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Islam and Political Violence: An Examination of the Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in Palestine

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Abstract

In this paper I examine how political violence is justified in the charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas). Using the recent work done in the social psychological literature, I argue in the paper that the charter draws upon the Islamic history and memory to authorize political violence; charter uses explicit construction of binary symbols and historical mythology to dehumanize the target of violence; and finally, the charter evokes shame—which lead to “humiliated fury”—through collective memory of humiliation, which then might make martyrdom attractive.

**Islam and Political Violence: An Examination of the Covenant of the Islamic
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The Motto of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)¹:

Allah is its Goal.

The Messenger is its Leader.

The Quran is its Constitution.

Jihad is its methodology, and

Death for the sake of Allah is its most coveted desire.

Religion and violence are no strangers. Although all religions claim to be fonts of peace and justice, even a cursory examination of human history will bear witness to the fact that violence has always been part and parcel of different religions. For the Abhramic faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—too, violence has been an integral part of their existence. Sometimes this violence is used against another human; sometimes it used is against self. Since the rise of secularism in the West, there is this belief that violence in Western societies is not explained by references to religion, because the role of religion in public life has declined. But when it comes to violence in the Islamic world, the violence is explained with reference to Islam itself. In some sense this is valid because in the Islamic world Islam is part of lived daily life in a fashion that is relatively different from

¹ Taken from the charter of the movement, as translated by Muhammad Maqdasī (1993, 124). Hamas means “zeal”.

the case with Christianity in the West. In the Islamic world the religion has not be privatized for the most part and therefore is supposed to have a deeper hold on the followers. Although Islam has always been portrayed as a violent religion in the West, in the past half century this depiction has taken a more dangerous turn. The creation of Israel and the wars between Israel and Arab countries began what was to become a trend of an almost automatic equation of Islam with violence. Then came the oil shocks, which lead to the demonization of Islam to unprecedented levels. The huge oil reserves in Muslim countries and the resultant political volatility any conflict in the Middle East caused in the international oil market only added to this mix. And now with the attacks on American targets in the Middle East and the September 11 attack, Islam never had it so bad.

It is not easy to define violence and even more so to define political violence. There have been suggestions that violence could, in addition to physical, be symbolic or material. In fact, during the Cold War period the definition of political violence revolved around the damage to, among other things, property. But for our purposes here, it is the violence to physical body that is important. Johan Galtung (1980) comes close to providing a satisfactory definition of violence. Given that societies consist of actors that have a certain degree of autonomous consciousness and given that these actors pursue a certain strategy in mind to reach certain goals, direct violence, according to Galtung, can be conceptualized as violence-as-action (1980, 68). Human action here, in keeping with Alfred Schutz's phenomenological framework, is understood as subjectively meaningful to the actor and oriented to the future (1988, 57). For the violence to be political,

according to Lupsha and Mackinnon, three criteria must be fulfilled: 1) targets must be representatives of state or symbols of state authority; 2) actions of violence must be meant to be more than just the instrumental destruction of the target; and 3) actions must be initiated in name of or by a group with a define interest. It makes sense here to not pay too much attention to the first condition because political violence could very well be against anyone else than those connected with state or symbols of state.

Whether Islam is violent per se or not is a separate question than how Islam is used to justify political violence. It is with this second question that I am concerned in this paper. I am interested in looking at how Islam is used to justify political violence. My argument is that Islam is used as a source for constructing a religious symbolic environment that makes a sharp division between those who believe and those who are the enemies, by loading the present with historically rich symbolism; and that a memory of shame, humiliation plays an important role in it. Herbert Kelman, a social psychologist at Harvard, has done some pioneering work in examining how the ordinary Germans in the WWII were able to become part of mass atrocities. From this research, Kelman has come up with framework to explain how it is possible for people to become susceptible to use of violence. In Kelman's (1973, 29-61) opinion, moral inhibitions against violent atrocities tend to be eroded once three condition are met, singly or together: 1) the violence is authorized (by official orders coming from the legally entitled quarters); 2) actions are routinized (by rule-governed practices); and 3) the victims of the violence are dehumanized (by ideological definitions and indoctrinations.) In this paper, I do not think that I can examine the routinization of actions, because my paper is based upon the

charter and not actions of the movement. But I am arguing that in addition to these points, it is important also to look at another point that is not present here: shame. I will therefore focus on three points: authorization, dehumanization and shame. I will argue in the paper that the charter draws upon the Islamic history and memory to authorize political violence; charter uses explicit construction of binary symbols and historical mythology to dehumanize the target of violence; and finally, the charter evokes shame—which lead to “humiliated fury”—through collective memory of humiliation, which then might make martyrdom attractive.²

Hamas: A Brief Introduction

Hamas or the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas is actually an acronym for the Arabic name of the organization which translates to the Islamic Resistance Movement) was founded in 1987 after the beginning of the first intifada in the Israeli Occupied Territories. It began as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, a group founded in 1928 in Egypt by Hasan al-Banna with the avowed goal of working toward establishing an Islamic state in Muslim countries³. Although the Muslim Brotherhood has been involved in Palestine since 1935 (Abu-Amr, 1994, 1), it was only after the beginning of the first intifada in 1987 that it began active opposition to the Israeli occupation. Ever since its foundation in the Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood faced trying circumstances, especially

² I wish to point out at the beginning that I am not arguing that anymore—even if they are very devoted to Islam—who reads the charter are prone to participate in acts of political violence. There are many variables and concrete lived experiences that cannot just be pinned down in any dependable fashion.

³ It is interesting to note that the other main Islamic group in Palestine, Islamic Jihad, is also an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. It was established in 1980 by two 1948 refugees who broke away from the Brotherhood, though influenced by other Egyptian groups such as *al-Takfir wa al-Hijra* and *Tandhim al-Jihad* that were themselves derived from the Brotherhood (Abu-Amr, 1993, 6 and 8).

under the rule of Abdel Nasser who hanged a large number of Muslim Brothers, including Sayyid Qutb, the author of Islamic radicals most venerable text, *Signposts*⁴. Given the totalitarian conditions faced by the Brotherhood, the leaders of the movement decided to avoid a direct confrontation with the state and shifted their focus to charity and educational work, in effect preparing grounds for changing the culture from bottom up (Kepel, 1983, ch.2).

In the Occupied Territories, the Brotherhood adopted a similar posture, with Shaykh Ahmad Yashin, the founder of Hamas and Brotherhood's main representative in the Occupied Territories, focusing on educational and charity work, avoiding direct confrontation with the Israeli authority.⁵ But since an increasing number of followers began to leave the Brotherhood because of its inactivity against the Israeli occupation, a decision was made, after the beginning of the first intifada, to join the struggle against the Israeli occupation in a more active fashion. Since then, Hamas has risen to become, along with Arafat led Fateh, to be the main player in the Palestinian politics. Its increasing network of social service agencies and schools provide support for the poor in the West Bank and Gaza; and its militant wing—Kata'ib 'Izz-al-Din al-Qassam—takes part in violent actions against Israel and its Palestinian collaborators. Hamas's ideology and beliefs are codified in charter, which it issued on August 18, 1988 (Abu-Amr, 1994, 80). The charter states that the Islamic Resistance Movement is “a distinct Palestinian movement that gives allegiance to God, takes Islam as a way of life, and works to raise the banner of God over every inch of Palestine” (Maqdasi, 124). The goal of this

⁴ Also translated under the title of *Milestones*.

⁵ There is ample evidence that Israel supported Hamas during the initial period of its existence, thinking that a growing Islamic movement will act as a counterweight to the secular PLO. But Israel withdrew its support soon after.

movement is not different from that of the Muslim Brotherhood: the establishment of an Islamic state or, recalling Qutb, the establishment of the God as the sole sovereign.

The Charter and Political Violence

The charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement codifies the ideology, beliefs and aims of the movement. Written in a flourishing style that combines hard-nosed political calculations of not dismissing nationalism of other Palestinian groups in its Islamic program, the document is interspersed with a number of Qur'anic suras and hadiths to establish religious sanction behind the content. These selections from Qur'an and hadiths, furthermore, provoke a certain degree of sacredness, keeping the reader from just drifting off and thinking of it as just another charter for a movement. According to Ziad Abu-Amr, "the content of the charter does not differ from positions taken by the Muslim Brotherhood on the same issues" (1993, 12). In article two of the charter, Hamas declares itself as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood society. In this sense it is important to look at the ideas of Muslim Brotherhood in understanding Hamas's relationship with political violence. But while there are ample common grounds between the Brotherhood and Hamas, Abu-Amr points to one main difference in the charter: "the charter pays little attention to the Brotherhood's core goal of transforming society, placing far greater emphasis on the Palestine problem and *jihad*" (Abu-Amr, 1993, 12). But this difference, I would argue, can be explained away by pointing to the importance of the context, in the sense that it is not an either/or proposition for Hamas to focus on the Palestine problem at the expense of societal change. In fact, I would argue that there is ample material in the

charter that aims, in addition to the solution of the Palestine problem, at the societal transition, too. The charter injunctions, for example, on the role of women in Palestine and the role of women in a future Islamic state are as much a call for action in the Palestinian context as much as they aimed at societal transformation.

The Muslim Brotherhood genesis of the ideology of Hamas is important for understanding the charter. In the Brotherhood nothing is more central to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood than the ideas of Sayid Qutb as expressed in *Signposts*. It is for this very reason that Egyptian intellectual Tariq al-Bishri declared it the *What Is to Be Done?* of the Islamicist movement (Kepel, 1984, 43). In this book, Qutb proposes a radical restructuring of world as it exists in his time. Qutb reached the conclusion that sovereignty (*hakimiyya*) only belongs to God only God⁶, and therefore he declares all the societies on the earth—whether capitalist West or communist East or avowedly Islamic societies—*jahiliyya* because: “Any society that is not Muslim is *jahiliyya*...as is any society in which something other than God alone is worshipped.... Thus, we must include in this category all the societies that now exist on earth!” (Qutb quoted in Kepel, 1984, 47). For him the rebuilding of Islamic society, which has gone in decline since the time of first Qur’anic generation (1993,11-17), is to be done around the Islamic *umma*⁷. This rebuilding is to begin with the formation of a vanguard of people who would tactically withdraw from the *jahiliyya* society and wage a *jihad* to achieve the establishment of an Islamic state.

⁶ This emphasis in Qutb comes from the works of Mawdudi, who deposited sovereignty in *raab*.

⁷ On this point Qutb departs from Hasan al-Banna’s understanding because al-Banna still considered the nation-state as an intermediary stage of action in the Islamic “long march through the institutions”.

The ideological foundations of the Muslim Brotherhood and from there of the Hamas are well captured in the concept of *jahiliyya*. This concept is used both in Qutbs' work and in Hamas's charter⁸. In so far as the word itself is concerned, it is a Qu'ranic word (Kepel, 1983, 63). It refers to the pre-Islamic times that are seen as "the Age of Ignorance" (Zakaria, 1991, 282), where people, like the Meccans before their acceptance of Islam, worshiped Idols. *Jahiliyya* is supposed to stand for barbarism, a time when lawlessness and idolatry were prevalent. In contrast to this, the establishment of Islam represents morality, enlightenment and divine law. Given that Sayyid Qutb's use of the concept of *jahiliyya* forms the backbone of his argument in *Signposts*, the text that is central to the Muslim Brotherhood⁹, one can sense that the Hamas's use of the term also carries the same weight. In fact, in article six the charter lays out the conditions that prevail in absence of Islam:

In the absence of Islam, discord takes form, oppression and destruction are rampant, and wars and battles take place. The Muslim poet Muhammad Iqbal eloquently declares: When faith is lost there is no security not life for he who does not revive religion;/ And whoever is satisfied with life without religion then he would have let annihilation be his partner (Maqdasi, 124).

And the article nine depicts the prevailing conditions as:

⁸ Although in the version of charter that I am using, the author translates it as "ignorance". But in two other translations that I have seen it is present as jahiliyya. The word is used in the article 19 in reference to the difference between the Islamic and non-Islamic art and the formers role in the "battle of liberation".

⁹ Though this text is central to the Brotherhood's ideological formation it was criticized by the clergy at Al-Azhar (Kepel, 1984, 60). Even from within the ranks of the Brotherhood, Hedaybi, the Supreme Guard of the movement, in 1969 launched an indirect critique of Qutb's labeling of the avowedly Islamic society as jahiliyya. It was indirect critique because Hedaybi, unable to directly challenged the status of the hallowed martyr that Qutb had become after his hanging by Nasser in 1966, challenged four important concepts found in the work of Mawdudi, on which Qutb based his work (Kepel, 1984, 61-64).

Values have deteriorated, plague if the evil folk and oppression and darkness have become rampant, cowards have become ferocious. Nations have been occupied, their people expelled and fallen on their faces [in humiliation] everywhere on earth. The nation of truth is absent and the nation of evil has been established; as long as Islam does not take its rightful place in the world arena everything will continue to change for the worse (Maqdasi, 125).

If for Qutb all the societies on the face of earth, even the avowedly Islamic ones, are *jahiliyya*, then would it be off the mark to argue that Hamas's conception is not much different from the Brotherhood one? I for one think that it is arguably the same, but that Hamas is attuned to the context and thus more focused on the Palestine question.

One of the conditions that Kelman specifies for the erosion of moral inhibition against violence involves the imposition of an ideological definition and indoctrinating against the targets of violence. "An ideology", according to Ball and Dagger, "is a fairly coherent and comprehensive set of ideas that explains and evaluates social conditions, helps people understand their place in society, and provides a program for social and political action" (1995, p.9). The imposition of ideological definition and other associated processes result in dehumanizing the target. If the target is reduced to something less than humans, then violence against it becomes easier to accomplish. The targets are reduced to animal like status and made it be irrational, thus lacking the very human faculty of reason. Dehumanization is best accomplished via setting up polar binaries and equating

one's potential target with the negative part of the binary. Part of the process of constructing a symbolic environment that is conducive for deployment of political violence includes an effort to draw a neat and polar division between the believers and those who are considered to be the targets of violence. Given that all religions lay a claim to what is proper behavior and what is not, leads to certain injunctions about proper behavior. There is almost an obsession in religions in specifying what is forbidden and what is allowed. Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori refer to this as "boundary setting" process (1996, 18). In Islam what is forbidden is denoted by haram. Haram also has the meaning of unclean. Hamas draws sharp distinction between Muslims and Jews by constantly referring to the Jews as impure. Given that Islam, same as other religions, also draws boundaries to designate what is permissible and what is forbidden, the designation of something as impure puts it beyond the pale. In the charter Jews are referred to as "the transgressors...[who stand for]...filth, impurity, and evil" (Maqdasi, 123). This equation of Jews with filth, impurity, and evil signifies what is beyond the pale. This equation of the Jews as a group with filth and impurity is part and parcel of the dehumanization. Even worse, the equation of Jews with dirt and filth sets up the scenario for purification of the land from these supposed impurities. Thus, not only does this portrayal of Jews as impurities convey dehumanization, it also sets up the grounds for taking actions to remove these impurities.¹⁰

The dehumanization of Jews as a group does not stop with their equation with filth and impurity. The venomous attacks on the Jews continue, with Jews set up as the enemy.

¹⁰ A very close parallel could be drawn with the way Nazi ideology portrayed the Jews. For the Nazis Jews represented impurities and as such were to be prevented from sexual relations with the Aryans, because if they had sexual relations with the Aryans the impurities will destroy the supposed superiority of the Aryans.

Sometimes the Jews are referred as Jews while in other instances they are referred to as Zionists. Either way, these terms are used interchangeably. Given that non-Zionists Jews are also occupying the Muslim land, they are as much part of the group that is targeted by Hamas. Extending the chain of dehumanization that begins with the equation of Jews with filth, the charter plays up on the stereotypical demeaning depictions of the Jews. Here the Jews are behind everything and anything, they are the scheming and clever. This conspiratorial view of the Jews holds them responsible for a number of historical events that have not worked in the favor of Muslims. In article 22, *The Power that Support the Enemy*, Jews are held responsible for many influential political events in the world history:

With the money they ignited revolutions in all part of the world to realize their benefits and reap fruits of them. They are behind the French Revolution, the Communist Revolution, and most of the revolutions here and there which we have heard of and are hearing of. With wealth they formed secret organizations throughout the world to destroy societies and promote Zionist cause; these organizations include freemasons, the Rotary and Lions clubs, and others (129).

It is not only that the Jews are portrayed as moneyed and powerful, they are also supposed to be behind every kind of political machination. The stress on Jews roles behind “most of the revolutions here and there” evokes the stereotypical idea of Jews as troublemakers. These instances parallel, if not completely than to the large extent, the way Nazis dehumanized the Jews.

Patriarchal notions that groups have about the role of “their” women are very influential in maintenance of boundaries between groups. In the Hamas charter there is not much doubt about the status of women. The Muslim woman here is conceived of as “the factory of men” (127) and as one who takes “...care of the home and [raises] child of ethical character” (128). And given that the women are viewed through the patriarchal lenses, it is no surprise that the group claims the protection of the Muslim women as its duty. But who are the women to be protected from? Who else from if not from Jews! In article 17 of the covenant, *The Role of the Muslim Woman*, a somewhat convoluted connection is made between the Jews and the moral corruption of Muslim women. The Jews, according to this article, are behind the media and motion picture industry, and thereby keeping Muslim women away from Islam. These very same Jews are also using the education system to corrupt Muslim women. Through their control of teachers who are members of Zionist-sponsored “...[free] Masons, Rotary Clubs, intelligence networks, and other organizations” the Jews are directing the moral corruptness of Muslim women.

A growing body, which usually stands as connection between life and growth, is used as a metaphor for the way in which the depiction of Muslims versus Jews takes place in the charter. While Muslims are supposed to stand for life and growth, the Jews are depicted as death or in decay. On the very first page of the charter, the Muslims are exhorted as people of “the beat of believing hearts, immaculate arms” (122). In a few lines down from these descriptions the founding of Hamas is depicted as the growth of a seed (122). In contrast, the Jews are depicted as representing a disease that is afflicting the Islamic

body with fever (129). In certain other instances they are depicted as the cause of problems for Muslim bodies in other ways. They are, for instance, are said to be behind the drug and alcohol trade because they can ease the control [of supply] that they exercise over the Palestinians (131).

The portrayal of history events is very important in establishing an authorization for violence in the charter. On one level the portrayal of historical events, especially those that either depict the construction of historical enemy (Jews in this case) or the evocation of history as memory, are important in situating the present in the past and in bringing the past in to the present. Remembering this history thus serves a multitude of functions; primarily it places the past in the service of the present; and as the maxim has it, those who control the past control the present. The charter is based not only upon the general evocation of the past—glorious—history of Islam but also upon the scoping of specific events that are evoked to drive home certain points. The evocation of the history to lay claim to the land of Palestine is clearly present in the charter. In article 14, the charter states that “Palestine is an Islamic land accomodating, the first *Qibla*, the third Holy Sanctuary, the [place where the] ascent of the messenger (saas) took place” (126). On one level this evocation tries to remind the reader of the history and on another it constructs a solidarity based upon these historical events. The introduction of historical events in the charter leading to the authorization of violence is even more clearly present in revisit of the histories of the Crusades in the charter.

In the charter the history of Crusades is evoked very prominently. This history itself is very important because it reminds people that Palestine was occupied before, too—in the periods of Crusades—but the Muslims under the leadership of Salah al Din did set it free. On the topic of the importance of the Crusades in the worldview of the Muslims and Arabs, Amin Maalouf in his *The Crusades Through the Arab Eyes* states that “it is often surprising to discover the extent to which the attitude of the Arabs (and of Muslims in general) towards the West is still influenced, even today, by events that supposedly ended some seven centuries ago” (1984, 265). And “...Israel is regarded as a new Crusader state” (1984, 265). The focus on Crusades is, at times, coupled with the Tartar invasion. So, for instance, on two occasions, the charter refers to the Muslims defeat of the Tartar invasion. On page 131, the Muslims are depicted as having “defeat[ed] the crusaders and pushing back the Tartars and saving human civilization”. At another instance, the crusading west is paired with the Tartars invasion from the north (133). By remembering the Crusades the charter lays claim to carry the mantle of Salah al-Din, the Kurdish warrior responsible for the victory over the Franks (Franj). But remembering the Crusades serves another purpose: it provokes a sense of shame. Shame at what was done to them.

In social psychology an interesting literature exists on the connections between shame and aggression (Scheff, 2002). Sometimes referred to as the shame/aggression complex, this literature draws attention to the fact that most of the violence is done by men and comes from a feeling of shame, a shame that flows from humiliation endured or felt. This feeling of shame is converted into a “humiliated fury” that is used to overcome the

feeling of powerlessness and weakness and that men are not taught to never acknowledge as part of their socialization. The only way to get rid of the shame is to use the “humiliated fury” to get rid of the source of shame—the Other who rejects the self and is thus responsible for the shame. In the Hamas charter, history is used to remind the Muslims of their collective shame, a shame that comes from having lost the wars and land to Israel. In many instances the Israelis are referred to as Nazi Jews and are held responsible for the humiliation heaped at them. So, for instance, in article 28, the charter revisits this history of humiliation: “We shouldn’t lose this opportunity to remind every Muslim that when the Jews occupied immaculate Jerusalem in 1967 they stood on the stairs of the blessed Masjid al-Aqsa loudly chanting: ‘Muhammad has died and left girls behind’” (131). In a patriarchal culture, nothing is worse for men than to be compared with girls¹¹. Colonialism and imperialism, from which the Muslim have suffered from in the last few centuries, are presented as sources of humiliation in the charter (127).

Left at the level of individual the shame will not be that bad, but if there is a collective sense of shame then it become even more furious. This is because collective memory gives shape to people's lives and provides not only a base from which individuals can look back and explain their experiences and actions, but also a platform on which to build and guide the future (Selbin, 1997). A sense of collective shame and humiliation combined with a program that claims to know the unfolding of history—as captured in article 34: “There is no doubt in the truth of the historical evidence which is a pattern of the universe and a law of nature...and in the end the victory is for truth (133)—makes it

¹¹ Mark Juergensmeyer talks about the concept of “warrior's power” in this context (2000, 187). Michael Ignatieff uses the term “warrior's honor” to denote the “idea of war as moral theater in which one displayed one's manly virtues in public (1997, 117). Masculinity at its peak reaches the image of a warrior in many cultures. Comparing a warrior to a girl means the deepest form of humiliation.

easier for people to use violence “to short-circuit” the course of events and lead them to what they consider to be the end. This even becomes easier if a program has been laid out for them and if this program holds promises for their deeds not only in this world but also in the next one.

The concepts of *jihad* and martyrdom in the charter provide for this possibility¹². *Jihad* is an oft-misrepresented term, but it is true that one interpretation of *jihad* certainly deals with the use of force and violence. There are two types of *jihad*: the greater one, which is the spiritual struggle of each individual against vice, passion and ignorance; and the smaller one, which involves the use of force to maintain Islamic social system and justice (Hashmi, 1998, 425). Muslim legal scholars have divided the world into two spheres: *Dar al-Islam* (land of Islam) and *Dar al-Harb* (land of war). It was the responsibility of Muslim to convert—by peaceful means if possible, or by force if necessary—the *Dar al-Harb* into *Dar al-Islam*. In the recent past the translation of *jihad* as “holy war” has gained widespread currency in the West. In the Hamas charter, *jihad* is used many times. According to article 13 of the charter, “There is no solution to the Palestinian problem except by jihad” (126). The aim of Hamas, according to the article seven of the charter, is to “...link in [a long] chain of Jihad against the Zionist occupation...” (124).

Given that smaller jihad cannot be waged without the chance of losing one’s life, the concept of martyrdom and death in Islam and their deployment in the charter become very important. One of the most striking features is the way charter evokes memories of

¹² Milton-Edwards (1992, 50) makes clear in her article on Hamas that its use of jihad as a concept is attuned to the political context of the Palestinian conflict. In equating jihad with the Palestinian nationalistic struggle, Hamas breaks with Qutb’s injunction to not limit jihad to either just self-defense or any territory.

martyrs (*shahids*). In the beginning sentences of the charter, there is a quote from “martyred Imam Hasan al-Banna” (122) and then there is the evocation of “Martyr ‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam and his mujahid brothers [who]...in 1936...initiat[ed] the jihad (124). It bears reminding here that al-Qassam, who began a “jihad...against the British and their Zionists clients...[as] the only means of removing invaders from Arab Palestine” (Johnson, 1982, 40), died as a martyr in 1936. His death had a large impact on the Muslims in Palestine in the following years—and his memory is revered within the larger collective memory. Related to martyrdom is the issue of how death is viewed in Islam. According to B. Todd Lawson, “The Islamic ideal of martyrdom can be thought to be the logical adjunct to the overall Qur’anic view of death as illusory” (55). These elements combined with ideas about suffering, redemption and sacrifice take on a form that is more conducive, although the exact conditions still remain out of our knowledge, for their deployment for political violence¹³.

Conclusion

Taking the case of Hamas charter, and tracing its foundation and ideological development based upon its background connections with the Muslim Brotherhood, I have argued using the framework developed by Herbert Kelman (with a slight modification) in this paper that the process via which political violence becomes justified involves three processes: authorization, dehumanization and shame. All these three elements are constructed in the case of the Hamas charter via the reinterpretation of history and

¹³ These sentiments are captured in Hamas’s slogans printed on stickers produced by the movement: “The call of Jerusalem is for Muslims to fight. With stones and blood we will liberate the land of the night journey” (Milton-Edwards, 1992, 51).

memory. This specific reinterpretation—putting the past in the service of the present—draws upon elements of suffering, redemption, martyrdom and overcoming enemies from the Islamic history. Although there are many other sources of political violence, there is none as deep reaching in its appeal as the religious-based appeal for the deployment of violence. These “cosmic wars”, to use Juergensmeyer’s term, will live with us forever because the human search for meaning in life—that is, religion—will always stay with us. Because religions, furthermore, provide guidance about moral life and thus try to chalk out what is just and unjust, this means that in so far as injustice prevails, religion will be used in fighting this injustice. And part of this always will be violent.

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