told, developed a hatred for Israelis from young age, and expressed it intellectually. A while before she blew herself and two Israelis, Ayat was visiting a friend when the Israelis soldiers shot through the windows and killed a teenaged boy resident of the home while watching TV. The older brother who was present at the scene remembers: "Ayat got hysterical...I picked up my brother, who was bleeding badly, and ran with him in my arms towards the nearest hospital. Ayat ran with me, sobbing and screaming...My brother died in my arms, and Ayat collapsed."

On March 29, 2002 Ayat al-Akhras detonated herself at a supermarket in the affluent neighborhood of Kiryat Yovel in Jerusalem. The blast killed two Israeli civilians and wounded thirty others. Fatah’s military wing, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, claimed responsibility for this attack. On her farewell video, Al-Akhras blamed all Muslim countries for their inactions regarding Palestinians and their cause. She was recorded declaring, “I say to the Arab rulers, enough sleeping and failing to fulfill your duty, and watching as Palestine girls do the fighting.” Al-Akhras is the youngest female suicide bomber in the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

23 Victor, Army of Roses, 68.
24 To Die in Jerusalem. DVD.
25 Ibid.

Twenty-one year-old Andalib Al-Taqatiqah was born and had lived in a village called Beit Fajar near Bethlehem. Unlike the previous four women Al-Taqatiqah’s social status is unknown. She was, however, known as a member of the Fatah party, and had an intimate relationship with a male Fatah member who allegedly recruited her for the mission.\(^{26}\) Two of her first female cousins were captured by the Israeli forces while attempting to bomb the Mahane Yehuda market two years prior. Andalib witnessed the homes of her cousins demolished by the Israelis in retaliation.\(^{27}\)

On April 12, 2002 Andalib al-Taqatiqah detonated herself at the same market - Mahane Yehuda in Jerusalem.\(^{28}\) Six civilians were dead and more than sixty others wounded in the blast. Although there is not a great deal of evidence regarding her


\(^{27}\) Ibid., 22.

\(^{28}\) Ibid.
motives to commit the act, unofficial reports have been gathered by witnesses and acquaintances revealing that she wanted to die as a symbol of the Palestinian women's fight against occupation. She stated on her suicide video that she longed to finish the work that had been started by her two cousins, and wanted to honor the memory of those women who came before her.\textsuperscript{29} Al- Taqatiqah also indicated a religious motive on her video and said, “I am prepared to sacrifice my life for the cause. This is the highest level of Jihad (holy war), and I hope God will give me the honor of doing it.”\textsuperscript{30} Unlike the previous women she did not have an explosive belt wrapped around her waist. She carried a black handbag that contained three plastic pipes filled with explosives and nails connected to a battery.\textsuperscript{31}

**Hiba Daragmeh (1984-2003)**

![Image of Hiba Daragmeh](http://www.aztlan.net/women_martyrs.htm)

Figure 6. Hiba Daragmeh. Picture copied from the Web: [http://www.aztlan.net/women_martyrs.htm](http://www.aztlan.net/women_martyrs.htm).


\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 44.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
Nineteen year-old Hiba Daraghjmeh was born in Tubas of the West Bank. She was a first year student at Al Quds University majoring in English Literature. Her family is said to be economically well off. Hiba was an extremely devout Muslim known for her strict religious practices. She was reportedly never seen without her veil or her Qur’an. Her family described her as “obsessed with religious thoughts.” She was an outstanding student who was planning to obtain a degree in Literature and Palestinian studies. Her older brother was arrested by the Israeli forces and imprisoned for possession of explosives and guns during a demonstration in Tubas on the anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba – the 1948 establishment of the State of Israel and the Palestinian exodus. On the day of her brother’s arrest, the Israeli army unexpectedly stormed her family’s home and ransacked the house. A couple of days later, a curfew was put in place in her home town. Hiba’s brother later died in an Israeli jail while serving his ninety nine year prison term. The arrest and the subsequent death of her brother is said to have affected Hiba very deeply. She was affiliated with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).

On May 19, 2003 Hiba Azem Daraghmeh detonated herself at Kanyon ha-Amakim, a shopping mall in Afula (a city southeast of Haifa). The bomb left three Israeli civilians and Hiba dead and more than fifty people wounded. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attack. Her motive was allegedly to avenge the death of her brother. However, information gathered after her death has indicated that

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33 Ibid.
her main was predominantly rooted in her religious convictions. Her oldest sister was quoted saying, “Hiba saw herself as a special person. She demonstrated that in her religious obsession. She used to pray for two hours, standing, stooping and kneeling in devotion. She spent most of her free time reading the Koran.” As in many suicide bombing cases, days after the attack the Israeli army demolished Hiba’s family home in retaliation for her actions and forced the family to relocate in another area.

**Hanadi Tayseer Jaradat (1974-2003)**

![Hanadi Tayseer Jaradat](http://www.aztlan.net/women_martyrs.htm)

Figure 7. Hanadi Tayseer Jaradat. Picture copied from the Web: http://www.aztlan.net/women_martyrs.htm.

Twenty-nine year-old Hanadi Jaradat was born on September 22, 1975, in Silat al-Harthiyah, a village near the town of Jenin, the West Bank. Hanadi was a college graduate with a law degree from a Jordanian university. Her fiancé was an active member of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). However, her dream was short-lived when her fiancé was killed during a clash with the Israeli forces in the town of Jenin. She

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34 Ibid.
also lost her younger brother and a cousin from bullets shot by the Israeli army during an uprising in Jenin.  

36 It should be noted that during the second intifada the town of Jenin was viciously attacked by the Israel Army who claimed to be targeting residents of the refugee camps all in the name of fighting terrorist plots.

On Saturday, October 4, 2003 Hanadai detonated herself in Maxim restaurant in Haifa killing twenty civilians including four children and wounding more than sixty people. The bombing is best known as the Yom Kippur bombing, because it happened a day before the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur - Day of Atonement.  

37 The Islamic Jihad claimed responsibilities for the attack. In addition to her religious motivation, Hanadi was also very much aggravated by the death of her fiancé, brother and cousin. A few days after the incident, Hanadi’s father told reporters that, “He will accept only congratulations for what his daughter did. “This, he said, was a gift she gave me, the homeland and the Palestinian people.”  

38 Again, a day after her attack Israeli forces demolished Hanadi’s family home and the homes of two of her neighbors in reprisal for her suicide bombing.

36 Ibid.


38 Ibid.


Twenty-two year-old Reem Salih al-Rayashi was born in Gaza City. Limited information is available about her social status, but it is believed that Reem came from a wealthy family and was happily married with two young children.39

On January 14, 2004, Salih al-Rayashi blew herself up when she detonated a bomb wrapped around her garment at Erez border crossing in the Gaza Strip. The bombing killed four Israelis – three security forces and one civilian as well as wounded ten other people. Hamas claimed responsibilities for this attack. Salih was the first women to be deployed by Hamas.40 When crossing the check point, she requested a personal security search instead of walking through the metal detectors. She claimed that she was unable to walk because of a metal implant that was put in her leg. When she was


40 Ibid.
approached by security officers, Reem detonated her explosives that she was carrying.

Reports indicated that her husband assisted her in accomplishing her mission by driving her to her destination. On her farewell video, she said she had wanted to sacrifice herself as a martyr since the age of thirteen.

I always wanted to be the first woman to carry out a martyrdom operation, where parts of my body can fly all over ... God has given me two children. I love them (with] a kind of love that only God knows, but my love to meet God is stronger still.41

Zeinab Abu Salem (1986-2004)

Eighteen year old Zeinab Abu Salem was born in the Askar refugee camp near the city of Nablus, in the WestBank. She was the fourth of the ten children in her family. According to reports, Zeinab came from a financially stable family. Her family owned a television station where Zeinab appeared in a number of children’s shows. By all Palestinian standards, Zeinab’s upbringing was that of “privileged.” Zeinab had just

graduated from high school and was planning on going to college before she tragically ended her life.\footnote{42}

On September 22, 2004, Zeinab blew herself up at a crowded bus stop in the upscale neighborhood of Jerusalem. After spotted by two Israeli policemen, she was ordered to stop, and show her identification. When the two police officers asked to search her back, she argued with them for a few seconds; then reached for her bag and detonated the bomb, killing herself and the two police officers as well as wounding sixteen other bystanders.\footnote{43} The Al-Aksa Martyrs Brigade of Fatah claimed responsibility. She apparently had wanted to avenge the Palestinian militants killed in Nablus a few weeks prior to her bombing.

**Mervat Masoud (1988-2006)**

Figure 10. Mervat Masoud. Picture copied from the Web: [http://www.aztlan.net/women_martyrs.htm](http://www.aztlan.net/women_martyrs.htm).


\footnote{43}{Ibid.}
Eighteen year old Meryat Masaoud was born in the town of Beit Hanoun of the Gaza Strip. She was a student at the Islamic University of Gaza. Although there is no sufficient information on her upbringing, Israeli media sources reported that she came from an economically well to do family.\footnote{International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, “Female Suicide Bomber wounds IDF Soldier in Gaza,” November 7, 2006, \url{http://www.icej.org/article/female_suicide_bomber_wounds_idf_soldier_in_gaza} (accessed January 4, 2011).} In 2004, one of her cousins and a fellow Palestinian militant blew themselves up at an Israeli port city in Ashdod killing ten people. A few days prior to her action, Meryat witnessed the killing of two Palestinian women by the Israeli army. Apparently, the Israeli soldiers fired at a group of Palestinian women who were acting as human shields for their teenage militant sons and husbands who were trapped inside the Mosque in the town of Beit Hanoun. Beit Hanoun is one of the towns that have been under constant raid by the Israelis since the Fall of 2006 when their efforts to root out suicide bombing squads in the area began. More than fifty Palestinians, mostly women and children, were reported to be killed by the raid.\footnote{Ibid.} The killing of these women is said to have affected Meryat deeply and motivated her to somehow avenge their death.

On November 6, 2006 Meryat detonated a bomb that was strapped around her waist at an Israeli army checkpoint in the town of Beit Hanoun. Although no other lives were lost in this attack, one Israeli soldier was badly wounded. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the bombing and released a videotape of Meryat holding the Qur’an and a rifle. In the video, she was seen declaring that she wanted to die fighting Israel and...
freeing her people from occupation. She asked for forgiveness from her parents and said she loved them very much, but that she loved Palestine and God more.\(^{46}\)

**Fatima Omar Mahmud al-Najar (1949-2006)**

Fatima Omar Mahmud al-Najar was born in the Jabaliya refugee camp in the town of Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip. Although her exact age is unknown, it has been approximated that she was between the age of fifty seven and sixty year-old at the time of the bombing. She is the oldest woman to have ever engaged in a Palestinian female suicide bombing. Her act shocked both Palestinians and Israelis, because it not only signified the deep sense of desperation these women experience, but also the escalation of the trend of transcending age. Fatima Omar Mahmud al-Najar was the mother of nine

children and a grandmother of forty-one. Apparently, Najar also participated in the same Mosque barricade in Beit Hanoun in which a number of Palestinian mothers acted as human shields to protect their militant men who were trapped inside the Mosque. Two women were shot and killed by the Israeli army during the standoff. Like Meryat Masaoud before her, Najar was also deeply affected by the killings of her fellow women and especially by the sixty Palestinians, both women and children, who were killed in the same town of Beit Hanoun by the Israeli raid. During the first intifada of 1987-94, Najar’s house was demolished twice by the Israeli forces; and two of her sons were arrested, one of her grandsons was killed, and another grandson is now in a wheelchair as a result of having a leg amputated. He was shot in the leg and back by the Israeli army during a local demonstration.

On November 3, 2006, Fatima Omar Mahmud al-Najar detonated an explosive strapped around her waist killing herself and wounding two Israeli soldiers. There were no lives lost by Najar’s attack. Hamas’s militant wing, Al-Qassam Brigades claimed responsibility for the attack.

In analyzing the commonly shared factors of these ten documented female suicide bombers of Palestine (Dalal Al-Mughrabi is excluded), five out of ten were university students, graduates, or professionals. All of them were affiliated with an organization in

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one way or another. The first five bombers were deployed by Al-Aqsa Brigade – a military wing of Fatah.

Three were organized by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). It is important to note that this party had previously refused to accept female suicide volunteers in its armed faction. Citing the Qur’an, PIJ claimed that Islam does not allow women to go out of their homes or be exposed in military activities. According to PIJ, women’s place is at home supporting their men who are engaged in the armed struggle. Two of the bombings were dispatched by Hamas, whose initial stand was also not to allow women to participate in any form of political movements including armed struggle. However, by deploying these bombers, Hamas, not only shifted from its conservative religious discourse on women, but also heightened its actions by employing a tactic which has brought dramatic effects on spectators

The average age of these women is twenty-two year-old. Almost all were single women. They all share the same religious conviction and patriotism; unwavering allegiance to the religion and eagerness to the nationalistic discourse as abundantly seen in all of these cases. On the other hand, poverty does not seem to be a common denominator, as most of these women came from relatively economically stable families. But, most importantly, each of these women lost at least one close family member in the conflict. Therefore, avenging the perceived injustice also seems to be a crucial factor. Unlike their male counterparts, these women’s actions received an exceptionally high media coverage and very strong popular support, especially among other young women.

Fatima al-Najar’s suicide attack may have hinted the closing stages of Palestinian women suicide bombing against Israel; considering there have not been any documented female suicide bombers since. However, what is unknown is whether or not this trend will once again rise to light as a result of the current political reality - a turmoil that is sweeping the Middle East from Tunisia across the heart of the region in Yemen. If female suicide bombing in Palestine once again catches momentum, what are Israelis and the rest of the world to do in order to counter this phenomenon? The following chapter will deal with this very question by presenting some fundamental policy recommendations.
CHAPTER SIX
COUNTERING THE THREAT

The continued use of female suicide bombings suggests the organizations that utilize this modus operandi evaluate this tactic as an effective weapon of eluding security measures to fulfill their missions. It also means that the women who volunteer for the mission do possess, right or wrong, motives for their actions. Countering the threat here essentially means how States that are targeted and alike can stop female suicide bombers from letting their body blowup to inflict greater damage on other lives. It also means how they can reverse the naiveté and utopian thinking of ideologues and the brainwashed Palestinian young women who believe that self-sacrifice has tremendous rewards in the hereafter.¹ This essentially means how can Western policy makers formulate policies that educate and inform Palestinian masses in the language and practical daily life realities of the society?

This could begin by formulating a community-based approach that aims to improve the socioeconomic opportunities for women by providing them with basic necessities such as education for their children, protection for the women’s personal safety and equal rights. Western governments should call for and assist all efforts to start and help accelerate reforms and democratic changes in the occupied territories and among Palestinians themselves to stand united to institute and firmly establish the pillars of good governance.² This way, change in life style and mode of thinking would reverse the suicidal mentality that female and male terrorists are trapped under. But, Hafaz

² Zedalis, Female Suicide Bombers, 19.
argues, the United States above all should stay out of cultural debates and avoid calls for educational reform in the Muslim world. At the same time, Palestinian political and religious authorities should make every effort to delegitimize suicide attacks.³

Another way of countering the threat is to encourage the Palestinian authorities to undertake reforms and bold decisions to agree and work with Israel for the prevalence of peace, stability and development for a gradual reversal of decades of hostilities and sense of perennial enmity to each other. As Jimmy Carter extensively expounded in his book, “Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid,” one way for Israel to achieve lasting security is to withdraw from the occupied territories and to revert to internationally-recognized boundaries. For the Palestinians, they have to recognize in no uncertain terms the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign and independent country in geographically defined territory side by side with Palestine.⁴

Of course this is not an easy task as it stands now due to extremist interferences of regimes like Iran and Syria as well as the heavy involvements and bloody measures of non-state actors like Hezbollah and Al-Qaida.⁵ In the end, lasting solutions can only come about if and when a remedy of cohesive and concerted international framework is worked out and implemented. Therefore, strategic planning should begin from the realization of this hard fact: female suicide bombing is no longer a regional or a cultural phenomenon, but it is becoming a global problem and thus countering the threat requires coordination and planning of an international nature.

³ Hafez, “Dying to be Martyrs: The Symbolic Dimension of Suicide Terrorism,” 87.


⁵ Ibid.
How can Western governments work out a multilateral framework of channeling economic, financial and material supports for Palestinian citizens in both the occupied territories and elsewhere where large concentration of Palestinians live? How can the West initiate, encourage, and support people to people contacts? It needs to inspire and strengthen modernists and liberals within the moderate Palestinians who can inspire and abate the motivation for change in the status of women from the standpoint of legal reforms and political leadership to initiate the empowerment of Palestinian women.

Western governments can introduce and accelerate the Palestinian society's mindset towards gender sensitivities with respect to women. This, however, does not necessarily mean introducing swift Western style transformational policies, as this is one of the sources of grievances used by the groups that deploy female suicide bombers. This only means putting in place enabling environments for women to get out of their traditional roles for equal participation in individual and communal life. It requires pressuring their leaders to work on the enactment of new laws that enable women to have equality before the law, equality in social and cultural settings, and certainly create conducive environments for empowerment of women to grow and ultimately seize their place in modern society.

Lindsey O’Rourke argues that the particular character and effectiveness of female suicide bombing depends on the norms regulating gender behavior in the societies from which these women emerge and in which they perpetrate their attacks. If states attempt to transform those norms, female suicide bombing would lose its superior effectiveness. However, we have to be careful not to upset the norms of the society in such a way that it

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6 Lindsey O’Rourke, “What’s Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?” 13.
brings about unintended consequences. It should also be noted that in a society where seventy percent of the population lives under conditions of extreme poverty, sensitivity towards fulfilling the basic needs should take precedence over the long term transformational policies.

Realistically, as desirable as they may sound, these changes could not happen overnight. In fact, more frustrating days will follow between institutional framing and legal provisions ensuring the realization of the actual exercise. Given how long it took women in the West to get real gender equality, change in Palestinian women’s lives can certainly be protracted and even frustrating. Even after placing the desired changes in place, the most difficult immediate tasks will be the institutional arrangement to democratize the entire society; among those are: putting in place democratic election commissions that organize free, fair, and transparent elections with no corrupt and factional manipulation, allowing women to voice their concerns to elect their representatives and to reform and legislate laws that protect women’s rights, creating institutions to address the rule of law, judicial independence, human rights, free press, political party organization, trade unions, etc. These fundamental democratic institutions do not just need to be established, but they need to be effectively maintained to ensure continuity and mitigate the rise of dictators.

One good example of this possibility is Eastern Europe’s public uprising that led to the crumbling of the communist world of the Soviet Russia. Despite the democratic aspirations of the Russians for Western style good governance, Russia is still lagging behind Poland, Czech and Hungary due to lack of pro-democracy institutions. The same old communist technocrats, KGB spy chiefs and top brass military men seized the
opportunity by changing their hats. No wonder Russia still remains a country where the free democratic culture is restrained and at times repressed.\(^7\)

Therefore to bring change in Palestine that women believe and participate in fully, really requires patience and determination. The good thing going for them at the moment is the wind of change that is blowing in the Arab world against corrupted leaders, unemployment, political deprivation, the desire to live as free persons and the desire to choose their own elected leaders. This new wave is accelerating women’s emancipation not only from bad governance but also from cultural and societal gender repressions. This may translate in to fulfilling their desire of freedom from their “occupation” and realization of statehood. The good thing going for Western policy makers in all of this is the fact that millions are pacing towards change and democracy that the West labored to bring about for years by nudging leaders or covert operations. The time is now to support Palestinians to start their revolution to bring about change in their own ways without condescension or any desire of making their leaders the West’s puppets. In so doing, America and Israel can benefit from it, but only if they push for positive outcomes in the occupied territories.

The current political wind of change in the Arab world that manifested itself in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, Bahrain, etc. for freedom, justice and democracy would serve as a stimulus for change in Palestine leading to eventual emancipation of women in the occupied territories. Liberated women would certainly have better dreams in life than blowing off their own heads and committing suicide to kill others. Western governments

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also should openly and loudly support such mass movements for change, freedom and
democracy.

Having said this, the real issue still rests on the underlying conflict between
Palestinians and Israelis. Maintaining the status quo in Israeli-Palestinian hostile
deadlocks must change to help overcome the root causes of the conflict and to stop the
further breeding of female suicide bombers. Instead of fishing in troubled waters, it is
good to make the waters safe and easy to sail through, as in those situations fishing could
easily lead to good catch. But here there is no naiveté as to the considerable length of
time it takes to bring social emancipation, gender equality and empowerment of
Palestinian women to abandon their deadly embrace both as an empowering philosophy
and as a conviction to destroy the enemy – Israel. Nonetheless, progress towards
achieving meaningful gender equality is certainly achievable.

From recent events in Egypt, the voices of Egyptian women were heard for their
powerful message in pursuit of liberation and freedom. Constitutional changes, reforms
and societal transformations need tremendous legal, political, public and private
concerted efforts. No one could measure the political will of those in power first to
legislate and second to translate into practice the equality of women. In the Palestinian
context, it becomes even more complex to legislate, much less to guarantee gender
equality. Israel must agree to trade land for peace, and stop its projects of building
settlements and bringing Jewish settlers in occupied Palestinian lands. 8 Here the United
States can twist arms on both sides for regional peace, security and stability by way of
constructive engagement, diplomatic pressure and economic incentives. While the

restrictive patriarchal Arab culture against women is a significant drawback to early realization of women's emancipation and true freedom, the astringent sentiment of Muslims against the largely Judo Christian West remains as a major obstacle.

This thesis highly recommends double-pronged policy formulation by way of addressing the unique problems of the Palestinian women as they relate to addressing their social emancipation, and elevation of their status in society through legally framed gender equality like in the Western world. Simultaneously, the West has to weigh in on Israel to sit for negotiated settlement including the immediate freezing of settlement activities in Palestinian territories, cessation of military bravados, exchanging land for peace, and improving the human rights situation in areas where Israeli military personnel freely move and control people.

Essentially, what is needed is courage and strong leadership to help take bold and systematic measures like conflict resolution, confidence building measures, establishing trust that both Palestinians and the Israelis can subscribe to, etc., the United States and other key players in the game need to take the initiative to bring the main players to one table, help them fight it out in the negotiating table, and nudge both sides to come up with unconventional workable solutions that they alone can adhere to. ⁹ Above all, the West should speak with one voice and design coherent policies that push and incentivize both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to resolve the fight and the bickering that started in the house of Abraham between Sara and Hagar. ¹⁰ It is vital for both protagonists to convince themselves that they are inseparable neighbors and that it is to their mutual

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advantage to resolve their long hostilities and conflicts that have harmed both sides of the population for so long. It is in this spirit and frame of thinking that the United States in particular and the West in general can succeed to dry up the breeding ground for self-destruction missions in Palestinian territories. Corollary to that, it is only in those terms that the efforts of combating the threat of woman suicide bombers could bear fruits. The goals of female suicide bombers may not justify the means they choose. However, it is very important to recognize without the prevalence of peace in the Middle East (Israeli-Palestine), without the alleviation of the pain and suffering of the population by redressing grievances that arise from the deprivations of most of the basic rights, it would be very unlikely to see the end of women suicide bombers in Palestine.

In conclusion, it is absolutely necessary that “gender reality” must be at the center of any possible effort to formulate measures that are designed to respond to this type of attack. Furthermore, it is essential that the community which supports suicide bombing be discouraged by enlightening the population that the alternative is a better choice. This could be done by introducing baby steps such as: replace the basis of the organizations with developments, alienate the participants and their facilitators from the public, discredit the groups that utilize this modus operandi, etc. Only then can a fruitful result be achieved.
CONCLUSION

What is the logic behind using women as suicide bombers by the different groups in Palestine? The answer is multiple. First, it is the patent need of expanding the numerical size of the fighting force against the enemy/occupier that is Israel. Second, using women as human bombs has a dramatic effect, for women are perceived as symbols of the utter despair. The media coverage and the sense of empathy by the public give the groups that utilize this tactic a tremendous strategic gain. Male fighters have faced more severe restraints due to Israel’s inflexible, tough and aggressive measures that have disabled their ability to infiltrate into the enemy territory and accomplish the desired attack. Here in comes the necessity of having women bombers who very often successfully blend in and unleash their suicide missions. The detection of women by the enemy is less compared to their male counterparts. Thus, women provide a tactical venue in accomplishing the desired mission. Third, Palestinian women have long suffered because of both national oppression and social repression. Making themselves available for martyrdom while fighting Israeli occupiers is doubly liberating, for it propels them to the powerful sense of fighting both enemies—social repression and Israeli occupation—at the same time.¹ As a result, their dispatchers take advantage of this reality.

Why are women willing to engage in such a mission considering the very patriarchal nature of the Palestinian society? The answer is multi-leveled: Women are willing to engage in suicide missions because it is partly their own fight in their pursuit of emancipation from Israeli occupation and military rule as well as from their own

traditional life of gender discrimination and social repression. Perhaps, women may
desire to be suicide bombers for the practical reason of getting recognition and prestige
since suicide bombers are seen as dear heroines and respected martyrs.

As women in the Palestinian society, the burden of family, the despondent life in
perpetual war zones, the social obligations of women for not only their immediate family,
but also the community and society are immense. What had made their lives even more
despondent is their lack of power in decision making in the political arena which would
have opened up a venue to address their gender-specific issues. The fact is Palestinian
women were voiceless for much of the half century that the movement for Palestinian
liberation has gotten solidified. What is striking is the fact that Palestinian women carry
the brunt of the consequences of the actions and inactions of their male leaders. For
instance, Palestinian women and children often became first victims when military and
nonmilitary decisions were made by their leaders resulting in Israeli political reprisals
such as: extending new settlements, imposing restrictions on cross border human and
commodity movements, military retaliations, etc., even in bloody urban warfare between
Israeli military and Palestinian fighters, the adult male population runs or fights back with
some degree of preparedness while Palestinian women generally die or remain captive in
the battle zones with immense risks to their lives and physical safety and security. In
this respect, their willingness to fight and die as suicide bombers has various liberating
results.

Years of such repeated grim realities have instilled a sense of strong resistance
including the willingness to die for the "noble cause" of killing the enemy. There is

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2 Ibid.
much to be gained from this Palestinian women's choice to volunteer in suicide missions as it alleviates the pain of perpetual dispossession, disempowerment and deprivation as well as getting relief in both death and survival from subjection to war crimes on them or on their loved ones.

The whole argument is that, yes, Palestinian women have their stakes in the choice they make to become human bombs, but as long as Israeli occupation and heavy-handed military rule in the territories remain, Palestinian women's lives will continue to be circuitous, despondent and filled with pain, anger and bitterness. They cannot choose to live in hopeless and poor conditions with a sense of perpetual deprivation, and the shame of endless relegation as victims, vulnerable and weak segments of the society. Hence out of natural progression they will be compelled to get out of the box and to reverse their weak and vulnerable position by converting themselves into fearless fighters as suicide bombers creating death and destruction in the land of the occupiers as well as in their own territories.\(^3\) Fighting for these women repairs the psychological damage and the perpetual vulnerability. Certainly, while giving women some firm sense of unique identity, Palestinian women suicide bombers represent a big leap forward to the military and strategic fighting objective of the overall national policy of fighting the occupationist enemy.

But, are these motives really any different than the motives of their male counterparts? The simple answer to this question is twofold. The motives of Palestinian female suicide bombers are similar to the overall motives of their male counterparts. In this sense, the two have similar goals in terms of sharing a profound and inseparable

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\(^3\) Alvanou, “Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers,” 19.
unity of purpose in pursuing the national agenda of independence, freedom, liberation and statehood. On the other hand, there are many specific factors that are unique about women's lives. Nevertheless, these characteristic features that female suicide bombers exhibit or possess don’t necessarily aid in profiling them, as they emerge from every educational, religious, social and personal background. But then again, the same is true for their male counterparts.

It is true that Palestinian women may well be motivated by gender-specific issues that they encounter on a day-to-day-basis. These factors include, but not limited to divorce, infertility, honoring a family name, revenge, etc., however, research suggests that these motives alone, though powerful enough to motivate women to volunteer in suicide acts, cannot complete the logic behind the act. In fact, scholars such as Yoram Schweitzer and Robert Pape argue that it will be misleading to believe that Palestinian female suicide bombers are motivated merely by gender-specific agendas, and Schweitzer writes:

From interviews with the women and dispatchers who sent women, and were also imprisoned, it becomes clear that both expressed the women’s motives in nationalistic and religious terms. Additional motives that were mentioned by the women were revenge and the desire to prove to Israel that Palestinians could fight back and force Israel to pay for the suffering that it had caused the Palestinians. Many of the women stated that they believed that a suicide attack was the only way open to them to take part in their national struggle. These arguments have likewise been heard many times from failed male suicide bombers who were not members of organizations and who did not possess any skill in using arms.4

This thesis attempted to frame the question of whether or not the emergence of female suicide bombing in Palestine signals an utter desperation, or is simply a weapon of choice by the organizations that utilize them under broader social, cultural as well as

4 Schweitzer, “Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers: Virtuous Heroines or Damaged Goods,”16.
political premises. The way this thesis examined this question is: First, it provided analysis on the concept of jihad and its interpretations in the Palestinian resistance movements, as the interpretation and use of jihad as redemption and martyrdom has the most important role in female suicide bombings. Second, it presented the role that Palestinian women played in the resistance movements. This helped to conceptualize the involvements of Palestinian women in the political arena that has certainly helped women to be quite aware of the historic and creative opportunities made possible by conflict. Third, the thesis also described the reasons why Palestinian groups use suicide bombings in the first place, and why they increasingly endeavored to include women in it. This has created an understanding of the tactical and strategic use of the modus operandi by the groups that utilize them. Fourth, the thesis analyzed the different factors motivating women to participate in suicide operations. I believe that the analysis helped to identify some of the stereotyping on the motives of female suicide bombers, and examined and determined if these motives are any different than those of their male counterparts.

In closing, the answer to the question of whether or not Palestinian female suicide bombing is an act of desperation or as Michael Horowitz puts it, “a special case of a military innovation by the groups that utilize them, and one strongly influenced by diffusion dynamics”\(^5\) may not necessarily be absolute. Nonetheless, this thesis was able to conclude that contrary to popular perceptions and some stereotyping, Palestinian women suicide bombers do not just display factors which are inherently feminine, and even if they do, these feminine motivations do not seem to be driving women to suicide.

operations. Instead, it appears that both female and male suicide bombers have similar motivations, because they share similar grievances. Robert Pape, in his extensive and thorough analysis of female suicide bombing cases in Palestine, revealed that it is indeed the occupation that is the primary driving force for both women and men in their participation in suicide operations. However, this is not to de-emphasize the female component of suicide bombers as a group, or to argue that they do not deserve an independent discussion, because they do. In fact, in countering the threat, the female element of the operation is the key factor that needs to be addressed effectively so that it paves the way for other long term transformational policy implementations.

To sum up, female suicide bombing in Palestine is the result of one of the longest, most complicated and protracted conflicts of our time. It is a reality that this conflict is also a key source of grievance among Muslims worldwide. Thus, a sensible resolution to the conflict would have a positive outcome extending well beyond Palestine, especially now when the political landscape of the Arab world is being radically transformed to a degree that has never been seen before.

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6 Pape, Dying to Win, 43.
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