A New Book by Dr. Anat Berko

The Smarter Bomb

Women and Children as Suicide Bombers

(Hebrew)
For the past several years the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center has dealt with female suicide bombers as part of its overall coverage of suicide bombing terrorism. Dr. Anat Berko, a criminologist who received her PhD from Bar Ilan University, studied the involvement of women in anti-Israeli terrorism and revealed surprising facts. *The Smarter Bomb* is based in part on interviews she conducted with male and female security prisoners.

To give our readers a sneak preview of the book and to reveal some of the findings about women who planned to become suicide bombers, the ITIC presents three pages from the introduction, courtesy of Dr. Anat Berko and Yedioth Aharonot Publishers.

**Introduction**

“We’ll be good together...One of my girlfriends will let me use her apartment so that we can be together...Bring condoms. You have some, right?” That was the message received by a 16-year old Israeli boy, tempted by promises of sexual adventures into meeting a girl he didn't know, behind which was a plot to kill him.

“Do you have a girlfriend?...Are you going to tell your friends about us?...We have to...Are you younger than I am?...Do you want to have sex??? I want to, but I don’t want to get pregnant...”

Sixteen-year old Yair had a secret he didn’t tell anyone. He thought he had met a girl older than himself who wanted to enter into a sexual relationship with him. Houda even made sure to ask, “what if your mother sees the condoms and finds out about us?”

“Don’t worry,” he said, “she won’t.”

Houda manipulated Yair, weaving her web around him until he was trapped in a classic male adolescent fantasy. Their chats grew longer and more frequent, and his desire to meet her increased daily. Finally he went to the designated meeting place, where not only was Houda waiting for him, but her friends, and they killed him in cold blood.

The Houda I visited in jail hadn’t changed. Using guile, ingenuity and cruelty she established her control over the other security prisoners until she had become their spokeswoman and unchallenged leader. Even after she was moved to a different wing because of the negative influence she had on the other prisoners, her shadow still hovered and threatened them. Any prisoner who dared to stand up to her, or who made her angry, risked having boiling margarine mixed with sugar thrown in her face and being scarred for life. There are prisoners who will remember Houda for ever.

For the most part, women in Palestinian society are pawns in men's hands, and passive during the stages of planning and carrying out terrorist attacks. They do not become
terrorists as the logical outcome of a life of crime, as opposed to some of the male security
prisoners. The examination of trial transcripts and discussions I held with Palestinian
intellectuals made me suspect that the women sent on suicide bombing missions were often
sexually exploited: “You’re going to die anyway, so what difference does it make...?”

Carrying out a terrorist attack is supposed to upgrade the status of the terrorist's family, but
the benefits received by the families of female suicide bombers are not equal to those
received by the families of male suicide bombers. The discrimination between them is based
on the circumstances under which women become terrorists, usually different from the
men's. One can only wonder what makes a woman's conduct be considered exceptional, what
motivates a woman to become a terrorist? What terrible thing did she do, or was done to her,
that made her try to purify herself in such an awful way?

In many instances, women do not join a terrorist organization to carry out an attack. Rather
the organization seeks them out and recruits them close to the prospective date in order to
glorify itself and chalk up another attack to its credit. The various organizations are in serious
competition over the number of attacks, and they hold a kind of head count to compare
results.

Some of the chapters of my first book, The Path to Paradise, about suicide bombing
terrorism, were devoted to women. Since its publication I have focused on women and
children, and on the interaction between women terrorists and their dispatchers. My research
indicates that woman are simultaneously important and unimportant. This book examines the
subject in depth and provides new insights, and various ways of viewing the involvement of
women and adolescents in the service of terrorism. To gain a broader knowledge of the issue
I interviewed Muslim clerics, terrorists, dispatchers of female terrorists, lawyers, and senior
members of the Muslim community, both inside and outside prisons. The book is also based
on the statements and stories of the female terrorists themselves. I spent many days
observing military terrorist trials, and read transcripts and indictments. For the past fifteen
years I have met with security prisoners in Israeli jails, among them those who orchestrated
and carried out murderous terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians. The most notable among
them was Ahmed Yassin, the late founder and leader of the Hamas movement. In recent
years I have focused on women and adolescents who participated in terrorist attacks.

The names of the people and places in this book are fictitious, in part because of the high
level of personal revelations of the people I interviewed. We shared a desire to deal with
genuine issues without having harm come to them. What is written in these pages is based
on conversations I held with people whom many consider impossible to understand. The
special, close relationship I developed with them made it possible for me to document our
meetings and try to understand their personalities and motives. I am certain that some of the
events recounted in this book will open wounds for many Israelis who were badly hurt in
terrorist attacks.

Within the words I looked for answers to the questions which prompted me to conduct this study: Can a woman be “good” according to the criteria of Palestinian society and a terrorist at the same time? What is behind what I learned from the meetings I held, that a terrorist woman in Palestinian society can simultaneously be important and unimportant? Is the involvement in terrorism a sign of the liberation of Palestinian women, or another way of oppressing them and preserving their social inferiority – which would explain their low status and the inferior rewards their families receive? Is the woman’s body, naked and ideal as described as that of a virgin in paradise, a sexual incentive for the death industry set in motion by men, in which the bodies of living women are sacrificed by explosions for the sake of replacing them with the women of paradise? Who are they, the Palestinian women who dared to leave their homes, in most cases without their fathers’ permission, what made them, what made children join the terrorist machine? Can the human bombs of Islamic terrorism be stopped, and if so, how? Is a woman who carried out a suicide bombing attack a smart bomb or a stupid bomb?

Dr. Anat Berko