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# **Palestinian Women in Terrorism: A Double-Edged Sword?**

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## **Abstract**

Drawing on a decade of research on terrorism in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we show how subjective 'rational choices' motivate some women to engage in terrorist activism. Focusing on the motives of young women who engage in terrorism is consistent with feminist theory's insistence on women's agency – even at the extremes. In addition to the well-established motivations for terrorism reported in the literature, interviews with young women involved in terrorism reveal mixed personal motives for their gender defying choices, including thrill-seeking and some conscious rebellion. However, we contend that women's subjective rationale for participation in such violent behavior needs to be contextualized. A cost-benefit approach, we maintain, highlights the strategic considerations supporting the deployment of women as combatants by Palestinian terrorist organizations. We argue that the inclusion of women in terrorist activism in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict exposes a major fault line in attitudes to the role and proper place of women in what remains largely a patriarchal culture. This social ambivalence accounts for why, on all measures, women fare worse than their male counterparts. The implications of the findings for feminist research as well as policy are discussed.

## **Introduction**

In many conflict areas around the globe women's participation in violent extremism constitutes a key feature of what has been termed 'New Terrorism' (Laster and Erez, 2015).<sup>1</sup> On some estimates, approximately one third (Narco, 2008), or even half, of terrorist acts in some parts of the world are now committed by women, although the proportion of women involved varies according to the specific terrorist organization and theatre of conflict (Cragin and Daly, 2009: 103).

Drawing on a decade of research into Palestinian terrorism, including interviews with women incarcerated for terrorism-related activities, we examine the subjective accounts of why some women choose to engage in violent extremism. Taking women's views seriously remains an important feminist method that acknowledges women's agency- even at the extremes. In contrast to the stereotypes typically invoked to explain the seemingly inexplicable, careful qualitative research casts women as rational actors who make choices about their behavior, albeit in the context of their particular circumstances and culture.

However, focusing merely on individual choice typically ignores or underplays the cultural, communal, social, and organizational context of terrorism. We argue that it is therefore just as important to consider terrorist organizations' calculation of the costs and benefits of engaging women as active combatants.

This article provides a Palestinian case-study of how a cost-benefit approach can augment and contextualize the growing phenomenon of women's involvement in the terrorist frontline. We argue that a rational choice approach at the individual level, coupled with an organizational cost-benefit analysis at the organizational level, affords a better framework for understanding the phenomenon of women's involvement in terrorist activism, at least in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We contend that a cost-benefit approach accounts for the symbolic and strategic benefits that women bring to terrorist activity, and that these are consciously exploited by terrorist leadership (e.g. Bloom, 2011b; Laster and Erez, 2015). For terrorist organizations, as well as the women involved, though, including women is not without cost, requiring significant concessions to be made to cultural sensibilities.

We show how Palestinian women's engagement in terrorism exposes cultural fault-lines and presents a major challenge to established power relations. As in many other contexts, women who find themselves at the pointy end of such cultural ambivalence fare markedly worse than their male counterparts. And women's involvement in terrorism has significant negative consequences for other women who then suffer the negative consequences of being treated as potential combatants.

We begin with a discussion of the growing phenomenon of women's involvement in terrorist activism, particularly their relatively recent entry into the field in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Employing a 'rational choice' perspective, we go on to present the reasons advanced by women themselves for their involvement, noting the methodological challenges of using qualitative approaches to research motive. We then show how a cost-benefit approach can provide a wider contextual lens by identifying the strategic benefits, as well as the costs, for Palestinian terrorist organizations recruiting women into their ranks. But these women, we suggest, are worse off as a consequence of their involvement. We conclude by considering some implications of a cost-benefit approach for feminist theory and public policy, especially counter-terrorism initiatives.

### **The Female Face of Terrorism: The Palestinian Context**

In some conflict zones, women have been actively engaged in relatively large numbers, including occupying leadership positions, in terrorist organizations (Cragin and Daly, 2009). In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Palestinian leadership has only relatively recently allowed women to be directly involved in what has hitherto been the exclusive preserve of men--active combat roles in terrorist missions against Israeli targets, including as suicide bombers. It is

important to assess the import of this significant shift in policy, particularly the responses of the women involved.

Generalizing about culture is always a fraught exercise. Cultures are not monolithic and Palestinian society is complex, with a diversity of religions, socio-economic strata, educational backgrounds, and differential rates of urbanization. But predominantly, the social order of Palestinian society particularly in the rural areas of the West Bank and Gaza, remains, according to insider commentators, tribal in structure and conservative (Hamamara, 2019). A key feature of this conservatism is strict adherence to gender- (and age-) based social hierarchies, resulting in unequal gender role division (Rubenberg, 2001; Tamimi, 2017).<sup>2</sup> In theory and practice, women (and children) are relegated to a dependent and inferior status (Tamimi, 2017). A woman's social value is largely determined by the extent of her seclusion and obedience (Hasan, 2005); her activities are largely confined to the private sphere while participation in the public domain is highly restricted (e.g. Haj-Yahia, 2003; Hasan, 2005; Hamamara, 2019). Women's identity and worth is assessed according to their capacity to fulfil their role as wives and mothers (e.g. Tamimi, 2017; Hasso, 2005).

Palestinian women are expected to maintain their honor, centered on the preservation of a chaste reputation. Women's purity and virginity is highly valued and, when compromised, (e.g. by rape or other circumstances that cast a shadow on a woman's modesty) it reflects badly on their male guardians, who are presumed to have failed to protect and control their womenfolk (e.g. Baxter, 2007; Hasan, 2005).

Men are expected to protect and monitor the behavior of their female blood relatives. A woman who exhibits inappropriate or immodest behavior,<sup>3</sup> violating gendered scripts of social

relations, brings shame and dishonor on all of her kin (Hasan, 2002, 2005). A family's reputation is closely tied to the honor of its women, so violations of gender expectations (such as a woman's unsupervised contact with men) constitutes a grave offense that requires the restoration of the family's honor through punishment of the woman, which, in extreme cases, can lead to her death -- the so-called "honor killings" phenomenon (Hasan, 2002; Baxter, 2007).

In line with cultural dictates, prior to 2000, Palestinian women's role in the nationalist political agenda was clear and limited: they were expected to sustain Palestinian aspirations through childbearing (of future fighters) and taking care of their families. Their obligation was to show unwavering support for their husbands and to inculcate national-organizational ideology in their children. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, for example, often referred to the womb of the Palestinian woman as "the best weapon of the Palestinian people," recognizing women's power to produce children to fight Israel<sup>4</sup> (Berko & Erez, 2007; Erez and Berko, 2008). Sheik Ahmad Yassin, the founder and former Hamas leader,<sup>5</sup> also emphasized women's role in childbearing and argued that they should not be direct participants in military operations (Berko, 2007; 2012).

The surprising aspect of Palestinian women's involvement in terrorism in recent decades, however, is how quickly these long established and deeply held cultural values were displaced in the interests of pragmatic political ends. Patriarchy, once again, demonstrated itself to be opportunistic and adaptable (Laster and Erez, 2015).

Following the onset of the second *intifada* (uprising) in the 2000s and the escalation of Palestinian hostilities, including waves of suicide bombings that resulted in numerous fatalities, Israeli security procedures were significantly tightened, eliciting a more aggressive response from the Palestinian leadership. The decision to put more active foot-soldiers on the ground led

to a shift in thinking about the role of women in the national struggle. The Palestinian leadership came to accept women's involvement in terrorist activism. Yasser Arafat, in his later years, for example, modified his views about the participation of women combatants, proclaiming that women are not just "the womb of the nation" but "my army of roses that will crush Israeli tanks" (Victor, 2003, p.19).

Technology facilitated this shift in policy as guerilla warfare became more accessible and 'democratic'. Suicide bombers require limited physical strength and training to wear a bomb which can be detonated at the press of a button. More significantly, the internet has proven to be a highly effective tool for disseminating propaganda aimed at recruiting new, including female, volunteers (Berko and Erez 2007; von Knop 2008). For women, the on-line world has afforded them opportunities for engagement beyond their tight family circle coupled with the privacy to pursue clandestine activities, including involvement in terrorism (Berko and Erez 2007). Women were suddenly able and, with new modes of persuasion, willing to assume active roles in the terrorist enterprise.

Following the first suicide bombing perpetrated by a woman in 2002 under the aegis of Fatah, other organizations, including Hamas, began to recruit women, recognizing their tactical usefulness. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the Hamas leader at the time, modified his restrictions on women waging jihad, initially lifting the requirement that they be accompanied by a male relative as chaperone if the mission is for 24 hours or less, and then eventually embracing women's involvement without qualification (Israeli 2004; Bloom 2004: 150).

In 2005, Hamas announced the establishment of a special unit of women to fight Israel. These women - mostly wives or sisters of Hamas activists- claim that they joined terrorism "not

to compete with men but to implement Allah's orders<sup>6</sup>." A few years later, in response to Israeli military attempts to stop Palestinians firing rockets into Israel's southern towns, the Islamic Jihad (another Palestinian fundamentalist organization) threatened to flood Israel with female suicide bombers.<sup>7</sup>

Although women are increasingly called upon to assume active resistance roles, the traditional gender framework still lingers: women are meant to balance support for the national struggle while preserving Arab/Islamic constructions of femininity (e.g. Ali, 2006). For example, still in September 2012, the Facebook page for Fatah in Lebanon posted a picture of a mother dressing her young son in a suicide belt. The picture is accompanied by an imaginary conversation. The child asks his mother, "Why me and not you?" with the mother replying, "I will stay in order to give birth to more children for the sake of Palestine." (Palestinian Media Watch, 2012).

What then makes some Palestinian women defy expected gender norms and take part in terrorist activism and what are the consequences of them doing so?

### **Gender and Motivation for Terrorist Activism**

Decades of research has now definitively refuted the common stereotype of male terrorists as mentally ill or with particular personality disorders (e.g. Post, 2009; Horgan, 2014). This finding applies equally to female terrorists (see review by Jacques and Taylor, 2009). However, the widely accepted taxonomies, which seek to capture the motivations of those who commit terrorist acts (e.g. motivations for suicide bombing in Jacques and Taylor, 2008) are incomplete and have methodological limitations.



The social science accounts of New Terrorism, including acts committed by women and girls, have focused mostly on female agency (e.g. Ali, 2006; Bloom, 2011a; 2001b; Cunningham, 2007). The pervasive stereotyping of women is also well-documented in feminist writing on women and terrorism (Laster and Erez, 2015). For example, feminist analyses have highlighted the consistent bifurcation of women terrorists as either heroes or hapless victims (e.g. Nacos, 2005; Marway, 2012). Yet policy interventions to deter women from engaging in such lethal activity require a contextual appreciation of the push and pull factors influencing the involvement of some women, as well as the personal consequences of their gender-defying activism.

In line with other researchers in this area (e.g. Hausken 2016), we submit that decisions made by individual women to engage in terrorist activism are best understood within the loose rubric of contemporary versions of ‘rational choice theory.’ Under the broader model of ‘bounded rationality,’<sup>8</sup> individuals make decisions from a position of imperfect knowledge and under conditions of uncertainty. In the anthropological sense, ‘rationality’ is embedded in the inconsistencies and paradoxes built into all cultures (Kuznar, 2007). Research has documented that women join terrorist groups for a variety of reasons, including avenging another's death, recruitment pressure, marginalization by society, and ‘serving as pawns in a man's game’ (Simon and Tranel, 2011). Research on female suicide bombers identified personal reasons (such as revenge for a loss of significant other) as more prominent than religious or nationalistic motives (Jacques and Taylor, 2008).

Based on extensive interviews with women terrorists and their families and friends in diverse trouble spots across the globe, Mia Bloom (2011a; 2011b) developed a typology of four (plus one)<sup>9</sup> overlapping motivations for why women choose to engage in terrorist activism. They

include: Revenge (at the loss of significant others or other political grievances); Redemption (women volunteer or are volunteered to perpetrate suicide bombing to erase moral blemishes, commonly resulting from actual or suspected sexual contacts outside marriage that tarnishes “family honor”); Respect (admiration from other Palestinians for their honorable contribution to the cause), and Relationship (with men who are involved in terrorism).

Given that local conflicts remain the critical motivator for participation in terrorism (Ali, 2006), we analyze interviews of Palestinians engaged in terrorist activism that describe their experiences and views as combatants, and Palestinian leaders’ perspectives about the involvement of Palestinian women in terrorism. Taken as a whole, the narratives provide a more nuanced evaluation of the choices made by women themselves, and the apparent organizational benefits and costs of involving Palestinian women in terrorist activism.

### **Methodology and data collection**

The data for the study included interviews with the following: first, in-depth interviews with incarcerated Palestinians who perpetrated various acts of terrorism. They included 14 women aged between 18-29 at the time of the interview, although some were adolescents at the time of their involvement. We also interviewed 10 adult men (age 22 and 36), and 10 adolescent males.

Two of the women interviewed were Israeli Arabs (citizens of Israel), with the remaining 12 women and the 20 male adults and adolescents from the Palestinian territories -- the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. All the interviewed women were unmarried. The women also had higher levels of education than the male terrorist interviewees, with two having some university level education.

The participants were selected to represent severity levels of the various security-related offenses, including dispatchers, (failed) suicide bombers, combatants, and those who knowingly harbored or provided material assistance to terrorists, or aided and abetted terrorist missions. For the women it also included some who recruited other women for operations, or who accompanied men to a target as cover.

In addition to interviewing participants in terrorism, the data set includes interviews with 10 Palestinian leaders and community notables, all of whom were male. Half (N=5) of the leaders were imprisoned at the time of the interviews, having been arrested or sentenced for planning terrorist attacks or involvement in security violations. The other half included Palestinian spiritual leaders and Shari'a judges. All leaders and community notables were selected for their prominence and influence in the political and communal life of Palestinians living in the territories of Gaza and the West Bank.

Lastly, the data include interviews with six Israeli legal and law enforcement agents tasked with processing terrorism cases in the courts as well as attending to incarcerated security offenders in Israeli prisons.

The interviews with imprisoned Palestinians were conducted in the Israeli adult prisons and youth wings of prisons for security offenders; the interviews with those outside prison were conducted at their workplace.

The interviews with male and female activists sought to examine Palestinian terrorists' life course within their structural, social and cultural contexts to establish their pathways into terrorism (see Mayer, 2009). The structure of the interview was open: interviewees were asked to tell their 'life story' in their own terms (Denzin, 1989), with only occasional interjections for

clarity. The topics consistently covered by all interviewees included their childhood, milestone events, significant relationships, and their aspirations for the future. Interviews with Palestinian leaders and notables centered on their views on participants in terrorism in general, and on women's participation in particular.

Interviewing procedures complied with all IRB requirements as well as the guidelines issued by the Israeli Prison Services' Ethics Committee. The interviews lasted between 2-4 hours, which, for logistical reasons, occurred over two or three meetings spread over days, weeks, or even months in some cases.

Interviews with the incarcerated Palestinians and community notables were conducted in Arabic, Hebrew, or English, according to the participants' preference. The interviewees were initially suspicious but once they accepted that the interview was for research purposes rather than a security related interrogation, they seemed keen to participate, volunteering their views and experiences in a relaxed and conversational manner. The interview narratives were transcribed, translated, and analyzed using grounded theory approaches (Charmaz, 2006).

To ascertain their validity, interview data were compared with the military court case files about the violations involved, as well as with the prison records of the interviewees. There appeared to be only a few minor discrepancies between the official record accounts and the information obtained directly from the participants' interviews.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***Stated motivations and their limits***

In telling their life stories, the participants described the circumstances that led them to become involved in terrorist activity, their reasons for involvement, mode of recruitment, their beliefs, and how they felt about their choices, along with their expectations of what engagement in terrorist activity would bring them. The data allowed us to document participants' stated motivations for engaging in terrorism, and to make some general comparisons between the expressed motives given by the female interviewees with those offered by the adult and adolescent male subjects.

We found some significant differences between men and women's stated motives for involvement. In accordance with prior research findings (Jacques and Taylor, 2008), Palestinian men tended to focus much more on ideological factors than the women.<sup>10</sup> The other significant factor for men was gender status enhancement. Both Palestinian adult men and adolescents, for example, described how they felt "manly" through their participation in terrorism, with the adolescents emphasizing their improved social standing among their male peers. Some male operatives explicitly asserted that their activism helped them to recover their manhood in the emasculating environment created by the "occupation regime." Monetary rewards, which would flow to their families through their involvement in terrorist activism, was also a common factor noted by male prisoners.<sup>11</sup>

The motivations for engagement in terrorism reported by the female prisoners generally support Bloom's categorization. For instance, several women talked about revenge for the death of a brother, a cousin, and in one case, the death of a fiancé involved in terrorism. In the words of this woman, "...he was the most beautiful man in the world...he wanted to marry me and the Israelis killed him..."

Uniquely for the women interviewees, relationships, real or imagined, loomed large as a significant motivator. Romantic involvement with, or wish to marry men involved in terrorism, was often a primary driver. A Palestinian woman who agreed to accompany a Palestinian man on a mission as cover for the kidnapping of an Israeli taxi driver, for instance, maintained that, “He [promised to get engaged to me and] asked me to come with him so I did.” She added that her father was angry with her as she brought shame on him and the family, but then wistfully added, “I do not know if the man took advantage of me. I miss him a lot ...”

Compared with the men, the incarcerated women focused far less on their desire for respect or social status. Only one female interviewee maintained that she expected people to respect her for what she had done. An interviewed legal officer, who had tried many terrorism cases, summarized the differences between the approach of men and women in court as,

A woman would claim that she has acted out of stress or desperation; quite often we hear the argument that ‘it was the situation that forced me to do it.’ A man would usually just admit that he did it, and would do it in a defiant manner, to get more points in regards to the manhood aspect.

A few of the interviewed women admitted that they had been coerced<sup>12</sup>. In a well-documented tragic case, a young woman who had been burnt and severely disfigured in a cooking accident, was pushed by her parents to become a suicide bomber. Her father, in her words, “was beating me and told me I will never get married and I will be a cripple for the rest of my life”. By forcing her to ‘volunteer’ the family sought to dispose of a daughter who they perceived to be a burden on the family. Another woman wanted only “to train with weapons,” but then was compelled to follow through with the suicide mission.

The interviews, though, suggest that at least in the Palestinian context, some of Bloom’s categories need to be augmented or at least refined. Religion (independent of political ideology),

for example, is a prevalent leitmotif among women (as well as for some men). A number of female interviewees, for instance, maintained that they engaged in terrorism to reap rewards based on their religious belief systems, such as the promise that they will ascend to paradise, and become one of 72 virgins who serve the Prophet and his companions. In one instance, a women interviewee projected a religious motivation on to male suicide bombers, “In my opinion, a *shaheed* (martyr) hands himself over to Allah and therefore the underlying reason for his suicide is religious”.

Ideology, revenge, and religion though are often intertwined for Palestinian women, particularly for those who have had direct or family experience with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). For example, one of the women, a Palestinian university student whose combatant brother had been killed by the Israeli military, pressed a recruiter to allow her to undertake a suicide mission so she could become a *shaheeda* (female martyr) “against the Jews, for revenge and for paradise...” Another woman stated that, “all Israelis are the enemy of Allah and the enemy of Islam”. Still another interviewee commented, “In paradise there is everything that we want. Paradise is for the Muslim and Hell is for the Jews. In Paradise I will marry the man I wanted to marry.”

The interviews also identified other motivations beyond Bloom’s taxonomy. For the young women we identified a broad category of ‘Rebellion’ that includes, at one end of the spectrum, thrill seeking and relief from ‘boredom,’ (see Katz, 1988), and at the other end, though less frequent, the conscious flaunting or disruption of gender norms. To that extent, as we argue below, “seductions of terrorism” affords a better theoretical framework to capture these quite distinct motivations.<sup>13</sup>

The search for excitement and relief from boredom was a major driver for some of the young women interviewees. Getting out of the controlling environment of the home, interacting with men outside the purview of the family, and experiencing the exhilaration of male operatives preparing them for a mission was, to apply Katz's term, hugely 'seductive' for women coming from a highly restrictive social system. A chance to take off the veil or wear tight western clothes on the way to the target were noted as particular highlights by some of the young women. Training in the use of weapons by the *shabab* (the guys) or secretly travelling to the targeted sites was reported by a few Palestinian female adolescents as an attractive feature of doing "military work".<sup>14</sup>

The women in our 'Rebellion' category were also more likely to comment on the relative freedom that they experienced in prison: "here in prison I have more freedom than home; I can wear whatever I want. I listen to whatever music I like, as loudly as I want, and I speak on the phone with whoever I want." For women from a culture which relegates women to the private sphere, these are powerful motivators.

A few of the women interviewees also described personal psychological rewards: a feeling that they were "different" or "unique", because they were making a direct contribution to the national cause: "I did something that is manly. There are hardly any women who are doing what I have done."

Yet, apart from the act of participation, we found little evidence of any direct challenge to patriarchal gender roles among the female interviewees:<sup>15</sup>

It is natural that men direct the world. . . . Men have more physical ability than women. The percentage of brain capability and wisdom of men are not larger than women's, but men have the ability to realize their brains' potential and



women do not.

Another explained that,

Our religion says that it is not good for a woman to be a leader, because she does things from the heart and not from the head. Our prophet Mohammed says that a woman is not like a man. The man is better than the woman according to religion; because we have our menstrual period and when we have our period we do not pray and therefore we are less than men. We do less with our head because we think and make decisions from the heart. We are more sensitive than men.

Even the one or two women who explicitly saw their involvement as defying gender norms, observed that:

There is no difference between a man and a woman in the intifada [uprising]. . . . We all want to protect our land . . . there is no difference in the recruitment of a guy or a girl, but the percentage of women that are recruited is lower because there are women that have another role in society. Every woman is a homemaker; this is the main barrier which prevents women from being recruited.

There are always methodological problems with discerning ‘true’ motives, especially given the sample bias of our interviews with participants who had failed in their missions. It is impossible to know if the men or women who succeed in their missions, are more highly, or differently, motivated than our cohort of interviewees. Generally though, the participants probably failed for extraneous reasons, such as quality intelligence which led them to be intercepted, or in the case of failed suicide bombers, being lucky (or unlucky depending on one’s point of view) to be caught through, for example, faulty equipment, a random search, or suspicious behavior.

Ethnography though, is less about ‘truth’ than ‘ascertaining meaning’ (Horgan, 2011). Inevitably, accounts are ex post facto rationalizations and efforts at individual sense making. They are legitimizing exercises, which probably recast actions in the most favorable light for the

benefit of peers, political organizations, and family members (Hamm, 2018; Horgan, 2011). For our activist cohorts, expressed motivations constitutes useful data even if these are reconstructions or rationalizations for joining the cause, or for their failure to complete their mission.

Another potential limitation of our method is that the interviews had to be conducted in security detention facilities, and thus likely to encourage socially acceptable responses (Hamm, 2018). Reflecting back on one's past actions, especially being interviewed by strangers aligned with the 'enemy' (see Ozacky-Lazar, 2010) can be illuminating, but is, just as likely, an exercise in second-guessing the most advantageous way of telling one's story. We suspect, for instance, that the women interviewees may have underplayed sexual contact or exploitation because they were ashamed to reveal details, which, in their cultural worldview, would tarnish their reputation. It might also be the case that some of the women understated their ideological motivation and political standpoint when talking to political adversaries, although this did not deter the male participants from expressly addressing such matters during the interviews.

Jails are their own social world and women inmates have to make significant adjustments to prison culture, including their presentation of self (Hamm, 2018; Horgan, 2011). For instance, some of the women interviewees became 'born-again Muslims' in prison, replacing their Western clothing with traditional religious dress, praying regularly and participating in religious study groups often under the influence of a dominant woman leader.

More generally, as Jack Katz notes, regardless of how skilfully and carefully we undertake qualitative research, 'motivation' for past behaviour is complex, mixed, and eludes easy categorization (Katz, 1988; 1991). Finally, although discerning subjective motivation is

important, too great a focus on individual accounts risks overemphasizing agency at the expense of structure (Giddens, 1984; Sewell, 1992).<sup>16</sup> As some feminists contend, the level of both symbolic and actual violence against women in deeply patriarchal societies, where structural victimization and agency co-exist (e.g. Serendip, 2012), means that it is almost impossible to isolate choice or agency from the wider context in which women's individual decisions are made (McKinnon, 1987). Individual motivation or 'rational choice' needs to be understood as part of the broader social context, which underscores decision-making by terrorist organizations and their leadership about the deployment of women as combatants.

### ***Women as Good (Terrorism) Business***

Current scholarly approaches apply cost-benefit principles to crime control efforts generally (e.g. Roman et al., 2010) and to terrorism in particular (e.g. Hausken, 2018). It is now well acknowledged that terrorism constitutes a rational (albeit deadly) enterprise (Post, 2009), based on its own corporate logic (Shelley, 2014, Gill et al, 2018). To that extent, cost-benefit analysis provides an important contextual frame for unravelling the rationale for involving women in the business of terrorism.

Cost-benefits analysis, including the program logic of a corporate enterprise underlying terrorism, is now routinely employed to the analysis of terrorism (Giacomello, 2004; Shelley, 2014), as well as in the development of particular counterterrorism measures. (e.g. Gill, 2018 ). As Shelley (2014:176) summarizes, "Economic analyses of terrorists have drawn strong parallels with the legitimate business world, describing terrorist organizations as hierarchies, franchises, brand strategists, and venture capitals," as they maximize the advantages of different 'trading' environments. These realms include material, technological, and human capital, as well as social

practices and cultural patterns, tenets, and traditions. Like all businesses, ‘successful’ terrorist organizations make strategic decisions about desired outcomes, risks, and the allocation of resources (Hoffman, 2006; Horgan, 2014; Shelley, 2012). Terrorist leaders routinely engage in cost-benefit thinking, including in their choice of targets (Gill et al, 2018; Sandler and Lapen, 1988), and in assessing the risks and impact of counter-terrorism strategies directed against them (e.g. Sandler and Enders, 2004; Gill, 2018).

If we are to properly understand women’s experience at the extremes we need to augment feminist analyses of personal motivation for terrorist activism within the wider frame of why women have relatively recently been ‘let in’.

Gender, or more specifically, the use of women in terrorism, has now become another important variable in terrorist leaders’ business calculations. The most cynical explanation is that women are more expendable as foot soldiers than men. But terrorist organizations almost certainly have a more sophisticated understanding of the instrumental and symbolic impact of gender stereotypes in target societies, and regularly exploit these to strategic advantage (Laster and Erez, 2015). For instance, it has been observed that organizations deliberately recruit women because of the publicity they inevitably attract (e.g. Bloom, 2011a; 2011b; Brunner, 2005; Naco, 2005).

The national causes that drive insurgent groups, including the Palestinian Hamas and Fatah organizations, receive amplified public attention when women are involved in terrorist operations, even more so when females carry out suicide bombings.<sup>17</sup> Acts of destruction and death perpetrated by women attract significantly more media attention compared with male

perpetrators, both in the West and in the Middle East (e.g. Bloom, 2007; Berko and Erez, 2007).<sup>18</sup>

Media reports typically frame the involvement of women in terrorist activity as an indication of the depth of resistance movements (Ali, 2006; Bloom, 2004). There is, therefore, great symbolic force in demonstrating the political resolve of a terrorist organization prepared to sacrifice its women as foot soldiers. There are also major propaganda and practical benefits in the publicity which terrorist acts by women attract. For example, having to fight against women can undermine the morale and psychological well-being of soldiers engaged in the fight against terrorism (Bloom, 2011a). Women taking up arms can also potentially goad more men into radical activism (Ali, 2006; Hasso, 2005) since the assumption is that, “if women can do it, so can men” (Izraeli, 1999).

Beyond its propaganda and practical advantages, terrorist organizations have recognized that women are a strategic military asset. They are especially useful in terrorist operations involving “soft” or civilian targets (Bloom, 2011a). Women can gain relatively easy access to densely populated sites such as markets and hospitals<sup>19</sup> where large numbers of civilians congregate (Bloom, 2011a). The deployment of women provides another major advantage for terrorist organizations: the element of surprise. Women are generally better able to avoid detection (Cunningham, 2007; Berko and Erez, 2007) which is why Palestinian terrorist organizations have on occasions sent men dressed as women to perpetrate terrorist attacks.<sup>20</sup>

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, women have managed to penetrate well-guarded areas, such as checkpoints, by virtue of being women. Israeli soldiers, for example, were

initially reluctant to apply the rigorous standards of male security checks to women. Since women are less likely to arouse suspicion and be stopped at checkpoints for routine security searches, their involvement increases the likelihood of a successful attack (Berko and Erez, 2007; Erez and Berko, 2008).

Some terrorist groups have also found that an attractive woman serves as effective distraction. In recent years, some terrorist organizations have selected women volunteers based on their appearance (Bloom, 2011a). The 2003 suicide bombing by an attractive Palestinian female law student, Hanadi Jaradat, in the Maxim restaurant in Haifa that killed 21 people, is a case in point (Blair, 2003).

Although some women have become suicide bombers in the Palestinian cause, the majority of women recruited serve in a variety of support roles which fall short of martyrdom. For instance, women are most likely to serve as lookouts, scouts, and intelligence gatherers for terrorist organizations. They also fulfil important enabling functions such as buying cell phones on behalf of male terrorists, providing material support such as cooking, or cover for operations. Women have also provided assistance in the manufacture of explosives, and through their social and familial networks, are instrumental in the recruitment of other women into terrorist work. Palestinian women, at times with children, regularly accompany male terrorists travelling to a target to create the impression of an innocent family outing thereby avoiding suspicion and detection (Berko and Erez, 2007; Erez and Berko, 2008).

Nevertheless, for all the strategic and practical benefits afforded through the engagement of women in the business of terrorism, there are significant political and social costs for terrorist organizations occasioned by women's involvement. These costs, in turn, become the price that

participating women pay for their involvement, as reflected in their retrospective assessment of their terrorism experiences.

### ***Cultural Fault-lines: The Costs of Women as Terrorists***

The rhetoric about, and attitudes toward, the involvement of Palestinian women in terrorism have changed dramatically over the last decade (Laster & Erez, 2015). Nevertheless, involving women in terrorist activity is still a fraught political decision. An incarcerated Hamas leader summarized in his interview the dilemma the Palestinian community faces when women participate in terrorism: "It is forbidden for a girl to live outside the house, especially to live in prison. Even when we send her to study at a university we don't feel good about it."

In the cost-benefit equation, whatever the strategic advantages, actively involving women presents serious reputational risks for terrorist organizations. Terrorist leadership continually has to manage the potential loss of social capital among its support base because women's involvement challenges core cultural precepts.

To ensure that social conventions about women's honor are maintained, they need to expend extra resources on logistics. Thus, the interviews revealed that transporting female recruits to training requires another woman to be present in the car so that female participants are not seen alone with a man. In preparing women to be dispatched to a target, the organization employs other women around the clock to offer the recruit moral and social support. As discussed by the interviewees, other women are often used to strengthening the recruit's resolve, allay her anxieties about her family and manage her loneliness and pining for her family.

Having women operatives involved ostensibly satisfies the chaperoning requirements and minimizes any moral blemish on the reputation of a potential female martyr. The thinly disguised

underlying political concern, however, is with the reputation of the organization among its key constituencies because its operations compromise the high social value placed on the preservation of women's honor.

A major challenge for all terrorist organizations is maintaining their legitimacy and support base, and thus survival. Involving women in terrorism therefore remains a serious cultural fault line in a patriarchal society. It can even potentially undermine international sympathy for their political cause (Laster and Erez, 2015).<sup>21</sup>

Interviewed Palestinian terrorism functionaries were also concerned that engaging women in terrorist missions would diminish the glory and respect that a successful operation conferred on men. Dispatchers who used female recruits admitted in their interviews that they were likely to be subject to gossip and scorn. One dispatcher confessed that for this reason, he had tried to conceal women's involvement in a suicide bombing operation.

Recruiters and dispatchers of female terrorists expressed reservations about the marginal gains afforded by women to operational outcomes. They generally shared traditional views about the best way for women to advance the national cause—through the bearing of sons who would become future 'freedom fighters'. In one interview, a dispatcher who sent one woman on a successful suicide bombing mission, for example, lamented her death, "It's a pity I sent her to blow herself up; she could have given birth to three men like me."

For terrorist organizations, engaging women in terrorist activism requires considerable reputation risk management. For instance, they need to deal with the fallout when a woman's family discovers that she has left home (Berko and Erez, 2007). To avoid being blamed for leading women astray, terrorist organizations have had to develop protocols requiring women



recruits to sign documents attesting that they had volunteered for the mission, and that they had initiated the contact with the organization. This is necessary to avoid a 'blood feud' against the organization for 'expropriating' a woman from her father's jurisdiction. The imprisonment of women can also give rise to complaints against the organization, as women's incarceration brings disgrace on the family (Erez and Berko, 2008).

The interviews with Palestinian leaders and community stakeholders reveal deep concerns about women's participation in terrorist activism. Even interviewees who recognized the strategic advantages afforded by women were nonetheless acutely aware that their involvement comes at a high price.

The involvement of Palestinian women in suicide bombings in particular, attracts strong opposition from fundamentalist religious groups in Palestinian society (Berko and Erez, 2007; Bloom, 2007). A successful detonation by a woman means that the female suicide bomber's intimate body parts are exposed, or worse still, they become intermingled with the remains of her victims, some of whom are men. The exposure of female intimate body parts is, according to an interviewed Shari'a judge, "...a problem. That's nakedness, lewdness. The body of a woman is *a'wra*". [a breach of the religious injunction that a woman's private parts should only be revealed to a spouse].

A more general cultural concern expressed by the interviewees was the violation of gender segregation. Hanging over all missions is the real or imagined transgression of strict taboos on sexual contact between men and women. As one community leader put it,

...She left home without permission to carry out an attack? She must have met men who enlisted her; where they were hiding...bad things [likely] happened [i.e., sexual relations]...and people build on their fantasies.

Several Palestinian community leaders expressed alarm at the unsupervised contact between men and women during terrorist operations. These interviewees noted that in recruiting and preparing for terrorist missions, male recruiters and dispatchers had opportunities to initiate contact with women and to develop illicit relationships with them. For this reason, one high-ranking Hamas official confessed that he would never allow his own daughter out, even to participate in a public demonstration.<sup>22</sup> This concern was raised by one of the women interviewed, using this metaphor:

Woman's honor is like a vase (*jara*). If it breaks and you try to fix it, it will never look the same. You can always see the crack; it cannot be erased.

In the interviews with male operatives involved in the recruitment or deployment of women in terrorist actions, many noted the risks of being tainted by their involvement in forbidden interactions with women.

There was also awareness among some of the Palestinian leader interviewees that women's participation in terrorist activity could, in the longer term, undermine the established social hierarchy and as well as the moral fabric of Palestinian society. Several Palestinian leaders and stakeholders were concerned that, in the words of one interviewed leader, "the woman will think she is the captain in the home." They cautioned that if women are perceived as capable of participating in "military activities," they may want to take on other responsibilities and enjoy privileges accorded to men, thereby disturbing the proper division of labor between the sexes, the foundation of Palestinian social order.

The women interviewed were aware of this barrier, and of the Palestinian community's approach to women's involvement in activities that are the preserve of men. As one incarcerated female terrorist observed,

A woman cannot succeed in her role; they will not let her succeed . . . there are people for whom it is not good to see a woman as a leader or a woman in an important role.

The community leaders in the sample were also acutely aware of the challenge that the involvement of women presented to male status in a patriarchal culture. In a macho social order, the participation of women is an embarrassment to their menfolk. One of the woman interviewees described how, when her brother visited her in prison, he covered his eyes to avoid seeing the shameful image of his imprisoned sister. As she noted, “Seeing me in prison is something he cannot bear to see. He is ashamed that I, a woman, am in prison whereas he, being a man, is in [sic] the outside.” Women’s involvement in terrorist activism undermines masculinist ideology- patriarchy had failed in its duty to protect its women (Hasso, 2005: 30).

Whatever the rhetoric of New Terrorism might suggest,<sup>23</sup> for Palestinian society, militancy and violence have been essential to the construction of masculinity, rather than to the affirming of female identity (Hasso, 2005: 29). As a consequence, for women both individually and collectively, involvement in terrorist activity is a costly undertaking.

### ***No Woman’s Land: The costs of terrorism for women***

While feminist research on female terrorists initially emphasized women’s agency (e.g. Bloom, 2011a) and the advantages that they bring to terrorism (for summary see de Leede, 2018), less attention has been paid to the risks and costs for women of their involvement in a previously an all-male preserve.

Palestinian women who choose to respond to the call to join the national struggle and participate in terrorist operations are caught in a classic double bind: doing what they have been told is their national responsibility simultaneously threatens and contradicts their femininity and womanhood as defined by hegemonic patriarchy (Ali, 2006).

Recruitment of women by male operatives, whether through face-to-face contact, via the Internet, or cell phone,<sup>24</sup> entails risk for women. They are often young, with little involvement in the outside world. They may also be physically unsuitable or emotionally unprepared for the assignment. One female would-be suicide bomber for example, explained in her interview that the weight of the bomb caused her to get “stuck to the ground”. For others, who had rarely strayed much beyond their home and its environs, finding their way to a target was difficult as they became disoriented. In other cases, women recruits panicked when they encountered unanticipated problems.

Palestinian women, who are generally inexperienced in dealing with men outside of their family, may find their interactions with men exciting, but also confusing. A young woman interviewee who was recruited over the Internet referred to her recruiter, whom she had never met in person, as “her lover.” Some of the interviewed young women admitted that they were fond of, or in love, with their handler and that they had believed that his feelings for them were genuine.

Interviewed Palestinian leaders and community notables acknowledged that young women are probably exploited emotionally and even sexually as part and parcel of the recruitment process, since women outside the protective sphere of the family are seen, in a highly gender segregated society, as ‘fair game’. In the words of one leader, “If a man rapes or gets raped, it’s not important. A woman has to be obedient, in society and at home; people will say, what was she thinking [participating in a mission]?”

The double-standards applied to women generally are very apparent in the attitudes of male terrorists toward their female recruits. One interviewed dispatcher, recounting his final

moments with a female recruit about to embark on a suicide mission, described how she first prepared a meal for him before leaving for her death, adding wryly, “when a woman leaves the kitchen, it is only to do something bad.”

In many countries, the status of female soldiers who fight alongside men in war or revolution is enhanced. By contrast, Palestinian women who, in the words of our interviewees, “do military work,” inevitably find their status significantly diminished. They do not reap the respect and recognition accorded to female soldiers in most countries, let alone to their Palestinian fellow male combatants. Sometimes this is demonstrated in subtle but symbolically significant ways – one female interviewee, for example, complained that male suicide bombers were video taped wearing the explosive belt prior to the mission whereas the women were merely photographed.

If a woman dies as a *shaheeda* (female martyr), her death can be used for political mileage. Building up her contribution also displaces the anger that might otherwise be directed at the organization from her family. A few women suicide bombers are accorded a revered status as a martyr like Wafa idris -- the first female Palestinian suicide bomber, who killed one Israeli and injured more than one hundred people in Jerusalem. But death is the highest price that a woman can pay for esteem. And a woman who fails in her mission is not accorded due recognition, however great her motivation and effort. But at least, through her death, a female suicide bomber solves the problem of how to treat women involved in terrorist missions on their return to their families and community (see also Davis, 2013).

Many young Palestinian women charged with security offenses in Israel plead guilty at the first opportunity. Doing so avoids having to go to trial which would lead to disclosures about

their behavior, including that they were wearing Western clothes, had spent time in the company of men, and other facts which would cause them to lose face and humiliate their families (Erez and Berko, 2008).

Women who do contest the charges generally provide lengthy and elaborate explanations to prove their moral innocence. For instance, the female interviewees were at pains to point out that they stayed with a girlfriend in a women's dormitory or that there was another woman in the car when they were transported. It was apparent that the women invest considerable energy in hiding or denying behavior that may stigmatize them or bring shame on their families.

But disgrace is almost inevitable. As one interviewed Palestinian leader explained it,

A woman who winds up in prison, regardless, her status is inferior. She is not ideal woman... I don't think anyone would want to marry such a woman. She is not normative; she is deviant, atypical and crosses all the lines. In a macho society she is a woman who has taken the direction of being a man, a woman who lost her femininity in a society ruled by men.

While imprisoned Palestinian women convicted of terrorism-related offenses have a higher status than their sisters convicted of common crimes (Berko, Erez, and Globokar, 2010), they do not receive the respect and status accorded to their Palestinian male counterparts. An imprisoned female terrorist is an embarrassment to her family. In the prison environment she is not, in the traditional world view, within the protective sphere of the family, or under proper patriarchal control. Incarceration means that women will be exposed to activities that are deemed inappropriate for "good women." If they do not disown their errant daughters and sisters, some families still refuse to visit them in prison.

Prison life was described by a number of interviewees as harder on women than men because, “women are more sensitive than men. It is difficult for us to be far from our families, from our friends, from the world outside.”

Palestinian women serving prison time for security violations also reflected on how the path that they had chosen had adversely affected their life chances, especially their prospects of becoming wives and mothers on their release.

There is a difference between a man and a woman in prison. For a woman the prison is more difficult than for a man. It is dependent on the sentence... A woman thinks of her future, if she will get out or not. A man, if he sits 10 year or 15 years, when he is released he can build his life... A woman is not like a man. It is important how old she is because it is difficult for her to build her life and look at the future if she older than 30.

This negative trajectory for women is in marked contrast to the positive experience of male operatives who ‘fail’ and serve time. Male terrorists are accorded esteem by their compatriots both inside the prison and on their return to their communities. After their prison sentence they gain in prestige, receive various rewards, including a high status marriage and even leadership posts in their respective terrorist organizations.<sup>25</sup> Men are seen as heroic figures entitled to special treatment and honor. By contrast, the women interviewees were in many cases resigned, in other cases quite disillusioned, by the negative impact that their involvement in terrorism had on their lives and future. In a rhetorical *cris de coeur*, one of the female interviewees angrily lamented, “Do men respect me? They ought to respect me. Men and women ought to respect what I did. I did not do it for myself.”

For methodological reasons related to interviewing women prisoners via life stories, the interviewees were not asked the direct question, “knowing what you know now, would you do it all again?” Uniquely, ‘failed’ women terrorist activists have had an opportunity to experience the

social consequences of their decisions. For some, without consciously appraising it in this way, it exposed the gap between their aspirations, and the reality of the consequences for them as women in a patriarchal society. To that extent, honest answers could have shed some light on the ‘holy grail’ of counter-terrorism (Radlauer, 2013) -- what works as specific and general deterrence for women to refrain, or at least disengage, from terrorist activism?

### **Conclusion: A Balanced Scorecard?**

As a broad conceptual framework, a cost-benefit approach can structure assessments of the subjective and objective factors weighed up by both individuals and organizations when making decisions about a course of action (Sen, 2000), including involvement in the violent activity of terrorism (e.g. Hausken, 2018; Crenshaw and LaFree, 2017).

There are, though, limits to applying strict cost-benefit framework to terrorism generally, and to women’s involvement in particular. Weighing up risks and opportunities is always about ‘best guesses’ based on imperfect knowledge (Sen, 2017; Gill et al., 2018). It is, for instance, impossible to know whether the organizational call to include women in active combat, in time, will be regarded as a catalyst or a hindrance to the achievement of greater gender equality or indeed, the longer-term political objectives of the Palestinian people.

An economic model, traditional cost benefit analysis attaches a financial value to decisions that are, as our qualitative study demonstrates, based largely on subjective, non-monetary factors (Weimer and Vining, 2017). Thus at the individual level, the stated motives of the women interviewees who choose to become combatants, such as revenge, relationships, redemption, and our own category of ‘rebellion,’ are emotive responses. Women terrorists show no evidence of objectively weighing up the consequences of their actions for themselves or for



others. Our research shows that for some women, at least initially, there are subjective satisfactions in taking up arms. But, as the study also demonstrates, the apparent advantages come at a high price, with major costs for participants themselves and for other women in Palestinian society, in addition to the loss of many other lives and the scarring of numerous victims, both physically and emotionally (Erez, 2006; Hobfoll et al. 2006; Laufer and Solomon, 2006; Shamai and Ron, 2008).<sup>26</sup>

Palestinian terrorist organizations, though, seemingly do weigh up the tactical, operational and symbolic benefits of ‘letting women in’ to the front line of terrorist activism. But at the same time, they simultaneously recognize that the deployment of women in nationalist activism also has a destabilizing impact on the social fabric of Palestinian society, and comes at the cost of significant reputational risk for the organization. From a feminist perspective, this kind of challenge to patriarchal values might be regarded as a welcome development. But there is no evidence that allowing women to be part of terrorist activism has, or will, improve women’s social position in Palestinian society.

The answer to whether the benefits of employing women in terrorism outweigh its costs for individuals or organizations remains, like terrorism itself (Kimhi et al., 2009) in the eye of the beholder. It is impossible to know whether recourse to terrorism, including by women activists, in time will be regarded as a catalyst or a hindrance to the achievement of greater gender equality or indeed, the longer-term political objectives of the Palestinian people.

In practical terms, at the very least, cost-benefit analysis can inform counter-terrorism strategies. The diverse narratives, including those of failure and disappointment, need be captured and retold, particularly online where recruitment propaganda flourishes. Incorporating

stories into early intervention counter-radicalization programs may be a useful tool to discredit political rhetoric.

But as our research demonstrates, there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach. The counter narratives cannot refute a belief in, for instance, religious jihad or martyrdom. They might though highlight the extra ‘pain of imprisonment’ for women who fail in their mission and thus might be sufficient to dissuade at least some impressionable young women from the ‘seductions’ of a, briefly, more exciting, but ultimately unrewarding and perilous life choice.

Enhancing family supports to both deter and reintegrate vulnerable women who become involved in terrorist activism is a well-known counter-terrorism strategy. However, from a feminist perspective, counter-terrorist measures predicated on reinforcing gender inequality and patriarchal dominance cannot be condoned. Rebellion against strict family control was, in fact, one of the factors prompting some of our cohort to engage in terrorist activism. The disjunction between their day-to-day lives and their desire for a more fulfilling (or exciting) life is unlikely to be resolved by sending them back to the limited sphere of the family.

The research suggests that the longer term objectives of counterterrorism might need to focus on promoting sustainable ways in which women in patriarchal societies can be afforded opportunities to fully, or at least meaningfully, participate in the public sphere. The apparent (and short-lived) liberation offered by women’s engagement in terrorist activism remains a double-edged sword - wounding, and not infrequently killing, the women who choose to wield it.

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### Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The old definition of Terrorism by the League of Nations in 1937 declared that terrorist acts include ‘all criminal acts directed against a State and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons or a group of persons or the general public’.<sup>1</sup> The nation state as the focus has become less pronounced over time, however most commentators now agree that the constituent elements of Terrorism include: (1) the intentional use of violence; (2) against non-combatant targets (including both civilians and iconic symbols); (3) to create fear/terror/psychic harm; (4) by virtue of the widest possible publicity coverage for the group/cause/ individual; (5) pursuing political, religious or ideological objectives. Needless to say, these objectives are achieved by inflicting the greatest possible damage, including loss of life, on mostly indiscriminate, victims. ‘New Terrorism’ has come to be understood as the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of terrorist activism which, for some commentators, began with 9/11, but for others started much earlier, in the 1990s. New Terrorism marks a noticeable shift from previous forms of terrorist activity which, generally, used even extreme force as leverage to negotiate specific political demands. Laqueur (1999) outlines a revolutionary change in the aims and techniques which delineate New Terrorism — specifically the pursuit of indiscriminate (rather than focused) targets with the objective of killing as many people as possible. Unlike earlier forms of Terrorism, which sought to have specific political demands met, New Terrorism is bent on the destruction and elimination of whole societies and social systems. Commentators also note that while modern Terrorism was largely secular, the motivating driver of New Terrorism is religion, predominantly, but not exclusively, Islam.

<sup>2</sup> In this article we refer mostly to Palestinians who live in the West Bank and Gaza, and are directly affected by, or involved in, the conflict with Israel.

<sup>3</sup> Inappropriate behavior may cover a wide range of behaviors that may signify that a woman is independent or attempts to get outside the family purview (e.g. studying abroad), dressing in an inappropriate manner, refusing to marry the man designated by her family, or violating other gender expectations about modesty (e.g. Hasan, 2005)

<sup>4</sup> Generally, the importance of having large families in Palestinian/Arab society in Israel and the Palestinian territories serves various aims including attempts to rebalance the demography of Israel.



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<sup>5</sup> Sheik Yassin was assassinated by the Israel Defense Forces in March 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Maariv, 20 August 2005

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.inn.co.il:80/News/Flash.aspx/185204> “we will send female suicide bombers to prevent invasions (of Gaza) by Israel Defense Forces (IDF), Al-Kuds brigade, the military wing of Islamic Jihad warns that tens of Palestinian women are ready to blow themselves up near IDF forces”

<sup>8</sup> The notion of bounded rationality emerged because of the strong critiques of the self-interested *homo economicus* assumption (e.g. Bourdieu, 2005) underlying neo-liberalism, which have led social scientists to posit a more pluralistic notion of ‘rational choice’ which recognizes the role and impact of culture in decision-making.

<sup>9</sup> Bloom’s fifth category was Rape, which is largely applicable to Chechen women terrorists.

<sup>10</sup> This difference, it has been argued, may be a function of Palestinian women’s sheltered backgrounds which meant that they may not have had the same opportunities to acquire the lexicon and ideological rhetoric to which the men would have been exposed (Horgan, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> As current or prospective breadwinners, this issue is important for men. The Palestinian Authority pays a monthly pension to the families of those who participate in terrorism and are arrested or killed; a formula of the amount of money a family receives relates it to the length of the sentence imposed (and thus severity of the offense/harm inflicted on Israeli citizens) – the longer the sentence, the higher the pension.

<sup>12</sup> Some argue that motivations such as redemption and relationships in suicide bombing cases comprise structural coercion; women who have violated, or accused of violating, gender norms feel compelled to address the shame and seek redemption. Also, women, who are dependent economically or emotionally on terrorist men feel obliged to comply with their orders to participate (Serendip, 2012). In this article, we include examples of explicit coercion, where the women were forced to participate, not merely structurally feel they have no other options.

<sup>13</sup> The sense of thrill and excitement was also present in the interviewed Palestinian adolescent males, but in their case, the thrill of terrorism-related activities was in demonstrating manhood (see Berko, Erez, and Gur, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> As noted above, while most women participation was voluntary, in some instances, particularly with the young women whose main motivation was search for excitement, elements of coercion or entrapment were present; once the women were introduced to the world of terrorism but did not want to follow through with the assigned mission, various forms of coercion were used (e.g. Erez and Berko 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Palestinian terrorist, Laila Khaled, who planned and executed in 1969 the hijacking of TWA 840 flight, making the pilot fly over Haifa, her birthplace, and demanding that air traffic control refer to the plane as Popular Front Free Arab Palestine, is a unique case. Khaled belonged to the

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Marxist-leaning Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, thus did not have to contend with a patriarchal Islamic hierarchy (Palmer, 2010)

<sup>16</sup> If we accept the structuralist approach of Catharine MacKinnon (1987) and others, then the level of stigmatization or violence (actual and via linguistic construction) of women under patriarchy means that it is almost impossible to isolate ‘individual choice’ for women. In any case, the classic philosophical concept of ‘autonomy’ becomes practically meaningless.

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that in most cases, the women who perpetrate terrorism are not members of the terrorist organizations that send them on their missions; often organizations “take ownership” of the women’s actions after the fact, or just prior to it (Berko and Erez, 2007). In the lone wolf attacks that characterized the more recent acts of terrorism, participating girls and women were not aligned with any terrorist organization (see Margolin, 2016: 93; Sela-Shayovitz, 2019) .

<sup>18</sup> See Israeli (2004) for analysis of the Palestinian and Arab media regarding the role of women in the Palestinian struggle, and Hasso (2005) and Patkin (2004) for the media construction of women suicide bombers.

<sup>19</sup> A well-known case is a young woman from Gaza who has been severely burnt in a kitchen cooking accident, and Israeli authorities allowed her to receive treatment at the Soroka hospital in the south of Israel. The woman was then approached by a terrorist organization with demands to carry explosives, which she was supposed to detonate in the hospital.

<sup>20</sup> In the Park hotel attack, perpetrated during the Passover holiday meal (Seder) of March 2002, 32 hotel guests were killed and 160 guests and staff were wounded. The male perpetrator of the suicide bombing was dressed in women’s clothing.

<sup>21</sup> One of the major propaganda points used by the Bush administration to support the “war on terror” was to highlight the victimhood of women living under oppressive patriarchal regimes (see Laster and Erez, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Women’s participation in demonstrations in the Palestinian territories largely remains an acceptable way of expressing resistance and supporting the Palestinian national cause (see Tsoref, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> See Israeli’s (2004) analysis of the Palestinian and Arab media regarding the role of women in the Palestinian struggle; see also Hasso, 2005 and Patkin, 2004 for the media construction of women suicide bombers.

<sup>24</sup> In some cases, women received a cell phone from an operative (an expensive commodity in the area), as a sign of friendship or romantic interest. The women were told that they can use the phone cell only to call the operative. This “friendship” cell phone was then, often unknowingly, used to blow up explosives that the woman carried.

<sup>25</sup> For instance, the current chief of Hamas in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, spent 22 years in an Israeli prison for killing collaborators and involvement in other terrorist activities. He was released from prison in the 2011 Shalit exchange. Samir Kuntar, a Lebanese Druze member of the Palestine

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Liberation Front and Hezbollah, convicted of terrorism and murder by an Israeli court, was released from prison as part of the 2008 Israel–Hezbollah prisoner exchange. He served 29 years in Israeli prison, and upon release received Syria's highest medal, honored by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

<sup>26</sup> These studies detail the impact of terrorism on children, adults, first responders, social workers, documenting devastating psychological impact including PTSD that were diagnosed among both Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel. In addition to the primary and secondary victims (family and friends of actual victims, including first responders), there are also tertiary victims of terrorism, who are exposed to the horrific harm inflicted on primary victims through the media.