Abstract

Since the beginning of the current ‘Intifada’, suicide terrorism has been extensively used by Palestinian organizations against Israel, with the phenomenon of young women carrying out the bombings too. Islam, though promoting a patriarchal model, at the same time it mobilizes women to engage in suicide terrorism, through a systematic religious incitement- despite the character (‘secular’ or religious fundamentalist) of the terrorist group initiating the attack- to both fight the fear of death and dehumanize the target. Islamic notions of ‘martyrdom’, ‘jihad’, ‘infidels’, and heavenly compensations for all Muslims (including women) are very important in order to lead the female perpetrator to defy death, deny life and also kill innocent civilians. The enemy is demonised and is deprived of his human value. The violent act looses any negative meaning and becomes a righteous deed, purifying the soul.

"My sister Wafa, my sister Wafa Oh the heartbeat of pride Oh blossom who was on earth and is now in heaven. Allah Akbar! Oh Palestine of the Arabs Allah Akbar Oh Wafa Allah Akbar Oh Wafa! But you chose Shahada [martyrdom]. In death you have brought life to our will But you chose Shahada. In death you have brought life to our
will" (Palestinian TV May 12, 2002 - July 24, 2003)

Terrorist tactics have always produced horror, fear and confusion (this is the point of terrorism after all), but non more it seems than the suicide bomber tactics. Suicide attacks are a popular- almost copycat some would say- phenomenon of today’s terrorism scene that gathers the interest of researchers, law enforcement and scholars worldwide. They are sensational, spectacular in their own grotesque way and project extreme levels of hate, because they surpass in their evilness any logic and instinct of life perseverance, inherent by nature to all human beings. Moreover, they create panic, as it is doubtful whether the current and usual countermeasures are able to prevent them and protect the public: how can someone really stop and deter a person who is not afraid of losing his life? One of the stages in this theatre of suicide horror is the Middle East and more specifically the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Crowded buses, cafes, outdoor markets in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and other cities have been the target of the rage of the palestinian terrorist organizations, resulting in hundreds of dead and injured israeli citizens, very often just innocent civilians, even schoolchildren. ‘Martyrdom’ or ‘shahada’, even by their names these homicide attacks bear the mark of a deep religious influence, as they are part of a violent interpretation of islamic ‘Jihad’ and their actors previously undergo a process of religious hate indoctrination inside the palestinian society[1].

Though most palestinian suicide bombers have been men, palestinian women are indeed increasingly participating in suicide attacks. Since the outbreak of the second ‘Intifada’ in 2001 and until today, 8 palestinian women successfully carried out deadly suicide attacks in Israel[2]. This appearance of female ‘martyrs’- terrorists has drawn the attention of the public on the seriousness of female violence, as shocked onlookers are asking why and how such appalling crimes are being committed by those once known as the ‘gentle sex’[3]. Even more, the question arises about the strange antithesis between the muslim closed patriarchal environment- where women are often expected to assume passive and submissive roles- and the act of taking up arms and committing actively such atrocious violent acts.

The debate on the participation of women in suicide operations

On January 27, 2002, 27-year old Wafa Idris, a Fatah activist from the al-Amari refugee camp near Ramallah, carried a bomb that detonated in central Jerusalem, killing an 81-year old Israeli and injuring over a hundred more.[4] This was the first female suicide terrorism step in the Palestinian scene of the second Intifada[5]. The ultimate honor of “martyrdom” would no longer be reserved exclusively for men but had instead been unfastened to include women: “After the
death of [the] first suicide bomber, dozens of women are signing up for military operations against Israel...women had only played supporting roles in military and terrorist operations.... [T]his is a turning point [which] has given women a burst of enthusiasm.”[6]

In the Palestinian fight against Israel the various groups until the self-explosion of Waffa Idris, prohibited the participation of women in such operations[7]. In the traditional Palestinian society a woman is the responsibility of her male relatives. Terror organisations- and mainly the islamist ones- could not therefore recruit women as would-be suicide bombers without transgressing the honour codes that require women to seek permission from men for every action they take outside the family home. To secretly recruit a woman would be seen as an insult to the family's male honour[8].

Palestinians have long had their own cultural set of rules that markedly describe gender roles. The rules have dictated the separation of the sexes and prescribed that women keep to the private space of the home. Their role as fertile mothers and reproducers of the nation marked their utility in the parameter of the conflict as a demographic war. The nationalistic discourse defined Palestinian woman in terms of her reproductive capacity thereby making her sexuality and fertility a patriotic and explicitly political issue[9]. Women have been seen as vital in passing on the Palestinian traditions, instilling political consciousness to the young, with the highest accolade given to the “Mother of the Martyr”, whose “maternal sacrifice is a supreme political act that translates into respect and prominent community stature”[10].

So after the appearance of the first female suicide bomber, a serious debate started[11] about whether they should or should not become ‘martyrs’. The late Hamas spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, with a great impact on the palestinian public, had expressed his reservations with statements like: "in our palestinian society, there is a flow of women towards Jihad and martyrdom, exactly like the young men. But the woman has uniqueness. Islam sets some restrictions for her, and if she goes out to wage Jihad and fight, she must be accompanied by a male chaperon"[12] or “We have no need for suicide operations by women now because preserving the nation’s survival is more important". These opinions expressed the objective problems of such operations- when a woman should always be under a man’s protection- of how she would have to be absent from her home for more than a day in order for the attack to be prepared, how the role of women is to have children and strengthen in this particular way the Islamic nation.

On the other hand there were those too eager to see women, as one more weapon to inflict harm upon the enemy: Isma’il Abu Shanab, a Hamas leader in Gaza stated on the subject that “Jihad against the
enemy is an obligation that applies not only to men, but also to women. Islam has never differentiated between men and women on the battlefield"[13]; another Hamas leader in the West Bank, Sheikh Hassan Yussef, added that “a muslim woman is permitted to wage Jihad and struggle against the occupation. The Prophet would draw lots among the women who wanted to go out to wage Jihad with him. The Prophet always emphasized the woman's right to wage Jihad"[14]; Jamila Shanti, heading the Women's Activities Division of the Palestine Islamic Movement, proclaimed that “Islam does not prohibit a woman from sacrificing herself to defend her land and her honour. It is she who was attacked, and she has the right to defend herself in any way. It is not puzzling that Muslim sisters have been carrying out heroic operations within Palestine since 1948. On the contrary: It would be strange if the palestinian woman had not done so, as Jihad is a personal imperative for her and no one can prevent her from waging it, provided... she avoids fitna[15] which is not on the agenda in martyrdom operations because she is going to her death. Perhaps these activities require the woman to wear a particular garment in order to mislead the enemy, and therefore she may have to relinquish part of her veil when she goes to martyrdom. But there is nothing wrong with this, because the clerics are in consensus that martyrdom operations are the highest level of martyrdom"[16]. Lebanese scholar Muhammad Hussein Fadlullah added that: "Islam has licenced the woman to fight especially if necessities of a defence war requires women's participation in any ordinary military operation or a martyrdom operation"[17] and that “it is true that Islam has not asked women to carry out jihad (holy war), but it permits them to take part if the necessities dictate that women should carry out regular military operations or suicide operations"[18].

So, in 2003, an important change takes place: Female islamic martyrs make their first appearance on the scene. On May 19, Hiba Daraghmeh carried out a suicide bombing attack at the entrance of a shopping mall in Afula and the responsibility for her gesture was claimed both by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, with the latter one claiming is the one that receives most credit. It was nevertheless the first time that the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a fundamentalist orientated organization, claimed responsibility for a 'martyrdom' operation accomplished by a woman. On October 4 of the same year, Hanadi Tayseer Jaradat, became a 'martyr' spreading death in a restaurant in Haifa, the 'Maxim': This time the claim was solely by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the woman's religious zeal left no doubt this time as to the change of operational mind that had taken place amongst the islamic organizations. This was confirmed by the attack of January 2004, carried out by Reem Raiyshi, mother of two small children and the first woman to carry out a suicide attack in the name of Hamas.

While the use of women as suicide bombers still poses conflicts with
some fundamental religious leaders’ beliefs in Islam, females serve the tactical need for a stealthier weapon, with even the late Ahmed Yassin changing his opinion and agreeing into it, stating: “Women are like the reserve army—when there is a necessity, we use them”[19] and “even though the use of women is considered unusual, jihad is an obligation of all Muslims, men and women. This proves that the armed resistance will continue until the enemy leaves our lands and our country”[20]. A new theology emerged about female suicide bombers among some Palestinian Muslim clerics[21]. Searching for new ways to resist the security complications, the Palestinians discovered that their women could be an advantage[22] and religiously backed up their use.

**The use of Islamic incitement by terrorist groups in recruiting women**

More than one criminologist has pointed out that the disciplines of theology, religion, and philosophy have had important things to say about terrorism[23]. It is also a fact that about a quarter of all terrorist groups and about half of the most dangerous ones on earth are primarily motivated by religious concerns[24]. They believe that God not only approves of their action, but that God demands their action. Their cause is sacred, and consists of a combined sense of hope for the future and vengeance for the past. Religious terrorism is all about a fundamentalist or militant interpretation of the basic tenets, when most religious traditions are indeed filled with plenty of violent images at their core, and destruction or self-destruction is a central part of the logic behind religion-based terrorism[25]. Religion can easily serve as a moral cover for self-centred terrorists and psychopaths[26]. Most importantly, such "defenders" justify terrorist action in their accountability only to God, for it is God who has chosen them for this sacred mission in history.

Like many societies in the Muslim world, significant segments of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza have become more religious in response to Islamic revivalism or fundamentalism since the late 1970s. The majority of the Palestinians in the “Occupied” Territories are Sunni Muslims (only about a 4% are Christian) and the Palestinian national identity—similar to that of most other Islamic nations—collides and yet often comfortably coexists with the other overarching identity, the Islamic identity. Islam hence is a crucial factor in all aspects of Palestinian life[27] and moreover, the Islamist indoctrination activities of Hamas and more recently of the Palestinian Authority have caused a far-reaching islamization of Palestinian society, where Islamist terminology has now become part of mainstream Palestinian discourse. As a result, religious appeals have received greater acceptance, and religious symbolisms resonate much more readily than in previous decades.
Some have said that it is important to distinguish whether the nature of the Palestinian organizations engaged in suicide terror is religious or nationalistic and secular. Religiously oriented groups are supposed to be more complicated and dangerous. Their ultimate goal includes the spread of a religious holy war to end evil (as interpreted by them), or the pursuit of some heavenly millenarian reward. Additionally it would appear to be easier for religious groups to mobilize operatives to commit suicidal violence, than it would for secular nationalistic groups. This attempt to distinguish and categorize according to their relationship with religion and metaphysical beliefs, may be of utility when researching the identity and activity of terrorist groups in the West, but it may not be appropriate for groups operating in a society, like the Palestinian one after its recent increased Islamization. In Arab countries, communities and societies, Islam is more than an official religion, a faith that one observes or not. It is a cultural feature deeply rooted, inherent to all members, difficult to abolish and- above all- a point of reference to unite people against the ‘infidel’ enemy. No group would enjoy the support of the Palestinian public- that is necessary for its existence and operations- by declaring openly its distance from Islam or opposing the Muslim principles. This would really mean that the terrorist organization is committing suicide! As a result, what we call secular in the West is not comparable to Palestinian secular groups that are allowed- or even maybe forced by the special circumstances of the environment- to employ Islamic rhetoric and religious cloth for its operations.

Palestinian terror groups find in Islam a cultural toolkit that allows militants to frame their suicide attacks as a fulfilment of sacred imperatives to fight injustice: the concepts and traditions of jihad (striving), qital (fighting), and istishhad (martyrdom) in the path of God. A true metamorphosis has been underway in the ranks of Palestinian terrorists, since over the past few decades, they have evolved from a more secular, practical outlook with finite (if sometimes extreme) goals to an increasingly apocalyptic, religious orientation. A cardinal symptom is exactly the increasing percentage of suicide bombers. Palestinians have long been willing to die for their cause, but the terrorist who might die in the course of a daring operation is way different than the terrorist who intends to die as a consequence of his action. And if you compare the rhetoric of the 1970s and 1980s to the fevered declarations of contemporary Palestinian terrorists the embrace of religious symbolism and arguments is undeniable.

The videos and the pictures released after the attacks, evidence of the blood covenant made before between the ‘martyr’ and the organisation prove this argument. Despite the non Islamic character of the group and no matter the previous history of the woman or man (whether she or he was an observant Muslim or not) the photo gives a religious dimension that is always the same with the ones released by Islamic groups: The
female- in particular- is holding the Koran and wearing the Hijab, often citing Islamic verses. She is not just a militant, a member of an organization fighting and trying to liberate her land and injure the occupier; she is more than that: a ‘martyr’, hoping and waiting for her ‘sacrifice’ to be accepted and rewarded by heaven.

As argued before, in the framework of the second Palestinian Intifada, women have proved to be a valuable and precious weapon in the fight against Israel. It is not an exaggeration, that they are the new “Palestinian human precision bomb”[28], against the undeniable military supremacy of the Israelis. On the Palestinian streets female suicide bombings are commented as a response weapon to the enemy’s structured armed forces: ‘The Israelis have women in their army. We do not have F-16s, rockets or tanks. But these girls are our rockets. It’s OK for our girls to fight the Jews,’[29].

The conversion of Palestinian mothers, wives and daughters into human bombs spreading death is achieved not by altering their personality structures, aggressive drives or moral standards. Rather, it is accomplished through a twisted Islamic theology, by cognitively redeeming the morality of killing themselves and Israelis, so that it can be done free from self-censure. Their behaviour itself is reconstructed: When reached by a terrorist organization member for recruitment, the future ‘martyr’, already believes that she has been awarded the greatest honour and privilege that can be bestowed upon a devout Muslim, the privilege of ‘martyrdom’[30] with all its rewards[31]. They are to commit not suicide, neither homicide[32] and they consider themselves as fighting ruthless oppressors, protecting their cherished values, honouring their country’s commitments. They are made to see themselves as doing Allah’s will, by ‘sacrificing’ their lives to eliminate the ‘evil’ Jew. The disengagement practices operate also on the recipients of detrimental acts.

This manipulation of Islam can be a powerful example of moral disengagement, a theory which encompasses all the ways a person neutralizes or removes any inhibitions about committing acts of horrific violence[33] and appears highly useful in providing further insight into explanations for terrorism. Mechanisms of moral disengagement denote the disconnection, or ‘disengagement,’ of internal moral control from ‘destructive conduct’—a process that requires intensive psychological training[34] through several methods: Moral justification involves cognitive restructuring of the moral value of killing and can help explain how reprehensible conduct can be perpetrated by ‘decent’ people.[35] Euphemistic labelling provides a convenient device for masking reprehensible activities or even conferring a respectable status on them. The use of the terms “istishhad” and “shaheed” is the obvious example. A third mechanism is advantageous comparison, which can serve a party to make self-deplorable acts “appear righteous by contrasting
them with flagrant inhumanities.... Thus, terrorists minimize their slayings as the only defensive weapon they have to curb the widespread cruelties inflicted on their people.  

People do not usually engage in harmful conduct until they have justified, to themselves, the morality of their actions. The process of dehumanisation is an essential ingredient in the perpetration of inhumanities, because it is difficult to mistreat 'humanised' people without risking personal distress and self-condemnation, since to perceive another as human activates empathetic reactions through perceived similarity. The strength of moral self-censure depends on how the perpetrators regard the people they mistreat. Islamist rhetoric actually views the Jewish enemy as 'lowly people', divested of human qualities. Once dehumanised, the Israeli future victims of the suicide attack are no longer viewed as persons with feelings, hopes and concerns, of human value, but as sub-human objects, reduced to the status of puppets.

The examples that follow illustrate briefly how the above mentioned types of moral disengagement function in the Palestinian society through Islamic religious indoctrination of suicide violence through a methodic strategy:

Via PA TV actually runs a real hate incitement campaign to predispose Palestinians, including women, to suicide terrorism. The indoctrination includes sermon broadcastings as the following one that hails ‘martyrs’:

"Anyone who does not attain martyrdom in these days should wake in the middle of the night and say: 'My God, why have you deprived me of martyrdom for your sake? For the martyr lives next to Allah'...

"Oh Allah, accept our martyrs in the highest heavens...
Oh Allah, show the Jews a black day...
Oh Allah, annihilate the Jews and their supporters...
Oh Allah, raise the flag of Jihad across the land...
Oh Allah, forgive our sins...

Or video clips such as this, clearly praising the female suicide bombers:

a) While the female singer sings, pictures of extreme violence appear in the background. Suddenly, she is not merely a singer, but rather a warrior wearing an army uniform; she continues singing and encouraging violence, singing of her desire to fall as a Martyr:

“Shake the earth,
Raise the stones
Allah Aqbar, Oh, the young ones.
You will not be saved, Oh Zionist,
From the volcano of my land's stones,
You are the target of my eyes,
I will even willingly fall as a shahid,
Allah Aqbar, Oh, the young ones.

In addition to TV, militant messages in the school textbooks have been legitimized by frequent references to the Koran and of course several muslim clerics have given their own 'licence' and blessing to female believers to engage themselves in suicide massacres against Israelis:

"The martyrdom operation carried out among the Israelis by the young Palestinian woman is an act of Jihad permissible according to the Shari'a, and on this there is no disagreement....If the enemy has conquered and plundered even a single inch of Muslim land, Jihad becomes a personal duty of man, woman, slave, and master... [In such a case], the woman wages [Jihad] without her husband's permission...The Prophet's aunt came down from the women's citadel, and fought a man from among the infidels who had climbed up the citadel. She killed him...Likewise, Asmaa, the daughter of Yazid, participated in one of the battles against the Byzantines, and killed men" stated Sheikh Abu Al-Hassan basing his reasoning on well-known "acts of female Jihad" during the raids led by the Prophet Muhammad.

As a result of these strategies radicalized young Muslim women—in particular those who have lost relatives in the intifada—want to be more closely involved with the armed struggle. Proof? When journalist Barbara Victor after Wafa's death, entered her ransacked house, among her personal stuff, she found the photo of Wafa wearing a black and white chequered keffiyeh, the symbol of the Fatah organisation, with a green bandanna around her head, on which was written 'Allah Akhbar', or 'God is greater than all other gods.' According to her mother, Hanadi Jaradat prior to the attack she carried out, had started taking home tapes of the Koran to listen to at night. In her video she is modestly dressed in a tight-fitting white headscarf giving a testimony: 'By the will of God I decided to be the sixth martyr who makes her body full with splinters in order to enter every Zionist heart who occupied our country. We are not the only ones who will taste death from their occupation. As they sow so will they reap.' The following example is also indicative: In her traditional pre-suicide videotape testimonial,
Raiyishi, holding an AK-47 assault rifle—almost as big as she was—and wearing the green Hamas sash, said she long wanted ‘the honour’ of being a suicide bomber and was "proud to be the first female Hamas ‘martyr’: "I have two children and love them very much. But my love to see God was stronger than my love for my children, and I’m sure that God will take care of them if I become a martyr". This ‘credo’, statement of faith in the afterlife and heavenly dimension of Raiyishi’s act was confirmed later by Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar during her eulogy: “She is not going to be the last because the march of resistance will continue until the Islamic flag is raised, not only over the minarets of Jerusalem, but over the whole universe. It is not enough to call her a hero. Calling her hero does not give the whole truth. This woman abandoned her husband and children to win paradise”[48]. The “secular” Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade released a videotape of Andaleeb Takafka (Suha) where goes on to say, “I am prepared to sacrifice my life for the cause. This (bombing mission) is the highest level of jihad (holy war), and I hope God will give me the honor of doing it.”

**Conclusion**

Unfortunately, the palestinian women and her innocent targets fall prey to the perversion of human morals and emotions by those campaigning fear and blood and make divine promises to the faithful in order to transform them into human bombs. The mainstream culture in the palestinian society favours suicide terrorism and women want in for a variety of reasons. While on one side their active involvement as terrorists in this type of operations seems to signal a relative secularization of their social environment (seemingly bringing at least equality in hate, death and violence for both genders), on the other hand it is characterised by a strong islamization. The religious dimension, as an indoctrination and incitement strategy, is necessary to condition and prepare palestinian women to abandon their families, lives, their traditional role in a patriarchal society and engage in the worst of terrorism activities without remorse. Heroic and saint in the eyes of believers- yet suicidal and deadly in practice- is the stuff of ‘martyrs’, and ‘martyrs’ are the product and result of religion renaming and purifying their actions, contrary to any earthly logic. As Voltaire put it well: “Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities”.

[1] This of course does not mean that suicide terrorism in the
Israeli-Palestinian conflict has a mere religious etiology, especially in the context of the involvement of women. It is a far more complexed and multi-dimensional phenomenon, rooted both in the terms of the conflict and the Palestinian society itself. For more on the complexity of suicide terrorism's reasons see Scott Atran, ‘Genesis of suicide terrorism’, Science, March 7, 2003, pp.1534-1539. Yet, the religious parameter and feature in suicide bombings is very important and this is why this type of operations is referred to as ‘martyrdom’, even by the ‘shahids’ themselves and the Palestinians in general.

[2] Of course- besides being the active agent of the explosive act-women have also been participating on a preparatory level in suicide bombings, facilitating a large number of operations, finally perpetrated by men.

[3] While female suicide bombers have played an important role in many organizations that employ suicide bombings: in Sri Lanka, over one-third of the suicide bombers of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been women and the PKK’s used women to carry out eleven out of fifteen successful suicide attacks against Turkey, see Y. Schweitzer, “Suicide Terrorism: Development and Main Characteristics,” in ICT, Countering Suicide Terrorism, pp. 82-83.

[4] On February 9, 2002, the New York Times reported that an Israeli government investigation concluded that Wafa Idris was in fact a suicide bomber. The investigation had been ordered since circumstances surrounding the attack were initially unclear, especially the question of whether Idris had attempted to plant a bomb and escape, or whether she had intended to die in the attack. For more in this issue, see James Bennet, Israelis Declare Arab Woman was in Fact a Suicide Bomber, New York Times, February 9, 2002 (Internet Edition). Also, before, in August 2001, a Palestinian woman subsequently classified as a would-be suicide bomber was caught while attempting to carry a bomb into Tel Aviv’s central bus station, see D’ Davis, “Report: Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers in Training,” Jerusalem Post Online News, August 6, 2001.

[5] In earlier years Ataf Aliaan was apparently the first woman who tried to commit a suicide bombing in Jerusalem in 1987, according to an article of Zvi Bar-el, Women’s Work, Haaretz, Friday January 23 2004, B4.

Yet, the story about female involvement in the general framework of Palestinian fighting comes from further back, even if with different forms and modalities. Back in 29 August 1968, Leila Khaled, a young PFLP activist, participated in the hijacking of the Rome-Athens flight. Arrested and then released in exchange with other prisoners, today she lives in Damascus and is the mother of two children. In 1978, nineteen year-old Dalal al-Mughrabi, close to the Fatah organization, was head of a group of 11 attackers (with a second woman in the group) that hijacked an Israeli bus. The attack ended up with 39 deaths, 72 wounded and 9 victims amongst the attackers (and Dalal herself). In the traditional Middle East, there is also a precedent for the use of female suicide bombers. On March 10, 1985, 18-year old Sumayah Sa’ad drove a car loaded with dynamite into an Israeli military position in Southern Lebanon, killing twelve Israeli soldiers and wounding fourteen others. Roughly two weeks later, on March 25, 17-year old San’ah Muheidli drove a TNT-laden car into an IDF convoy, killing two soldiers and wounding two more. The two women were posthumously awarded the honoring title of “Brides of Blood” (Arous ad-Damm). For more, see L. Ricolfi, P. Campana, Suicide missions in the Palestinian area: a new database and A. Taheri, Holy Terror: Inside the World of Islamic Terrorism, pp. 126-129.

Why Women Turn To Suicide Bombing by Kevin Toolis, The Observer 12 October 2003

“Bearing more children for the revolution” was a motto repeatedly heard by the late Yasser Arafat as he exhorted women to have no less than 12 children each, see O. Naajjar, Portraits of Palestinian women, University of Utah Press, 1992, p.258 and R. Abdulhadi, The Palestinian women’s autonomous movement: Emergence, Dynamics and Challenges, Gender and Society, vol .12, no6 December 1998, p.655. On how during conflicts nations engage in demographic wars that leave women with limited control of their bodies, see Y. Davis, Woman, Nation, State, 1989, London, p.9


Wafa Idris: the Celebration of the 1st Female Palestinian Suicide Bomber Parts I and II’, February 2002, Middle East Media Research Institute (www.memri.org).


Middle East News Online, January 28, 2002.
[14] Al-Sha'ab (Egypt), February 1 2002.

[15] Inappropriate behaviour according to the muslim code of conduct.

[16] Al-Sha'ab (Egypt), February 1, 2002.


[19] Ibid.


[21] Of course, to this day, Islamic scholars continue to debate generally whether suicide attacks against Israelis are legitimate, regardless whether the perpetrators are man or women. The religious among those who believe them to be a legitimate form of resistance, those who organize the attacks, and those who eventually carry them out, are usually associated with the radical Islamist branch of the Muslim tradition. See H. Malka, “Must Innocents Die? The Islamic Debate over Suicide Attacks,” The Middle East Quarterly, Vol. 10: No. 2 (Spring 2003): 19-28; A. J. Jorisch, “ The Language of Terrorism,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policywatch, No. 567, 5 October 2001; R. Saad, “Weapons of the Weak,” Al-Ahram (Cairo), No. 564, 13-19 December 2001.


[29] A Palestinian teacher’s opinion quoted in Why Women Turn To Suicide Bombing, K. Toolis The Observer 12 October, 2003


[31] For many Muslims, heaven is a place of milk and wine rivers and honey lakes, where the martyr with the first drop of blood will see Allah’s face, be joined by 70 chosen relatives and have the sins erased. Female martyrs are promised to dwell forever alongside the husband or fiancé they have left behind, plus the weight of earthly rules (including Islamic law) and responsibilities will no longer hang upon them like millstones in the afterlife (If the ‘martyr’ is a man, he will enjoy also the services of 72 black-eyed virgins.

[32] Islamists and Jihadists become quite angry when the media and the West refer to those who blow themselves up as engaging in suicide bombing. A typical angry reaction would go as follows: “This is not suicide. Suicide is weak, selfish, and mentally disturbed. This is 'istihaḍ' which consists of martyrdom or self-sacrifice in the service of Allah. A martyrdom operation is the highest level of jihad.


[34] Ibid, pp. 161-163.


[37] This applies generally to terrorists: interviewed members of left-wing militant groups in Italy and Germany "began to perceive themselves as members of a heroic community of generous people fighting a war against 'evil.'", see D. Della Porta, 'Political Socialization in Left-Wing Underground Organizations: Biographies of Italian and German Militants' in Social Movements and Violence: Participation in Underground Organizations, ed. Donatella della Porta, Greenwich, Connecticut 1992, pp.286.

[38] When a Nazi camp commandant was asked why they went to extreme lengths to degrade their victims they were going to kill anyway, he explained that this was not a purposeless cruelty. The victims had to be degraded to subhuman objects so that those who operated the gas chambers would be less burdened by distress when they would kill them, see P. Levi, The Drowned and the Saved, New York 1987.


[40] F. Hacker, op.cit.

[41] Sheikh Ibrahim Madhi, Palestinian Authority Imam, in a Friday sermon delivered at a Gaza City mosque and broadcasted live by Palestinian TV on April 12, 2002.


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