Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women's Liberation or Oppression?

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Abstract

Prior literature on women's participation in terrorism has paradoxically interpreted this involvement as a sign of women's newfound empowerment, and as an indication of ongoing gender oppression. The study examines the hypothesis that Palestinian women's involvement in terrorism indicates women's liberation. The data are derived from in-depth interviews with fourteen women who were detained or incarcerated in Israeli prisons for security offenses. The interviews shed light on the women's pathways to terrorism, the roles that they play in terrorist activity, and the aftermath of their security offenses within Palestinian society and culture. The study underlines the "no return" option and "no win" situation that Palestinian women who embark on terrorist activities encounter. The results demonstrate

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that although some women became involved in terrorism due to the sense of liberation that it provided, the women largely became disempowered in the aftermath of their offenses; rather than receiving praise for their activism as they had expected, they were shunned by others for their violation of gender expectations, and failure to fulfill traditional gender roles. The social and personal costs of involvement in terrorism for Palestinian women are analyzed, and policy implications of the findings for theory and practice are discussed.

Background and Theoretical Approach

Throughout history, and side by side with men, women have participated in terrorist[1] activities. Notwithstanding perceptions of women as "inherently more peaceful in their attitudes toward international conflict [than men] and are more disposed toward moderation, compromise and tolerance" (Bloom 2005, 142), and prevailing notions across cultures that women should be sheltered from engaging in warfare activities, including near-total exclusion of women from combat forces (Goldstein 2001), women have engaged in terrorism in different parts of the world.

There is growing evidence that in recent years women are playing a more significant role in terrorism. From Israel/Palestinian territories of Gaza and the West Bank[2] to Russia/Chechnya, Sri Lanka, India, Turkey, and most recently Iraq and Jordan (see *Newsweek*, 12 December, 2005 issue), terrorist groups increasingly rely on women to execute terrorist operations. Female terrorists have functioned in a variety of roles including collaborators, informers, human shields, recruiters, sexual baits in person or over the Internet, and as perpetrators of acts of destruction and death.[3] As women are less likely to arouse suspicion, their value as perpetrators has been long recognized.[4] Some have argued that inclusion of women in terrorist operations attracts media attention and demonstrates the depth and importance of resistance (Bloom 2005). It also goads men to carry out missions (Hasso 2005), because in work settings in general, and military

context in particular, "if women can do it, so can men" ([Izraeli 1999](#)). Reminiscent of past theories about women's criminality (e.g., [Adler 1975](#); [Simon 1975](#)), some also claim that the increased participation of women in terrorism is an attempt to attain equality with men or a measure of women's progress (see quotes from Arab including Palestinian media in [Israeli 2004](#); [Bloom 2005](#), 146-150; [Hasso 2005](#)).

The role of gender in terrorism has begun to be addressed.[5] There is indication that women's patterns of involvement in terrorism, particularly the manner in which they are recruited, their motives, rewards and roles, differ from that of fellow men (e.g., [Berko 2004](#); [Bloom 2005](#)), raising questions about the multifaceted connection between gender and terrorism (e.g, [Hoglund 2003](#)). Research (and practice) show that gender and gender identity have been among the organizing principles of opposition to perceived oppression, and struggles to preserve autonomy, gain independence, resist occupation, or oppose globalization (e.g., [Yuval-Davis 1997](#)). Gender has been a motivating factor in resistance movements and security threats, whether expressed in religious, secular, ethnic, or national terms, and at the local, regional and national levels ([Goldstein 2001](#); [Kimmel 2003](#); [Hoogensen 2004](#)). Gender-based terminology and imagery is often invoked to explain beliefs, behaviors, and motives of participants in terrorism.[6] Gender structures are used to mobilize individuals, create incentives, establish rewards and implement terrorist aims (e.g. [Israeli 2004](#); [Berko and Erez 2005](#); [Hasso 2005](#)).

The recent involvement of Palestinian women in terrorist activities, particularly suicide bombing[7] ([Beyler 2003](#); [Israeli 2004](#); [Bloom 2005](#); Berko and Erez forthcoming) has been intriguing. Islamic tradition - to which Palestinian women involved in terrorism typically belong - explicitly relegates females to the private sphere, and restricts their participation in the public domain (e.g., [Hasso 2005](#)). By and large, national movements striving for independence (e.g., [Yuval-Davis 1997](#)), and Palestinian resistance movements and their leaders in particular,[8] have long emphasized the domestic aspects of women's contribution to national causes - bearing and raising children, and caring for the family, the basic unit of the nation.[9]

With the recent intensification of nationalism in Palestinian society, women's issues have increasingly come to the fore. Palestinian women have been invited "to participate more fully in collective life by interpolating them as 'national' actors: mothers, educators, workers, and even fighters" (Kandiyoti 1996, 9).[10] With the inclusion of women as perpetrators of suicide bombing, women were no longer praised only for their support role, but also for becoming men's presumed equal partner in the national struggle. As one Palestinian female leader exclaimed in a rally honoring female suicide bombers: "She's the mother of the martyr, sister of the martyr, daughter of the martyr - and now she is the martyr herself" (Hasso 2005, 34).

At the same time, nationalist movements, including the Palestinian (Rubenberg 2001), tend to reaffirm the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct, pressuring women to articulate their gender interests within the terms set by traditional nationalist discourse. Thus, on the one hand, the Palestinian national struggle has encouraged women's voices of resistance to political oppression to be heard and their struggle to be seen. On the other hand, it has stressed the importance of the role of the family and the need to preserve Arab/Islamic constructions of female sexuality.[11] As observers of Palestinian resistance note, militancy and violence have been critical for the constructions of masculinity, but have not been essential in affirming or reproducing female identity (Hasso 2005, 29). In sum, Palestinian women have been called to fight the occupying forces[12] but at the same time to accept and obey patriarchal hegemony, presenting a paradox for women who respond to the call.

Palestinian women's social and political oppression[13] and their resistance to it, together with the andocentric Palestinian terrorist organizations (e.g., Hasso 2005; Patkin 2004), with which resisting women had to interact, provide the context for analyzing their involvement in terrorism.

The Current Study

Using Palestinian society as a case study, this article examines gender-based influences on participation in terrorism among Palestinian women incarcerated in Israeli prisons for security offenses. Through their narratives, the article shows how gender constructs their identities, choices, and roles in terrorism, and how gender structures shape perpetrators' discourse and practice.[14] Although the sample ($n = 14$) is small,[15] and consists of incarcerated women who may not represent the larger universe of Palestinian women involved in terrorism, the data shed light on the nexus between gender and terrorism as it is played out in Palestinian society. Documenting the inner world of female terrorists through in-depth interviews, rather than merely relying on officially sponsored statements that female terrorists have left behind (Patkin 2004; see also Hasso 2005), the article demonstrates how Palestinian women's involvement in terrorism is simultaneously a "no return" option and a "no win" situation, thereby exposing the paradox that in patriarchal societies, participation in terrorism reproduces gender oppression and reinforces women's subjugation, instead of comprising a gauge for women's liberation.[16]

The article first describes Palestinian society gender-based structures and relations, which provide the context for Palestinian women's involvement in terrorism. It then presents interview data of 14 Palestinian women who were charged with or convicted for security related offenses, placing their stories in the sociocultural and geopolitical context of Palestinian society. The study highlights the meaning and implications of involvement in terrorism and its social cost for women and their families. The article concludes with theoretical and policy implications of the nexus between gender and terrorism that may apply to Muslim Arab patriarchal communities beyond Palestinian society.

Palestinian Society, Gender and Women

Palestinian community and culture, like other Arab societies, is based on the principles of collectivity, tribalism, and social homogeneity ([Sharabi 1975](#)). Palestinian society is not an individuated community; individual security, well-being, and survival derive from, and are guaranteed by, the protection provided by the group. Relations among nuclear and extended family members are highly valued and each member has the duty to care for the welfare and safety of other family members.

The social order in Palestinian society, like in other collective societies, is hierarchical and fixed; individuals must adhere to the directions given by those with higher standing on the social scale, commonly determined by sex and age ([Ahmed 1992](#); [Barakat 1985](#)). Most collective societies are patriarchal; males occupy the highest stratum of the social hierarchy. Women and children are placed at the base of the scale.[17] Young women must not only obey older women and males, but also males younger than themselves[18] ([Sharabi 1975](#)). To challenge the authority of the father, husband, or other male authority is a grave offense for women. The traditional patriarchal elements of Arab society emphasize the importance of customs and tradition, while maintaining stability and harmony in the hierarchy of social relations (extended and nuclear) ([Barakat 1985](#)).

There is no one model that typifies all Arab societies with respect to the family and marital life, the status of the family and its effect on the lives of individuals in this society, individual rights in families, interpersonal relations, and the status of women in the private (family) and public spheres. Also, the Arab/Palestinian society has undergone various economic and political changes over the last three decades that have transformed its social and familial organization. Yet, despite these changes, and regardless of the religious background of Arab families in the Middle East (e.g., Christians, Muslims, and Druze), place of residence (urban, rural, or Bedouin localities), occupation or education level of family members, their national affiliation and other factors influencing family life style, certain core cultural characteristics

that impact expectations from women can be identified in Arab/Palestinian society (e.g., Barakat 1985).

The family is considered the central unit in economic, social, and religious spheres of life; it also constitutes a source of support, unity, and cohesion that can sustain the individual socially, economically, and politically. The family plays a crucial role in providing assistance and services that in the modern state are expected from formal social services, for instance, mutual support in protection, financial support, employment, child rearing, and so on. Family members are expected to be totally committed to the values of family protection, unity and reputation, which may require putting aside their own personal, needs, aspirations, and desires in favor of the group. The collectivist orientation stresses self-sacrifice of individual members for the "common good," and lays out expectations to put the community's welfare and interests beyond one's personal happiness. For women, this means placing the family welfare before their own, demonstrating an unconditional devotion to and continuous care for the family, support for members of the family of origin (if unmarried) and the husband (if married). For mothers, whose own happiness is determined by their children's happiness, growth, and achievement, their success or failure in personal behavior and life choices, in marriage and child rearing, is considered as the failure or success of the family. Symbiotic relations between parents and children, particularly the mother, result in a complete erasing of the mother as a person and as a woman (Korbin 2005). Her role as a mother becomes a "master status," overshadowing every other aspect of her life.

All women are expected to preserve family's reputation and "honor," which in Arab society is primarily connected to women's sexual conduct (Al-Khayyat 1990; Kedar 2006). If a woman is immodest or brings shame on her family by her sexual behavior,[19] she brings shame and dishonor on all her kin. Whereas "family honor" for women generally means a chaste reputation, for men it means courage, religiosity, and hospitality (Fernea 1985). Women's "honor" is thus passive and can only be lost or tarnished, whereas "honor" for man is active, and can be retrieved, increased, and expanded (Hasan 1999; Israeli 2004).[20]

Social restrictions applicable to women include segregation from the public domain, confinement to the domestic sphere, and a prevailing morality that stresses traditional ideals of femininity, motherhood, and wifehood.[21] A woman's identity, worth, and movement are strictly defined in terms of her obedience, seclusion, and bearing sons (Rubenberg 2001; Israeli 2004; Kedar 2006). It has been argued that the restrictions imposed by the patriarchal family with its dual system of age and gender oppression, together with the translation of women's sexuality into a social norm of "honor," have become a tool that subjugates and controls Palestinian women, while strengthening men's domination (Hasan 1999; Rubenberg 2001).

Female vulnerability in Arab society is aggravated by male supremacy and the patriarchal power structure of Arab families that justifies inequality between men and women, and enables male family members to control women. Women's vulnerable position in Palestinian society is further exacerbated by Arab tribal notions that children or young adults are parental (father's) property, and that the welfare of the collective takes precedence over that of the individual, especially in times of crises (Al-Khayyat 1990; Fernea 1985). If women's (or girls') misbehavior (or abuse) become known, it may be seen as an indication that their families failed to discipline (or protect) them, which in turn may question the power and privilege of male family members (particularly the father), demanding a reaction to restore their masculine status and protective capability (Hasan 1999; Israeli 2004).[22]

The collectivist nature of the Palestinian community, its gendered scripts of social relations and their effect on women have been well documented, as has been the connection between family honor and women's adherence to rules about expected social behavior (Hasan 1999; Kedar 2006).[23] The issue of women's chastity, modesty, and sexuality is extremely sensitive in the Arab world (including Palestinian society) and the price that Palestinian women pay for preserving the social value of honor is high (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 1999). Women who deviate from cultural restrictions on their behavior, particularly those related to unsupervised contact with men, are perceived as tarnishing the family's reputation and bringing on scorn to their families, warranting harsh reaction to restore family honor (Shalhoub-Kevorkian

2000). The tendency to penalize violations of gender-expected behavior (in extreme cases even by death) prevents women from disclosing such contacts to parents, siblings, and other family members or seeking help from them.

The social order of Palestinian/Arab society, its cultural codes regarding gender relations, male privilege, and female-expected behavior provide the context for Palestinian women's pathways to terrorism. They also inform our analysis of the women's involvement in terrorism and its cost.

Methodology

In-depth individual interviews were conducted with 14 Palestinian female security prisoners who agreed to participate in the study. The interviews took place between February 2004 and January 2006 in two separate wings of the prison in which the women served their sentences. [24] Protocols of human subjects' protection were followed, and participants were informed about their right to decline participation, refuse responding to specific questions, or withdraw at any point from the study without adverse consequences.

The interviews were conducted either in Arabic, Hebrew, English, or a mixture of these languages, dependent on the interviewee's preference and language proficiency. Each participant was interviewed in at least two sessions separated by a period of a few days, weeks, or months. Each interviewing session lasted between two to four hours. The interview consisted of open-ended questions that developed into conversations addressing the interviewee's childhood and growing up, landmark events and significant others in their lives, relationships with family and friends, and their personal aspirations during various life stages, including at the time of the interview. Other topics included the participants' views on womanhood, the role of women in Palestinian society and its political struggles, and their wishes for the future. In all cases, in the second or third interviewing session the participants volunteered to describe in detail the circumstances that led them to become involved in terrorist activities and their reasons for their involvement. They described how they were recruited and deployed, how they

felt about their involvement, and their views, beliefs, and expectations relative to their mission.[25]

Some of the participants were initially suspicious about being interviewed, wanting to ascertain that it was not an attempt by the Israeli authorities to interrogate them or acquire additional information on their mission or contacts. Once they felt confident that the interview involved academic research, and as they realized that the questions focused on their private lives, social experiences and personal views, their hesitation to talk dissipated and they opened up. [26] Their stories provided insights into their world - their life experiences, beliefs, views, and dreams, and the circumstances that ended them in prison.

The data resulting from the interviews were analyzed through coding techniques for qualitative data described by Glaser (1992). As the authors read the transcripts, patterns and variations in participants' responses were identified, resulting in a set of conceptual categories or propositions. In analyzing the data the authors applied the logic of analytic induction, which entails the search for "negative cases" that challenge the analyst to progressively refine empirically based conditional statements (Katz 1983). In encountering each negative case the propositions were revised until the data saturated as, making the patterns identifiable and the propositions offered consistent throughout the data. Once no new conceptual categories could be added, and propositions did not require reformulation, it was assumed that saturation had been reached.

Results

Sample Description

The sample consisted of 14 Palestinian Muslim[27] women who, prior to their arrest, resided in Israel or in the Palestinian territories. Two women were Israeli Arabs (citizens of Israel), one was a resident of the State of Israel, and the rest were residents of the Palestinian territories.[28] The offenses for which they were detained (prior to trial) or convicted, consisted of security violations and included attempted suicide bombing, murder, aiding and abetting wanted terrorists, or assisting in the production of terrorist acts. The age of the participants at the time of the interview ranged from 18-29 with a mean age of 23 (the age range at the time of the incident was 15-27, with a mean of 21). Their educational level ranged from the 11th grade[29] to having a university bachelor (BA) degree. All participants, except for one, were single and without children. [30] About half of the women described themselves as religious prior to their incarceration; those who were not devout Muslims upon entering the prison began to observe religious rules while incarcerated. The former group came to all the interviews with traditional Muslim cloths, whereas the reborn Muslim women came to initial interviews in Western clothes (often blue jeans or tight pants and T-shirts) but in later interviews were wearing traditional Muslim garments.[31]

Personal History and Self-Portrait

The women came from small villages or lived in cities, in Israel or in the Palestinian territories. There were differences in lifestyle and level of exposure to Western values, way of life, and social practices between the urban and rural women. The women, except for one, grew up in a large family (between 7-12 children), with a mother who is a homemaker and a breadwinning father. The fathers had either a small business, provided services, or performed skilled or unskilled labor. Women generally considered their father as their

main source of support and protection. In the words of one woman, "my father is 60 years old; [he is a] strong man that provided us with everything we need and protected us well." Over half of the women lost their father later on in life, either to an illness, car accident, or due to his engagement in terrorist activities. One woman mentioned that her father was in prison since she was five years old. Another woman mentioned that her parents got divorced when she was very young; the children were raised by the mother, with the father, who soon remarried, making only periodic visits. The absence of a father/protector in the interviewees' lives may have contributed to the ease with which they were recruited or able to get involved in terrorism.

Most of the women described themselves as having a normal childhood, playing different children's games with siblings, friends, and neighbors. Some talked about riding on donkeys, playing with dogs, "hide and seek" or "make believe" games of family and home. Other described pretend games of "soldiers and children," playing the role of children throwing stones at, and then being chased by, kids who played the role of Israeli soldiers. Many women presented themselves as bashful and quiet. As one woman stated "I am shy even with my own shadow." They all had a limited contact with men outside their nuclear or extended family. Many felt embarrassed to talk about any issues related to association with men, including the wish to find a spouse or the ideal husband.

The women talked about their fathers with respect, and described a positive but somewhat distant relationship, compared to their close bond with the mother. Most described being obedient to the father, strictly following traditional rules of female-expected behavior. In the words of one woman, "I was never afraid of my father, because I do not make mistakes."

The mother was portrayed by all interviewees, except for one,[32] as a simple, dedicated, and self-sacrificing woman, to whom they were highly attached and whom they deeply loved. One interviewee stated that she has never seen a woman who has "suffered so much from her fate" like her mother did, and noted, "I have never seen my mother crying and saying 'why me?' She was

always saying 'thank Allah' on everything [all the hardships she had to endure]."

The women discussed how they shared most aspects of their lives with the mother, and fewer with the father. Yet, none of the interviewees disclosed their involvement in terrorism or contact with terrorist organizations to either parent. Moreover, some explained in detail how they had to deceive their father when they ventured out to engage in terrorism or to have contact with members of terrorist organizations, making up stories about going to see a girlfriend or, if they were students, going to study or attend some university event.

Despite the restrictions they experienced as women,[33] the interviewees felt honored to be Palestinians and Muslim. One woman stated:

The Palestinian woman is the best in the world. She is better than the American or the Jewish woman in terms of religion, clothing, culture and everything; particularly the discipline and culture.

Another woman proclaimed: "Because we are Muslim our situation is different. I feel a big honor that I am Muslim." They were proud of their ability to withstand hardships, and their resilience, determination and resolve. In the words of one woman:

The fact that I am a Palestinian woman is itself special. The Palestinian woman, all she has is sadness, frustration and disaster **…**. But the will of an Arab woman is most strong, particularly the will of the Palestinian woman.

The women closely identified with the Palestinian national struggle; some were willing to risk their lives for "the Palestinian people," other national causes or *Jihad*. Most of the women expressed hostility and anger toward Israel, stating that they want to "fight for our rights," "protect our land," or "see the Jews leave Israel." One woman stated that Israel has no right to exist. Another woman mentioned that she would have volunteered for the suicide-bombing mission for which she was arrested, even if a cease-fire with Israel

were to be declared. One woman expressed the dilemma underlying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by noting:

I do not say that Israelis should leave. Where would they go? They came from all the countries of the world to live here. This [the existence of Israel] is beyond my will and those who were here.

Dedication to national causes was also expressed in their wishes for the future, including descriptions of the ideal husband or the way they will raise their children, as will be discussed later.

Palestinian Women and Gender Roles

There was an agreement among the interviewees that women's status in Palestinian society is unequal to men's. The differences between them were manifested in a variety of ways. Some women discussed the limited freedom accorded to women, listing various restrictions that only apply to women. As some women explained:

Surely there is a difference between man and woman; because man in Arab society is freer. He is also different in his status in society. No one tells him to return home at a certain hour. He can come and go as he pleases. He is freer. He can leave and return and go without anyone asking him questions.

In our society it is very difficult for women; there are women who finished a good school but the family did not allow them to study in the university and would never allow them to travel overseas to study.

A notable gender difference that all interviewees mentioned pertained to the family control on women's time outside the home, particularly overnight[34]:

There is a difference between a man and a woman although not so much .... A woman cannot go outside the home like a man and stay there even for one night. This is the difference. When I went outside the home, I was never allowed to stay out even one night, not like the man.

Other interviewees discussed how important it is for a woman "to be responsible for herself" and to conform to gender appropriate behavior, particularly chastity:

A woman can look for her man but not at a young age, and she has to monitor the freedom that she is given and never cross boundaries, like they taught me to do.

One interviewee explained that when women violate rules of female expected behavior, particularly in relation to contact with the other sex, the damage is irreversible:

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.

Many interviewees thought that women's status in Palestinian society has been improving. Some were proud of their efforts to narrow the gender gap in Palestinian society. In the words of one woman, "I see myself as a Palestinian woman fighting for my rights; equality between men and women is the thing I fight about the most." Other women noted that "every woman wants to be strong and do special things on her own, because they always say that women are weak and are incapable of doing things" or "The woman has rights now and she works for herself and succeeds in the Palestinian community." Another woman explained:

Whatever a man can do, a woman can also do. [Women can do] things that are very special. For instance, they can raise children and work at the same time.

Many talked about societal resistance to grant women the privileges of men. One woman noted, "In our society, the woman does not receive respect." Other women explained:

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.

It is natural that men direct the world. ...Men have more physical ability than women. The percentage of brains 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.

Those who were religious offered explanations as to why women cannot serve in leadership positions:

In the Palestinian community a woman has rights and she works for herself and succeeds. But for a woman to be the director or the president, I am not for it. 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 Muhammad 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.

Nonetheless, the women expected that the community would value and respect them for their involvement in security offenses. One woman, whose suicide-bombing mission was foiled, commented:

If you want to do something, you just believe in yourself and do it. Men respect me; they ought to respect me. Men and women ought to respect what I did. I did not do it for myself.

The interviewees were aware of the perception of women in Palestinian society as the weaker (and dependent) sex, and as persons who have to be guarded and protected. Yet, many interviewees considered women more resilient than men, able to endure suffering that their male counterparts would not be able to withstand. One woman stated,

Men say that we (women) are weak, that they fear for [are concerned about] us. They always say that we cannot withstand suffering like them. In my opinion it is the opposite.

The interviewees also thought that women were more flexible and adaptable than men:

I see the woman as water; if you put her in a bowl, she can be in a bowl or in a cup. She can always cope with the situation. But the man is like iron, a piece of iron cannot change; he cannot cope with different situations.

The participants attributed to women an important role in the Palestinian national struggle, which they felt expanded their rights and involvement in public affairs. One woman commented:

In the *intifada* (the Palestinian uprising) the woman has a bigger role [than normally]. She participates in every activity. She can even vote in the Palestinian Authority. Now all the women go to vote. There are also women in the party of the [Palestinian] Authority, not only men.

Most women, however, perceived their primary role in the struggle as providing support for men. One woman explained:

People have different roles in wars. All around the world they (men) are supported by women, with medical treatment and other help. ...When the Jewish people came to this country, who worked here? Women and men.

Although some interviewees thought that their involvement in terrorism would narrow the status gap between men and women, they were aware of societal restrictions that inhibit most women from participation. As one woman noted:

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.

At the same time, interviewees' comments often conveyed acceptance of the idea that men are superior and should remain the measuring rod for judging women. One woman stated, "The woman who has big brain feels that she has the brain of a man." Another woman noted, "If the woman understands everything that is around her then she is special, but no more than a man." On the whole, the women agreed with one interviewee's view on gender roles: "The role of the woman is to raise her children. This is more important than military actions."

Pathways to Terrorism

The women's pathways to terrorism took various forms, were triggered by different motives, and reflected different personal circumstances. For some, involvement in terrorism was a retributive response to the loss of a relative or friend who was killed by the IDF.[35] For others, it was a way to rebel against a strict patriarchal regime, and resist gender restrictions. To still others, involvement presented an opportunity to have romantic unsupervised associations with young men, and a license for experiencing excitement and thrill that Palestinian women are normally barred from having. For still others, it created an opportunity to resolve a personal or familial problem,[36] remove a stain and restore reputation, or end desperate circumstances while presumably gaining respect in the process.

The Internet played a significant role in the involvement of two women (and in the modus operandi of another woman).[37] Contact that started as naïve chatting of women with men over the Internet ended in the women's recruitment to terrorism. One woman described how through a chat room she began corresponding with a man from an Arab country. She noted that after a while she fell in love with him, despite never meeting him in person. The woman described sitting long hours at the computer, exchanging intimate messages with the man. This virtual romantic affair soon became the tool to recruit her for terrorism. Through the chat room, and later through her cellular phone, the man talked to her about "military topics," which led her to

assume a support role in the production of a terrorist act, for which she was arrested.

Another young woman described how she established through a chat room "a private strong connection" with a man from the Palestinian territories. She noted spending as many as 12 or even 20 hours at a time on the computer, exchanging messages with the man. She further explained:

I never had experience with men. I met someone from the territories [on the Internet] and we spoke in the chat room and on the cellular phone. We only asked questions in the chat room. Until now I have not seen him. I had more friends from the territories and all over the Arab world but the relationship was not romantic, not love relations. It happens that you fall in love over the chat room but it did not happen to me.

The father, according to this interviewee, "allowed me to surf the internet, but he did not know what I was doing." The mother, who knew she was corresponding with men over the Internet, cautioned her to "beware of men who can harm you [as a woman] or try to recruit you." The man with whom the interviewee corresponded was wanted for involvement in terrorism. He later asked her to assist other wanted terrorists inside Israel. The sister of the interviewee, who knew about the nature of the contact, helped them implement the mission.[38]

A 24-year-old woman, pretending to be a Jewish university student, used the Internet to seduce an Israeli youngster (15 year old) from a southern Israeli town, convincing him to meet her in Jerusalem. She came to the meeting place in a car with two male accomplices. The men forced the youngster into the car, driving him to the Palestinian territories, where the three murdered him in a most brutal fashion.[39] This woman boasted during the interview that she was the one to initiate and plan the mission, and that she activated her male accomplices.[40]

One interviewee, 16 at the time of the incident that led to her arrest, tried to stab an Israeli soldier. She claimed that her brother was shot by the IDF on his way to school, and she stated that her act was an attempt to take revenge for

his death. She described how she grew up hardly knowing her father, who served a long prison sentence for involvement in terrorism. The father, she added, was released from prison just prior to her stabbing, adding to the high stress level in the household. She was proud of her act and did not express any remorse for the stabbing.

Three women volunteered for suicide bombing missions and one was coerced into becoming a suicide bomber. A university student in the Palestinian territories, whose brother was killed by the Israeli military for his involvement in terrorism, decided to become a suicide bomber, to avenge his death. At first, the activists she turned to refused to recruit her,[41] but she insisted and convinced them to honor her request to be a *shahida* (martyr). She stated she wanted to execute the suicide bombing "against the Jews, for revenge and for paradise. Paradise is the most important reason and only then revenge and rewards for my family."[42] She stated that for a month, "the most beautiful month of my life," she was waiting for the day in which she will become a martyr, feeling "very special" about her decision. To implement the mission, her dispatcher had to ask another female student to allow the prospective suicide bomber to stay overnight in her dormitory room prior to the scheduled mission.[43]

A 17-year-old high school student described how she and a female classmate were bored at school, and felt they needed "to do something" to inject some excitement into their monotonous life. She thus decided to volunteer for a suicide mission and this plan became their shared secret. The terrorist organization to which she turned to allow her to become a *shahida* at first refused to accept her offer, claiming she was young and needed to be in school. After she insisted, they agreed to honor her request and eventually assigned her to a suicide bombing operation.

One woman volunteered to be a suicide bomber following her father's refusal to allow her to marry a deformed man she met on a street. Being 25 years old, she felt it was her last chance to marry. The potential groom's family, however, could not raise the amount of money the woman's father demanded as dowry. Angry at her father who would not compromise about the sum of money he

expected, and feeling that "My life was useless, my life had no use to anyone " she decided to become a suicide bomber. The interviewee contacted a member of a terrorist organization and offered to become a *shahida*. At first the organization refused her services, but later accepted her request. The woman left her parents' home, and her male contact at the organization arranged her overnight stay with a female student in a dormitory and later with some of his acquaintances. This petit, small-framed woman described how difficult it was to fit an explosive belt for her, and how the belt that was prepared for her was too big, "getting me stuck in the ground." She also relayed how in the hiding place in which she stayed until being dispatched, there was an older woman who took care of all her needs, hugging and comforting her when she missed her mother. This interviewee was arrested at the apartment where she was hiding just prior to the operation.

One woman wanted to "get out of the house" so she decided to pursue military training. A girlfriend, who knew activists through her own experience with training, made the contact with the organization. Before the organization agreed, and to avoid potential problems with her family, its representatives made her sign a document stating that she volunteered and joined out of her free will. Such a document prevents opening a "blood feud" that can potentially result from the organization "expropriating" a woman from her family's (father's) control. The woman described how to be able to participate in the training she had to deceive her father, telling him that she was going to see a girlfriend. She also noted that in the car that picked her up and drove her to the training camp, there was always another woman present so that she was not seen alone with a man in the car, because "we do not live in the West." After three months of training this interviewee was ordered by the man responsible for the training to carry out a suicide mission. The woman refused, arguing that she is not religious enough, and that she never meant to become a martyr, but her appeal was denied. The woman stated she could not ask her family to help her in getting out of this entanglement, because they would then discover that she had violated fundamental rules of female expected behavior - associating with men. She was arrested just prior to the scheduled date of the operation.

Six interviewees assisted in producing terrorist operations. Women in terrorism are often employed for helping in recruitment, providing emotional support, cover during travel, and for overnight accommodations of female recruits,[44] as well as in placing an explosive belt on another woman's body. Having women as cover in operations is necessary to avoid suspicion of immoral behavior (associated with a woman being alone with men), without which future women's involvement in terrorism may lack any communal support.

A female university student assisted a suicide bombing producing organization by hiding a female prospective suicide bomber in her university dormitory room. The woman explained how at the age of four, the IDF had demolished her parents' home because her brother was involved in terrorism. She stated that this event was a highly traumatic experience for her, generating hostility and anger toward the Israelis. This interviewee expressed much enthusiasm about the planned suicide mission of a fellow student, stating that she herself would have carried out the mission, had the prospective candidate she was hiding change her mind. She also composed the final farewell will, which prospective suicide bombers are supposed to recite prior to their departure for a suicide mission. During the interview, she listed "good reasons for perpetrating suicide bombing," noting that there are many verses in the Quran that encourage Muslim to do *Instishahad* (self-sacrifice) because "all Israelis are the enemy of Allah and the enemy of Islam". She went on to add, "In my opinion, a *shahid* (martyr) hands himself over to Allah and therefore the underlying reason for his suicide is religious."

An Israeli Arab woman agreed to purchase a cellular phone in her own name and hand it over to a terrorism activist. She soon discovered that she incurred a large debt due to his overuse of the phone. Being unable to pay the bills and knowing that the phone was used for purposes of terrorism, she was reluctant to report the incident to the Israeli police. To solve her problem, she contacted Palestinian men from the territories and asked them to pay the bills incurred. She stated that in return, she was willing to transfer explosives or suicide bombers to Israel and to communicate with Islamic Jihad organization members. She was arrested before she had the opportunity to follow through

with her offer. According to the interviewee, this incident occurred after her engagement to a man that was supposed to marry her has been cancelled, and as a result she was highly upset and vulnerable. She explained that calling off the engagement was a traumatic scarring event for her, as in Arab culture cancellation is tantamount to a divorce. During the interview she regretted the fact that she did not marry and noted that her chances of getting married following her involvement in terrorism and subsequent imprisonment are slim.

One woman introduced a girlfriend, who wanted to become a suicide bomber (*shahida*), to a member of a terrorist organization that was supposed to help her realize her wish. She also helped in giving refuge to the prospective suicide bomber in her dormitory room and in communications with wanted terrorists. This woman boasted about her contribution to the military struggle stating "I did something that is viewed as manly. There are hardly any women who are doing what I have done." At the same time she was proud that she had never spent a night outside her home when participating in terrorist operations.

One woman, who wanted to become a suicide bomber and had undergone the requisite preparation for a suicide mission, changed her mind just prior to the due date. To compensate for failing to meet her dispatcher at the agreed on location and for not following through with the plan, she provided shelter for wanted terrorists, conducted observations on IDF movements, and served as a lookout for a terrorist organization. This woman explained that she joined the military struggle because the Israelis killed the young man who wanted to marry her. She went on to explain:

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.

One woman, who requested to be interviewed after hearing about the study,[45] described how a childhood male friend has recruited her, requesting that she aids in the production of a terrorist attack. She had several meetings with the recruiter and another accomplice about the mission. A few months later, she got married to her cousin and had to sever the connection with the recruiter,

because "as a married woman I cannot speak with any other man." A short time after she got married, she was arrested for her previous attempt to aid terrorists.

A 20-year-old woman, who due to her parents' divorce never finished elementary school, was enamored with a young man, who promised her that they would get engaged. He asked her to accompany him on a ride to meet his mother. To be able to leave her home, she took her toddler sister as a cover. She soon realized that the trip was aimed at kidnapping an Israeli tax driver. She retuned home for the night and the next day, she returned to be with the man, taking with her an 8-year-old sister as a cover to avoid her mother's questioning. In explaining why she consented to participate in the kidnapping she explained:

He (the man who promised her to get engaged with her) asked me to come with him so I did. My father was angry at me for doing it. My father thought I brought shame (*fadicha*) on him [and the family]. I do not know if the man took advantage of me. I miss him a lot My parents did not know anything about it.

Most of the women described their involvement in security offenses with pride and self-importance. They believed that their participation made them "very special," "different," "unique," or that they "have done something important." Many felt they were "more progressive than men," and more courageous and superior to Palestinian women who were not involved in terrorism. In the words of one woman, "we are smarter than women who did not do acts related to security." One woman thought that Palestinian women's involvement in terrorism was not that unusual or noteworthy, because "we are democratic."

All women, except for one, stated that the decision to become involved in terrorism was their own; no family members participated in reaching the decision. The women noted that they knew that their families, particularly parents, would object to their involvement in terrorism. In the words of one woman:

My relationships with my mother were very strong, but this does not mean that she influenced me. If my mother had influenced me, I would not have been here (in prison).

The women kept the decision to participate in terrorism a secret; they refrained from disclosing it to parents, family members, and friends. Some described how they enjoyed the thrill and excitement derived from participation in terrorism, including wearing revealing tight clothing and contact with the other sex. They noted that while doing "military work," it is permissible to violate rules pertaining to female expected behavior.[46] In the

words of one woman, "in the course of performing a military attack, it is possible to take off the veil, wear pants, or even travel unaccompanied in a car with a guy."

The women who volunteered for suicide bombing operations, knowing well that their parents would vehemently object to such a plan, explained why it was not difficult to conceal the decision to volunteer for terrorism. One woman commented: "When you look at your neighbor you do not know if he is a political terrorist. You only know he is your neighbor."

Some women noted how easy it was for men to lure women into joining terrorist activities, and how uncomplicated it was for interested women to be accepted and included in terrorist operations. One woman stated,

It helped that I am a woman. There are many ways to recruit (women), with talking, with friendliness. It is not difficult to convince a woman (to participate) and it is also not difficult to implement operations. The men accepted that I wanted to participate

The women claimed that their participation in terrorism was a service to their community and a noble act, which provided meaning for their lives and feelings of self fulfillment.[47] Yet, they were aware of the high cost that women ultimately pay for participation in terrorism, in terms of diminishing their worth and tarnishing their (and their family) reputation. Terrorism activities require spending time outside the ambit of family supervision, as well as contact with men. One woman noted:

I know it is forbidden to have contact with men. Even when I was in the university I continued in the same way, as from the religion perspective, it is not allowed to be in contact with men. In the university contact with men is more free, but it is related to studies or work. To have any other type of contact with men is prohibited.

Another related complication that reduced their status was their arrest and incarceration, particularly its gender related implications.[48]

The Prison Experience

Being in prison was a difficult experience for the women. As one woman noted "in prison we are in a bad mood, but not in the outside." Several reasons accounted for the difficulties. Before their arrest, the women have never spent extended amount of time outside the home. Women in Palestinian society are highly protected by their families and their time away from home has to be accounted for and approved by a male authority - father or a brother.[49] Palestinian girls usually do not stay overnight at friends, in pajama parties, or

in annual extended class trips. Being in prison, on their own, outside the purview and protection of the family, places them in a situation that is foreign to them, and that they find difficult to handle.[50] The separation from their families and friends in particular constitutes a hardship. One woman explained: "Women are more sensitive than men. It is difficult for us to be far from our families, from our friends, from the world outside."

The meaning of their imprisonment to the women's families presented even a more onerous hardship, despite the noble cause/act for which they were incarcerated. The women commented on how it was "difficult for my family to believe I am in prison," how "my parents were shocked to learn that their daughter was imprisoned," or how "my father could not digest the idea that his daughter is in prison." One interviewee demonstrated during the interview how her brother, when coming to visit her in prison, would cover his face with his hands so that he would not see her, as "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 the outside." It is a major concern for a family when a daughter spends prolonged time outside the home; it casts a shadow on the woman's reputation and by extension tarnishes the family honor. One woman alluded to this problem as: "I was never afraid of my mother and father. But after my imprisonment, I am afraid of my father, because of my situation."

Other women explained:

In my family it does not look good that I am in prison. It ruins my name. It also hurts the family's name.

In the [Palestinian] society it is different that I am a woman; they relate differently to a woman. If a woman is in prison it is different than for a man. It is not acceptable that a woman will be in prison.

A major hardship related to their prison stay revolved around interviewees' fear that their biological clock was ticking, making it possible that they would never marry and would miss motherhood. One woman explained:

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, whether it is 8 years, 5 years. 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.

The women tried to do their best in using prison time as an opportunity to improve themselves. One woman stated: "The prison strengthens as far as religion is concerned. But it is not only that. It strengthens in all respects. In prison we read more, study more, not only religion."

Another woman relayed that it is hard to sleep in prison, because "we prepare a warm drink and we talk. We take a book and discuss it. We discuss not only religion but also history and politics." For some of the women, the prison was a place where their safety could not be guaranteed if they did not abide by the rules of the group's self-appointed leader.

The women described different ways to cope with the hardships that prison life present. Many addressed the void in authority and missing guidance in their lives by submitting to the orders of a self-appointed fellow prisoner leader, who dictated what they can do, who they can talk to or with whom they could socialize in the prison.[51] Several women talked with admiration about the advice and help they received from the group leader, and how she counsels and comforts them in times of need. On the other hand, women who resisted her authority paid a high price. They were subjected to a well-orchestrated retaliatory attack in the form of boiling margarine with melted sugar thrown at their faces and bodies by fellow prisoners for not succumbing to her authority.

Several women became religious[52] or reborn Muslim in prison, praying daily and replacing their Western clothing with traditional Muslim garment. One woman explained, "I am now closer to Allah. It gives me strength." Other women talked about crying, having outbursts or yelling, writing a diary or engaging in religious or general studies on their own or in groups. Prison time allowed them to think about themselves and their future in a way that they have never done before.

The Future

The women imagined their future as resuming a normative lifestyle - marrying and having children. One woman stated that she wanted to finish her university degree before establishing a family. They were apprehensive, however, about whether their involvement in terrorism may cause them to miss marriage or motherhood. Some women expressed concerns that as a result of the ongoing Palestinian national struggle, there may not be sufficient men to marry, because "so many men got killed. There are now so fewer men left outside [the prison], so who would women marry?" Most women were also anxious about their return to, and acceptance by, their families.

Nationalist motifs pervaded interviewees' descriptions of every aspect of their future, including their ideal husband and how they would raise their children. Although the interviewees offered diverse personal attributes that they desired in their future husband ("he will be huge with nice face and polite, with muscles but not too many, and would not look on other women," "he should be smart, well regarded in society and should understand me," "he should be older, religious and know politics, and can even be poor") or different ideal relations with their spouse, ranging from complete domination/obedience relationship ("that he will be stronger than me and will have the control. That he will dominate me; this is the most important, that I am not the strong one and he is the weak one") to almost full partnership ("that we do things together, that if he agrees, he will take care of the children with me"), most stated that they wanted a husband who is dedicated to the Palestinian cause. They also mentioned raising their children to have national awareness. Nationalist elements also underlined their wish list for the future, with many describing how they dream of "an independent Palestinian state" or that "the Jews will leave the country."

Despite the importance of the Palestinian national struggle in their visions of the future, most of the women stated that upon release from prison they would not be involved in terrorism. One woman stated "I want to start a new

life. When I go out of prison I do not want to do any military work." Another woman explained,

In our religious community we look different at the woman. Sometimes they say it (military work) is not a work for a woman but only for men, because the woman has to be at home with her children, raise her children.

Only one woman, an Israeli Arab, expressed interest in terrorism, viewing it potentially as a way to enhance her status:

I love military work. If I were from Jenin, Nablus or Ramallah [cities in the Palestinian territories] I would get somewhere through military work. I would advance in this respect.

By and large, the women felt they paid a high price for their involvement in terrorism, without receiving the social recognition or gratitude that involvement in "military work" was expected to generate. Many believed that they have failed their families, bringing shame and agony on themselves and their loved ones. Well aware that they have crossed gender boundaries, which engagement in terrorism inevitably entails, they expressed despair and anxiety about what awaits them upon release. Some regretted their involvement, portraying it as an impulsive decision and noting that "in the future I will think before I do anything." Others noted their "bad luck," stating "I do not have luck. Luck is from Allah" or "I do not have luck, my fate is black. I have not seen anything good in my life." One woman, whose suicide-bombing plan was foiled, commented, "I did not succeed even in blowing myself up. This is another failure (*fashla*) in my life."

Discussion and Conclusion

The interview data question the argument that Palestinian women involved in terrorism are liberated, attempt to achieve parity with men, or claim a stake in male dominated national affairs. The study confirms Palestinian women's

secondary role in terrorism: providing support services, facilitating operations through disguise, cover or appearance to ward off security or morality based suspicion. Women also help in recruiting and supporting other females involved in terrorist operations. When they go on suicide missions, they implement operations designed and orchestrated by men. In the world of Palestinian terrorism, like the society that produces it (Hafez 2004; Hasso 2005), women play auxiliary and subservient roles. By and large, Palestinian women assist in operations that they did not initiate, plan or direct, submitting to men's commands and following their orders.

The data indicate that women are generally not full-fledged members of terrorist organizations, nor are they affiliated in a meaningful way with any terrorist group. Their experience with terrorism is short lived, lacking evidence of a "terrorist career" with a sustained record of activities that extend over time. The women do not exhibit an interest in a future in terrorism, nor do they express a desire to continue with military activities once released from prison. Their contribution to the national struggle is not a defining aspect of their lives, nor is it a part of their identity. On the contrary, they perceive it as a deviation from their destined role as family caretakers and future mothers.

In a society that adheres to unambiguous and rigid gender role division, entry of women to male dominated pursuits like terrorism inevitably raises questions about a woman's motive to enter a world to which she does not belong. When faced with the impact of their actions on their families, and their reputation as women, many interviewees regretted their decision to participate, recapitulating prevailing social conventions about women's "proper" role and place.

Despite political leaders' rhetoric, media communication extolling women terrorists and female suicide bombers' self-presentation to the contrary (e.g., Hasso 2005), the data suggest that the women's cursory engagement in terrorism is as often motivated by personal and social problems (see Victor 2003), as it is by commitment to the Palestinian national struggle. Examination of women's pathways to terrorism reveals two "ideal types" of Palestinian female terrorists: those who oppose political oppression and

navigate gender structures to implement their resistance, and those who resist patriarchal oppression and use the Palestinian national struggle as a "respectable" means to express their opposition. In a few cases, women's resistance to their dual oppression coalesces, blurring the distinction between motive and excuse.

Yet, regardless of the pathways women take, or the subjugation they resist, Palestinian women's involvement in terrorism ultimately renders them "failed women," in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of their community.[53] The data show that whether women respond to the call to oppose the occupation, or use the political conditions as an acceptable justification to contest gender oppression, embarking on terrorist missions places them in "no return" and "no win" situations. Once a contact with male-dominated terrorist organizations has been made, Palestinian women's return to the family is blocked, forcing them to follow through with the plan. And for women, the data show, following through with terrorism is a costly undertaking.

In deeply gendered structures (whether it is tribe/clan, village, or nation), women who resist gender restrictions are forced to employ female guile, cunning, and deviousness, and to become immersed in elaborate lying schemes. Notwithstanding the engagement in terrorism itself, such lies and other tactics of "household diplomacy" exacerbate their situation *vis-à-vis* their families, sealing their fate as "failed women" while blocking them from seeking the help of their primary protectors. Palestinian women participating in terrorism have to navigate patriarchal structures that connect a woman's personal status and worth to her morality, or conformity to gender-appropriate behavior. The contradictory messages to women - that they should partake in the Palestinian national struggle and simultaneously conform to Palestinian/Arab cultural rules about women's expected behavior - present Palestinian women with a paradox: if they become fighters they cannot be "good women," and if they wish to remain "pure women," they cannot be terrorists. In the world of terrorism, like other male-dominated organizations, women are unable attain the stature and respect that is accorded to their male counterparts. Moreover, in Palestinian terrorism, what bestows respect and high standing for men is shameful and dishonorable for

women (and their families[54]). In contrast to men, whose masculinity is enhanced by terrorist activities (Berko and Erez 2005; Hasso 2005), involvement in terrorism detracts from Palestinian women's femininity, resulting in disgrace, tarnished reputation, and loss of status. Likewise, whereas men's incarceration for security offenses boosts a Palestinian man's record, it comprises a stain on Palestinian women's (and their families') reputation.

The findings also suggest policy recommendations: examination of the pathways of several women to terrorism highlights the ease with which the Internet can serve as a tool to recruit women. The Internet and its chat rooms open important information channels and offers opportunities for productive communication, particularly in a society under siege. However, for naïve young women whose contact with men is highly restricted and monitored, and who are keen on communicating with persons of the opposite sex, such access presents a risk. Terrorism activists interested in implementing attacks can easily take advantage of inexperienced women's eagerness to communicate with members of the other sex and recruit them for operations.

Considering the high price that Palestinian women in terrorism ultimately pay for their involvement, it is important to convey to young women the risk inherent in such communication, as these have been articulated by fellow female Palestinians. Parents, siblings, and relatives should alert their loved ones about the possible intentions behind ostensibly innocent communications, particularly when they observe their daughters /sisters/ relatives exchange messages over the Internet for hours at a time, show a heightened level of interaction with "friends," exhibit behavioral changes or provide elusive responses to concerns about their welfare or activities. Authorities should encourage parents to report such changes in due time.[55]

Efforts to dissuade women from participating in terrorism should highlight the high price that Palestinian women pay for engaging in it, while being denied the praise that accrues to their male counterparts. Except for officially sponsored lip service tribute for fallen "heroes" - female suicide bombers (Hasso 2005; Israeli 2004; Patkin 2004), Palestinian society shows little

appreciation for the efforts of female terrorists who had the "misfortune" of staying alive, or worse yet, were arrested. Palestinian ambivalence toward women in terrorism is a natural outgrowth of the fact that in the current era of global "war on terrorism," women can contribute in a way that no man can - by taking advantage of their female body and status.[56] On the other hand, women's participation poses a grave threat to Palestinian patriarchal order, "destabilizing the construct of men as defenders of community and women as protected" (Hasso 2005, 24)

Additional research is needed to confirm these results, which are based on a small sample of incarcerated Palestinian women. Critics may argue that imprisonment undermines frankness or that coercive settings like prisons invalidate interviewees' responses.[57] The tentative findings, however, are consonant with other evidence that casts doubt on claims that Palestinian women have benefited from, been liberated by, or been wholeheartedly acknowledged for partaking in terrorism (e.g., Berko and Erez 2005; Brunner 2005; Hasso 2005; Israeli 2004).[58] It seems that as long as gender oppression is deep and pervasive, there will be women who will try to resist it, regardless of any benefits or costs. Some women who live in an environment that extols violence, death, and destruction (see Hafez 2004) will employ this "respectable" activity as an acceptable way to oppose gender oppression. Others will join the call to resist political repression or fight the enemy for nationalist convictions. Regardless of the type of subjugation they choose to object, or their motives for resistance, as long as Palestinian women navigate their dual oppression, one will witness their representation among the (lower) ranks of Palestinian terrorism.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. The definition of terrorism for this article is in line with that provided by the U.S. Department of Justice, namely, premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience, to bring about attention to their perceived plight/victimization or to bring about a desired social or political change. It goes without saying that one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter. The Palestinian women interviewed for this study referred to their activities either as "security violations" and more commonly "military acts." This article uses these terms interchangeably.

2. "The Palestinian territories" as a geographical/political entity were created as a result of the "Six Day War" of 1967, which erupted following a collective decision of, and preparation by, neighboring Arab countries to annihilate the State of Israel. In a preemptive strike, in June 1967 Israel took over parts of Jordan (the West Bank) and of Egypt (the Gaza strip). These areas, which include Palestinian cities, villages as well as refugee camps established in 1948 as a result of Israel Independence War, are referred to as the Palestinian territories. In August 2005, Israel pulled out of the Gaza strip and since then this area is no longer part of the Palestinian territories under Israeli control.

3. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Hamas leadership in Gaza (see Maariv newspaper article from 20 August 2005) has announced the creation of a special unit of female terrorists. However, so far the unit has not been involved in any terrorist activities, and the establishment of this unit seems to be more a part of the psychological warfare of Hamas than a tactical use of the women's military unit.

4. For instance, to avoid arousing suspicion Palestinian women led an operation to a target (sometimes with children as a cover as well), selecting the most populated target within a certain geographical range. Women also served as lookouts or accompanied men to a target, providing the appearance of an innocent couple traveling. The extent of women involvement varies in different countries; for instance, in Chechnya women comprise a large proportion of those involved in terrorism. Attention to females as potential terrorists, particularly in Israel, is increasing. There is a growing awareness of the variety of roles that women play in terrorism. It is predicted that with the increased security measures to combat terrorism, there will be increased interest in using women (and children) to implement terrorist aims. Chechen rebels, Kashmir rebels, the LTTE, and Palestinian groups - to different degrees - have relied on women in their terrorist acts. The involvement of a woman in suicide bombing in Amman, Jordan in November 2005 has called further attention to women in terrorism.

5. For recent discussions of the topic as it pertains to Palestinian women who served as suicide bombers see the work of Bloom (2005) and Victor (2003). For a recent study of mothers of *shahids* see Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2003).

6. For instance, phrases uttered by men terrorists such as "I felt raped by the state," "the honor of the land has been desecrated just like a woman's honor has been violated," or "acting as a man" when justifying terrorist activities are pertinent examples, as are statements made by terrorists that denote that their actions helped them in the recovery of their manhood from the emasculating actions of the enemy - whether it is globalization, the West, or the "occupation regime" (see Israeli 2004; Berko 2004; Kimmel 2003; For the role of gender in war in general see Goldstein 2001).

7. Palestinian women have been involved in acts of protest for a long time. They were active in the first *intifada* (uprising), which took place between 1987 and 1993 (the signing of the Oslo agreement), and were also involved in protests in the second *intifada*, which began 29 September 2000 and presumably continues to the present (May 2006). From the nineties and on, there have been many cases in which women tried to stab soldiers, at times even just throwing a knife at their direction, with the wish they would be arrested by the IDF, so that they can escape difficulties at home, for instance, being forced to marry or flee domestic violence. However, attempts to kill Jewish civilians or soldiers, and to help in the production of terrorist acts, are relatively new phenomena among Palestinian women, which have begun only with the second *intifada*.

8. Yassar Arafat, for instance, had often referred to the womb of the Palestinian woman as "the best weapon of the Palestinian people," praising the role of women in preserving the family, producing children who become soldiers that fight Israel, and changing the demographic structure of Israel. Sheik Ahmad Yassin, the former leader of Hamas (a fundamentalist Moslem organization operating worldwide) who was assassinated by the IDF in March 2004, was of the opinion that women should realize their special potential to bear children and refrain from participation in military operations (see personal interview with Yassin in [Berko 2004](). In regard to suicide bombing, Sheikh Yassin mentioned specifically that women should not blow themselves up as there are enough men to do the job. He stated that women's appropriate role is in supporting the fighters. In the fundamentalist spirit of Hamas, Yassin also declared that women must be accompanied by male chaperons when they go out to wage jihad and fight.

9. See a recent article by a Palestinian writer and journalist, Adel Abu Hasham, who lives in Saudi Arabia and who exalt the Palestinian mother as

"woman who got us accustomed that she is a factory to produce men ..." MEMRI, retrieved 26 November 2005

10. In January 2002, Yasir Arafat had a mass meeting with Palestinian women and promised full equality between men and women in Palestine. He called women to take part in the Palestinian armed struggle. Arafat proclaimed that women are not just the "womb of the nation" but are "my army of roses that will crush Israeli tanks" (see Kimmerling 2003; Victor 2003).

11. 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.

12. Similarly, Yassin has modified his restrictions on women waging jihad, first lifting the requirement that they be accompanied by a male chaperon if the mission is for 24 hours or less, and then embracing them without qualifications (Israeli 2004; Bloom 2005, 150). In August 2005, the Hamas announced the establishment of a special unit of women to fight Israel. However, these women - who are mostly wives or sisters of Hamas activists - claimed that they have joined terrorism "not to compete with men but to implement Allah's orders" (Maariv, 20 August 2005).

13. Some argue that Palestinian women suffer from triple oppression: "through the Israeli occupation, through patriarchal structures of society, and through Islamic attempts to discipline women" (Brunner 2005, 37).

14. Recent incidents of terrorism in Israel involving Palestinians provide support for the nexus between gender and terrorism, showing how gender affects motivation, recruitment roles and modus operandi. Even in cases in which, at face value, women's participation patterns resembled those of their male counterparts, upon a closer look, gender influences become evident, confirming the hypothesis that gender underlies, shapes, and molds participation in terrorism. For instance, from a masculine terrorist perspective "there is more honor in injuring soldiers than in injuring women and children" (e.g., Berko 2004; Berko, Wolf and Addad 2005). For examples in which masculinity was a major incentive for young men to perpetrate terrorist acts, particularly suicide bombing, see Berko and Erez (2005). In respect to suicide bombers, it has been recently stated, "suicide also allows for the art of martyrdom, which connects the attacker to the broader community" (Pape 2005). The connection that perpetrators have to the community is mediated through gender - a significant component of social organization.

15. The population of incarcerated women at the time of the study was about 120, so the sample comprises over 10 percent of the population of incarcerated Palestinian women. Comparison of the sample records with that of the larger population of women imprisoned for security offenses show that the sample reflect the spectrum of offenses for which the larger population was imprisoned or detained. It is also representative in terms of demographic characteristics, such as age, education and marital status (see Israel General Security Services [Shabak], *Five years of Confrontation*. Official Report, Government of Israel, September 2005).

16. Christopher Dickey in *Newsweek*, 12 December 2005, notes: "Among Palestinians, for instance, 'the idea of violence empowering women has spread throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip,' writes Bloom. Suicide bombing is changing the rules of deference and subservience that have dominated the

traditional society - a strange path to liberation for women hidden behind veils and burqas." See also Victor (2003).

17. One of the ramifications of perceived inferiority of women in regards to terrorism is that families of female martyrs (*shahidas*) receive a substantially reduced amount of money for the death of their loved one (e.g., if she perpetrated suicide bombing) compared to families of male *shahids* (see Victor 2003). This mode of thinking is practiced in other Islamic countries such Iran, where the fine imposed for killing a woman is half the fine imposed for killing a man.

18. In cases where the man has multiple wives, the senior wife has to be obeyed by more junior wives. When a father marries another wife, often a younger woman than the first wife, the second marriage often leads to friction in the family, as the wives and their offspring compete for the husband/father's attention and family resources, causing the children of first marriage anger and bitterness toward the father. The interviewees whose mothers had to accept their fathers' second marriage expressed such sentiments.

19. Instances of what is considered dishonor vary among communities. They may also extend in some localities to engagement in such "manly" pursuits as acquiring higher education, social activism, or marrying outside one's social group (see Hasan 1999).

20. As will be discussed later, this is one reason why participation in terrorism increases men's prestige, as it is viewed as a measure of male courage and dedication to the cause. For women, on the other hand, participation detracts from their reputation or honor, and may raise questions about the motives or reasons for engaging in terrorism.

21. In some places additional restrictions apply to women, such as imposition of veiling or clitorectormy (see Al-Khayyat 1990; Kedar 2006).

22. "Honor killings" by blood relatives of women are perpetrated in circumstances in which women have deviated from various gender-related restrictions. For analysis of "honor killing" and the expansion of this practice in Palestinian society see Hasan (1999).

23. Women are expected to follow traditions that prohibit interaction between the sexes and disallow contact with men that is not approved and supervised by the men of the family - the woman's father, the older brother, or other male authority in the family. Contact is generally approved if it is for the purpose of marriage. As will be demonstrated later in the article, this expectation places women who are involved in terrorism in a predicament, as their participation invariably requires contact with men who produce terrorist operations. The expectation that women should be monitored when they go outside the home, or chaperoned when they are in the company of men, has led to Sheich Ahamed Yassin's (the previous leader of the Hamas) initial instructions about how to integrate women in suicide terrorism. According to Yassin, women on the way to suicide bombing missions need to be chaperoned by men; see Bloom (2005).

24. In each prison, the women were housed in two different wings. The division was in response to the prisoners' wish to be separated, often according to their identification with a particular movement, although personal relationships and preferences played a role as well. One wing included women who were perceived as nonreligious, and who often had some affiliation with the Fattah Tanzim organization. The other wing housed women who were perceived as religious and were often connected with the Hamas or Islamic Jihad movements. The interviews took place in their respective wings. It should be noted that the "affiliations" the women acquired in the prison, with the Tanzim or Fattah, had often more to do with liking a particular group leader rather than any ideological beliefs and conviction.

Outside prison, when women became affiliated with a group, it was usually just prior to the operation in which they participated.

25. Some of the results pertaining to those who attempted suicide bombing were reported in [Berko and Erez (2005)](#).

26. The first author conducted individual interviews with the participants in a special room in the prisons that housed the participants. The interviewer's familiarity with Arab customs and the Arabic language and her identity as a daughter of Iraqi Jewish refugees, has helped in relieving the initial anxiety of the participants. At the end of each interview session, the participants stated that they looked forward to more interviewing time with the interviewer. They stated that they felt she was a caring person, and that they sensed a genuine concern for their well being. In some cases, the participants were crying during the interviews, putting their head on the interviewer's shoulder or tightly holding her hands. The interviewer comforted the participants, and handed tissues to women who wept during the session. In some cases the interviewer held them until they regained composure and could continue with the interview. Prison staff were available in case the interviewees required professional assistance, but such services were not needed. Some of the participants invited the interviewer to visit them in prison and to maintain contact with them when they are released. The interviewer also spent time with the prisoners in the prison yard, drinking coffee with them while waiting for the individual interviews scheduled for that day to take place. It should be noted that the factual portions of the data collected through the interviews corresponded to the information in the interviewees' court documents.

27. Although the women interviewees are Muslim, it is recognized that Islam is not necessarily the basis for the status of women in Arab/Palestinian society, nor do the authors take the intolerant and ultra-orthodox expressions of Islam, even those mentioned by the interviewees, as representing the

religion as a whole. They are aware of the distinction between Islam - a faith that unquestionably affirms human dignity and gender egalitarianism - and misogynist customs and prejudices prevailing in many male-dominated Islamic societies (see also [Wadud 1999](#)).

28. Those who reside in Israel are Arab Israelis who possess Israeli citizenship. Palestinians who reside in East Jerusalem are residents of Israel but not citizens. Palestinians who reside in the territories of the West Bank and Gaza are not Israeli citizens. As mentioned in note 2, since the evacuation of the Israeli settlements in the Gaza strip in August 2005, Gaza has become an independent territory, under the rule of the Palestinian Authority.

29. The education of the woman who completed only 11th grade was interrupted by her arrest. She would have most likely completed her high school studies if not for the arrest.

30. The woman who was not single got married just before her arrest, and while in prison she discovered she was pregnant. She gave birth to her first child in an Israeli hospital and was returned with her new born to the prison. Under Israeli law, women can care for and keep their babies in prison with them until the babies reach the age of two. This woman was eventually released before the expiration of her prison sentence for humanistic reasons, namely, that she is not separated from her child.

31. Traditional Muslim clothes include a veil (*hijab*) and a long dress (*jilbab*).

32. This interviewee was raised by her aunts, because the mother became a widow, and later married a second husband. As the child of another man (the first husband), who belongs to the family of the father (the deceased husband) this interviewee could not live with the mother and her new husband. She thus moved to her paternal grandmother and her unmarried aunts raised her from a young age.

33. The warden of the prison that houses the women, who was interviewed for the larger project about Palestinian women terrorists, quoted one of the women as saying "my home was more of a prison than this one."

34. A director of a women's organization interviewed for larger project relayed that "even a forty year old woman, if she is single her father will order her to return home at a certain hour, so that the neighbors will not talk about her."

35. In cases where the involvement was related to avenging the death of a loved one, there is a pattern of family engagement in terrorism.

36. Personal problems may involve romantic relationships with men and a woman's presumed immoral behavior that tarnishes her reputation. Familial problems may include such issues as erasing a stain on the family name that resulted from the collaboration of a family member with the enemy.

37. The Internet and satellite connection to the outside world have exposed the Arab world to Western ideas and temptations related to different lifestyles, and open unrestricted social interaction or practices. At the same time, the Internet made it possible for men and women to connect online with

individuals who are engaged in terrorism in different parts of the world (e.g., [Weiman 2006](#)).

38. There were many cases in which siblings or other family members also participated in terrorism or took part even in the same specific operation for which the interviewee were arrested.

39. In sentencing the woman, the judges described the brutality of the murder and listed it as a consideration in the penalty.

40. All the other interviewees became involved in terrorist activities that they did not plan, nor initiate. At best they volunteered to help or carry out a mission.

41. There is a tendency not to recruit suicide bombers from families of *shahids* (martyrs), who have already suffered from the death of a loved one; in reality, however, there are deviations from this way of thinking and practice.

42. Families of suicide bombers receive monetary compensations for the act of a family member who perpetrated suicide bombing (see also [Victor 2003](#)).

43. It is common that the dispatcher would arrange for the prospective female terrorist to stay with female relatives or friends of his.

44. Children are also used as a cover to escort women who are *en route* to operations, or in support roles such as transporting explosives or lookout, as well as being suicide bombers.

45. Information in prisons travels fast, and the security prisoners soon became aware of the fact that fellow prisoners were being interviewed for the study. Some women expressed to the researchers their interest in being interviewed and spending time with the interviewer. Their requests were honored.

46. One the reasons for which religious leaders have objected to women's participation in terrorism is women's need to emulate western behavior and appearance when they are involved in terrorism (e.g., Brunner 2005, 40). The thrills associated with experiencing Western dress code and uncontrolled social interaction with the other sex has been in fact one of the rewards that women listed as their reasons for engagement in terrorism (see also Berko and Erez 2005).

47. It is obviously not known whether their involvement was in fact triggered by these reasons, or this was an after the fact attribution.

48. It is known that incarceration of men for security offenses or terrorism elevates their status and is a point of pride for their family and community.

49. According to male hierarchy in Arab families the first-born son functions as second in command when the father is present, or in place of a father, if the latter is absent. If neither is present or alive, other male relatives play this role.

50. One of the consequences of this difficulty may be the reason why the women prisoners have accepted the authority of a self-appointed leader, openly stating how they consulted her in everything they were doing or seeking her support in any decision they had to make.

51. There were two factions in the prison, each loosely associated with one of the two major Palestinian organizations, Fattah and Hamas. There was rivalry between the groups and some of the inmates who refused to abide by the dictates of the leader associated with the secular organization suffered major consequences (for instance, burns caused by boiled margarine mixed with sugar that was thrown at them by the female leader's order, injuring their faces and necks).

52. This phenomenon is common in prisons, and occurs in both men and women prisons, regardless of prisoners' religion.

53. This is a topic that is not discussed in the open but for women who participate in terrorism, the question why they chose to do it, thereby relinquishing their "true" purpose in life, that is having a family and bearing children, is always hovering over their heads.

54. Families would not always openly admit that participation in terrorism for women cast a cloud over their reputation.

55. The Hamas movement, which has won the January 2006 election in the Palestinian terri-tories, has provided pictures of the women's unit they established in 2005, which describes women in the service of terrorism as devout Muslims covered with traditional cloths from head to toe.

56. Recent examples of women who exploited their female body or "corporeality" include a case in April 2006, where a female terrorist who pretended to be pregnant entered a military base in Sri Lanka, requesting medical assistance. She then detonated the bomb, killing eight people as she targeted the Chief of Staff. Prime Minister Gandi was also killed by a woman who faked pregnancy. There are many examples who exploited their female status to avoid searches or receive compassion and killed soldiers or citizens in Israel.

57. As noted in the Methodology section, the lengthy in Depth interviews and the close relationships established with the women did not provide any evidence that the women were fearful about disclosing their genuine feeling about their involvement. It is also the authors' experience that men terrorists interviewed in prison and who are proud about their involvement, provide frank responses about their future plans to continue with their terrorist activities.

58. Although women who were successful in suicide bombing have been praised for their actions by their communities or the media (e.g., Hasso 2005), there is no evidence that those who participated in terrorism but were arrested or otherwise survived have received genuine recognition and appreciation. In the authors' ongoing larger project on Palestinian female terrorists, interviews of community leaders and members suggest that women terrorists are viewed as "undisciplined" and "not someone I would like my son to marry."

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