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# Women in the Machinery of War: Gender, Identity & Resistance Within Contemporary Middle Eastern Conflict

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Women in the Machinery of War: Gender, Identity & Resistance Within Contemporary  
Middle Eastern Conflict

Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the graduation requirements for a Bachelor of Arts  
Degree in Middle Eastern Studies

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I would like to dedicate my thesis to all of the remarkable women in my life;  
you are all my inspiration.

## Table of Contents

<b>Key Terms</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Literature Review</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<i>Media Framing</i> .....	<b>8</b>
<i>Reporting in Times of War &amp; Cascading Activation Theory</i> .....	<b>11</b>
<i>Orientalism &amp; Matrix of Domination</i> .....	<b>13</b>
<i>Orientalized Bodies and Arab Womanhood in The Media</i> .....	<b>15</b>
<i>Imagined Communities</i> .....	<b>19</b>
<i>Women in State Formation</i> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Thesis Structure</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Chapter One: Gendered Encounters: Navigating Conflict and Resistance within Palestine and the Islamic State</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Historical Perspectives: Women’s Armed Rebellion, Resistance, and Political Violence</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>The Rise of the Islamic State</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Mother, Daughter, Wife, or a Martyr: Narratives of Womanhood</b> ..	<b>62</b>
<b>Nationalism &amp; Palestinian Women</b> .....	<b>64</b>
<b>Motherhood</b> .....	<b>64</b>
<b>Martyrdom and Militancy</b> .....	<b>70</b>
<b>The Islamic State’s Hierarchy</b> .....	<b>75</b>
<b>Chapter Three: Warriors, Widows, and Jihadi Brides: Media Representations and Framing of Women in Conflict</b> .....	<b>79</b>
<b>Women and the Reporting of War in the Middle East</b> .....	<b>80</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>97</b>
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	<b>100</b>

### Key Terms

I have taken great effort to both include and exclude various terms within my thesis in order to avoid words that I believe to be highly politicized or have unjustly gained a negative connotation when used in the context of the Middle East. Below I have defined each of these commonly found terms in hopes of providing my readers with clarity as well as explaining my own decision to include or exclude certain words in my study.

Islamic State (IS): The name of the organization now known as the Islamic State has undergone several changes over the years. In November 2006, the leader of AQI declared the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). After setbacks, resurgence, and an expansion into Syria, the ISI became the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in April 2013. This title lasted for approximately a year until the Islamic State (IS) was declared in June 2014.<sup>1</sup> While the Islamic State is a movement for the creation of an Islamic Caliphate outside the normal nation-state system, I refer to it by this name because of the organization's preference to be addressed by this name.

Terrorism/terrorist: Like Jonathan Matusitz, I believe that terrorism is a pejorative term. People employ the term in order to “characterize their enemies’ actions as something evil and lacking human compassion.”<sup>2</sup> I refrain from using this term to describe the attacks of the female combatants whose stories I analyze as I wish to let their actions and circumstances speak for themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> al-‘Ubaydi et al., “The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State.”

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Andre Matusitz, *Terrorism & Communication: A Critical Introduction* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2013).

Female combatant/resistor: I use the term combatant interchangeably with resistor in order to move away from the negative connotation that is sometimes connected to the word attacker. I am writing with the understanding that the women within my thesis are equal participants in their respective resistant movements and deserve to be addressed as such.

Jihad: Jihad is considered the obligation of Muslims around the world and literally means to struggle. Its meaning varies on context ranging from an inner spiritual struggle to a more physical struggle or resistance against domination in political situations that are perceived to be a threat to Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

Islamism/Islamist: Islamism is a political form of Islam and an Islamist is “an advocate or supporter of a political movement that favors reordering government and society in accordance with laws prescribed by Islam. Do not use as a synonym for Islamic fighters, militants, extremists or radicals, who may or may not be Islamists.”<sup>4</sup> I would like to note that Islam and Islamists cannot and should not be used interchangeably.

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<sup>3</sup> Magdalena Martinez Magdalena Martinez, “Women in Jihad: A Question of Honour, Pride and Self-Defence,” *World Journal of Islamic in History and Civilization* 1, no. 1 (2011): 27–36.

<sup>4</sup> Abby Ohlheiser and Leon Neyfakh, “The Associated Press’s New Definition of ‘Islamist,’” *Slate*, April 5, 2013, [http://www.slate.com/blogs/the\\_slatest/2013/04/05/\\_islamist\\_definition\\_changed\\_in\\_the\\_ap\\_stylebook\\_two\\_days\\_after\\_illegal.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2013/04/05/_islamist_definition_changed_in_the_ap_stylebook_two_days_after_illegal.html).

## Introduction

For generations, the women of the Middle East have contributed to various resistance and state-building movements during times of war and protracted conflict within the region. The general public's interests in the Middle East has become reinvigorated due to the US and UK closely following the growing conflicts within the region after 9/11 and the subsequent increase in foreign political and military interventions within the region. As the forms of mass communications continue to evolve, we consume increasingly large amounts of media on the war, conflict, and instability of the Middle East with women in the region—particularly those who openly partake in and approve of armed struggle as a means of resistance. While the media, like its audience, is seemingly appalled by the idea that women are sent to kill themselves or choose to do so, they remain captivated by female suicide bombing in particular as “it constitutes a distinct expression of female militancy, in that females transgress gender norms, not only by taking life, but also by embracing their own death, and in the process, counter existing core symbolic structures delimiting gender while at the same time creating new ones.”<sup>5</sup> Headlines of captivating stories of “female terrorists” have continued to grow in popularity, with many media sources attempting to understand this seemingly new phenomena.

Unfortunately, US and UK media have failed greatly in providing their general public with thoughtful and well analyzed stories that help increase understanding of the complexity of women's experiences within times of war and conflict. Instead, one can

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<sup>5</sup> Cindy D. Ness, “In the Name of the Cause: Women's Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (September 1, 2005): 353–73, doi:10.1080/10576100500180337.

find numerous examples stories, articles, and books filled with overly simplistic narratives of women's roles in armed struggle within the Middle East, often based in their own prejudices, conceptions of womanhood, and orientalist tendencies. In my analysis, I have found that US and UK reporting is highly episodic, often failing to situate these women's experiences and actions within the larger contexts of war and conflict that they operate within, instead choosing to focus more on aspects of their lives that make them 'more feminine'—their romantic relationships, physical descriptions, and reproductive ability. Their acts of armed political struggle are dismissed as being weak, naïve, and brainwashed into committing baseless and unnecessarily violent acts of revenge. Little effort is made to hear their stories, to understand their experiences and their truths. This is the way that our media wants us to understand female militancy in the Middle East—as illegitimate and unsubstantiated.

When a group of young Palestinian women were arrested and in some cases killed for stabbing or attempting to stab Israeli Defense soldiers and Israeli settlers in an uprising beginning in October of 2015, US media sources were captivated by the fact that young females were participating in violent acts declaring that “for perhaps the first time in the patriarchal Palestinian society they are acting on their own, without consulting any male authorities.”<sup>6</sup> We were told the stories of young women such as sixteen-year-old Ashrakat Qattanani, who “swapped her schoolbooks for a knife” on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015 when she charged at a young Israeli woman waiting at a bus stop near a military

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<sup>6</sup> Diaa Hadid and Rami Nazzal, “Young Palestinian Women Join the West Bank Turmoil,” *The New York Times*, December 1, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/02/world/middleeast/young-palestinian-women-adopt-unfamiliar-role-in-seeking-to-become-killers.html>.



checkpoint.<sup>7</sup> Ashrakat is reported to have told her father “don’t cry for me, cry for Palestine” prior to her attack, yet it is treated as a fleeting statement by a “rebellious soul” not the words of a young girl whose short life was lived under military occupation.<sup>8</sup> Around the same time as Ashrakat’s attack, other articles told the stories of other young women such as cousins Hadeel and Nourhan Awwad and a 19-year-old university student, Maram Hasouna who all died after attempting stabbing attacks. Through these articles we explore the rise of Palestinian women within their “new” combative roles “confounding families and a society unaccustomed to women who want to be killers”, but not without learning about their engagements, broken homes, and conservative families who don’t let their daughters wear make-up.<sup>9</sup> Not only are these women more feminine characteristics emphasized, but they are written off as killers and murderers, their acts framed as malicious and their political nature diminished.

As the examples above show, in doing a close reading of media focusing on female combatants in the Middle East we see how the US and UK media create narratives through their framing and representation of regional conflicts and the actors within them—they choose who is represented as good and who is evil, but is it really that simple? Do all young women living within the West Bank and Jerusalem become attackers merely because they are sad or come from “broken” homes? This pattern in incomplete and biased reporting has pushed me to look for answers. How do US and UK media representations of women’s roles, experiences, and motives for partaking in armed

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<sup>7</sup> Hadid and Nazzal, “Young Palestinian Women Join the West Bank Turmoil.”

<sup>8</sup> “Quiet in Past Uprisings, Palestinian Women Have Asserted the Roles of Martyrs in Israeli Stabbing Attacks,” *National Post*, accessed March 22, 2016, <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/world/israel-middle-east/quiet-in-past-uprisings-palestinian-women-have-asserted-the-roles-of-martyrs-in-israeli-stabbing-attacks>.

<sup>9</sup> Hadid and Nazzal, “*Young Palestinian Women Join the West Bank Turmoil.*”

struggle impact the ways in which we understand gender and contemporary within the region? What types of prejudices have led to this trend of delegitimizing and ignoring more women's militant roles in political resistance in the Middle East? How can we better understand these women's experiences and lived realities? I seek to answer these questions throughout my research in an attempt to contribute to current academic texts analyzing women in within contexts of conflict and resistance movements within the Middle East.

In this thesis, I use the case studies of Palestine and the so called Islamic State as examples of two similar, yet unique examples of resistance movements framed within the larger context of war and conflict that has come to especially characterize the Levant. I explore US and UK media's framing and representations of these women's actions and roles within conflict in order to better understand how media and mass communications control and manipulate their audiences' understanding of women and conflict within the Middle East. I argue that the US and UK media's representations of Middle East women in conflict neglect to capture the complex nature of their lived realities and the many ways that conflict and war affect their existence. I believe that it is important to investigate these deficiencies in media reporting as we cannot truly understand these women's experiences until we first understand the biases in our media's reporting and representations of these women.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Media Framing***

Our lives are saturated with news provided to us through mass-mediated communication—it's in our homes, on our phones, and in our classrooms subtly planting various ideas. Its power is inescapable; "Media discourses play a central role in *In Media and Society: The Production of Culture in the Mass Media*, Ryan and Wentworth suggest

that mass-mediated communication is a powerful socialization agent that transmits cultural rules and beliefs through its messages, images, and representations of various peoples, actions, and activities.<sup>10</sup> These messages “reproduce[e] the collective belief system of the dominant culture and the core values of society (Henry & Tarot, 2002)”<sup>11</sup> and allow the media to “effect change and stability in the behavior, thoughts, and feelings of individuals” who consume it.<sup>12</sup> *Culture*, when defined as “shared knowledge and schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to the social realities around them”,<sup>13</sup> is one of the most important aspects of this communication process as it molds the values and ways of thinking of a particular social group attempting to craft a certain message.<sup>14</sup> Media theorist Denis McQuail describes mass media’s continued infiltration into all aspects of our lives and their power to create realities and construct stories as being heavily impacted by “the political, social, economic, and cultural situation of a society.”<sup>15</sup> As a medium, the mass media is in no way neutral “with its technological biases and imperatives;” it is with this knowledge of mass media’s susceptibility to manipulation that we must be critical of the representations

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<sup>10</sup> John Ryan and William M. Wentworth, *Media and Society: The Production of Culture in the Mass Media* (Boston, Mass: Allyn and Bacon, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Diane Watt, “Challenging Islamophobia Through Visual Media Studies: Inquiring Into a Photograph of Muslim Women on the Cover of Canada’s National News Magazine,” *Simile* 8, no. 2 (May 2008): 1–14, doi:10.3138/sim.8.2.001.

<sup>12</sup> Ryan and Wentworth, *Media and Society*.

<sup>13</sup> John Paul Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures*, Syracuse Studies on Peace and Conflict Resolution; Syracuse Studies on Peace and Conflict Resolution. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Entman, “Framing.” 51

<sup>15</sup> McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction* (London; Sage Publications, 1983), <http://www.gbv.de/dms/bowker/toc/9780803997714.pdf>.

it presents and critique the injustices and prejudice that often make its way into the narratives that mass media reproduces.

Inspecting media frames provides a lens for understanding how and why media rationalizes events and organizes reports. If we apply media theorist Robert M. Entman's definition of media framing, we see that it is a news source's specific selection of some aspects of a perceived reality in order to make these aspects more prominent as a means of promoting a particular definition of the problem, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the event being reported. One of the ways that framing's capacity to promote a particular understanding or opinion of an act or issue is through *cultural resonance* and *magnitude*. Culturally resonant relates to the use of "words and images highly salient in the culture, which is to say noticeable, understandable, memorable, and emotionally charged" and are believed to "have the greatest potential for influence."<sup>16</sup> Magnitude relates to "the prominence and repetition of the framing words and images."<sup>17</sup> In this understanding of the capacity of framing, Entman concludes that the more resonance and magnitude that exists within framing, the more likely it is to arouse similar thoughts and feelings in large portions of the audience. Arguments can be made on whether mass-media has been an agent of largely positive or negative change, but its power is undeniable and can be reflected in the media's current treatment of women in conflict and war. Without acknowledging the active framing that takes place in the reporting of news events particularly in the Middle East, we fail to acknowledge the power of these "texts" and forget the fact that there are competing and

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<sup>16</sup> Robert M. Entman, "Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame After 9/11," *Political Communication* 20, no. 4 (2003): 415–32.

<sup>17</sup> Entman, "Cascading Activation."

differing discourses and interests as work when a foreign observer attempts report on topics such as war and conflict.<sup>18</sup>

I focus on US and UK media sources throughout my thesis as they have become two of the most widely read English language news sources today.<sup>19</sup> These news sources have reported extensively on global conflicts and have been at the vanguard at reporting stories focusing on women's militancy in the Middle East. Analysis of US and UK media sources is also particularly interesting as the governments of both of these countries have a shared history of political and military intervention within the Middle East. While there is diversity in the reporting styles and goals of the many media sources and agencies that comprise the US and UK media, I am operating under the understanding that there are general trends and common biases that can be found within the majority of these medias. I believe that critical readings of US and UK media sources will provide, "real-world insights into how inclusions and exclusions are structured in public discourse, and how this impacts everyday social relations" while exposing the various cultural constructs and stereotypes related to Islam, women, conflict, and the Middle East that have become pervasive in our societies.<sup>20</sup>

#### ***Reporting in Times of War & Cascading Activation Theory***

Throughout world history, the media have played a large role in shaping our knowledge and understanding of war and conflict beginning with their basic coverage of important battles and rises in conflict.<sup>21</sup> Media coverage in times of war has also been

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<sup>18</sup> Entman, "Cascading Activation."

<sup>19</sup> Michael Barthel, "Newspapers: Fact Sheet," Pew Research Center's Journalism Project, April 29, 2015, <http://www.journalism.org/2015/04/29/newspapers-fact-sheet/>.

<sup>20</sup> Watt, "Challenging Islamophobia Through Visual Media Studies."

<sup>21</sup> Daya Kishan Thussu and Des Freedman, *War and the Media: Reporting Conflict 24/7* (SAGE Publications Inc. (US), 2003).

seen to cause great changes in public opinion of the actions of major actors. Among the times that this ability to influence public opinion was seen in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was during World War I and World War II. Governments on all sides directed their media to frame coverage of the war in particular ways that would unite their populations.<sup>22</sup> After realizing media's impact on society, governments made media a new tool of warfare. During the Cold War, the US military would play music and news casts from 'across the curtain' as a means of propaganda.<sup>23</sup> Media coverage of the Vietnam war largely impacted public opinion of US military action, with reporting contributing to a change of tide and increase in protesting against our military policies. Media continue to play a significant role in our post 9/11 context as the war of opinions ensues with biased US and UK media reports on conflict in the Middle East.

In his cascading activation model, Entman uses the case study of US media's framing of the events following 9/11 as a means of analyzing the ways in which government officials and journalists exercise political influence over each other as well as the public.<sup>24</sup> This form of framing uses unique words and images that "can be distinguished from the rest of the news by their capacity to stimulate support of or opposition to the sides in a political conflict."<sup>25</sup> It is highly effective in its ability to "fram[e] events, issues, and actors in ways that promote perceptions and interpretations that benefit one side while hindering the other."<sup>26</sup> In the case of this thesis, this type of

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<sup>22</sup> Ryan and Wentworth, *Media and Society*.

<sup>23</sup> "Voice of America Begins Broadcasts to Russia - Feb 17, 1947," HISTORY.com, accessed March 9, 2016, <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/voice-of-america-begins-broadcasts-to-russia>.

<sup>24</sup> Entman, "Cascading Activation."

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

framing has allowed the US and UK governments to both vilify and victimize Middle Eastern women who live within contexts of war and conflict in order to support their foreign policy within the region. As my media analysis will later show, orientalism and sexism are pervasive within US and UK media framing of female combatants in the Middle East.

***Orientalism & Matrix of Domination***

*Orientalism* written by the Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said in 1978 is widely considered the foremost text on the post-colonial theory of Orientalism.<sup>27</sup> In his study, Said moves beyond defining orientalism as the study of Near and Far Eastern societies and cultures, languages, and peoples by Western scholars and suggests that it includes the imitation or depiction of aspects of Eastern cultures in the West by writers, designers and artists—all of this in an effort to define the “modern” west by portraying the Orient and Orientals as “the other”.<sup>28</sup> Said goes on to look at the West’s various encounters with the Near East, focusing particularly on the impact of history of Western colonialism and imperialism within the region, and how that has impacted the way that Orientals are represented and perceived in the US and UK.

The Orient is not just a geographical space, but a system of representations in itself heavily framed by political forces of colonialism and imperialism that has brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and Western empires. The West uses the Orient to define itself, and constructs the Orient in opposition of its own learning, consciousness and empire, labelling it inferior and inherently different. The

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<sup>27</sup> Irfan Habib, “In Defence of Orientalism: Critical Notes on Edward Said,” *Social Scientist* 33, no. 1/2 (January 1, 2005): 40–46.

<sup>28</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979): 3-4.

Orient's men are characterized as weak-minded and despotic, while its women are overtly sexualized and eroticized and perceived as relevant only for their physical features. In this vein, orientalist knowledge production is just another expression of Western domination, giving it the ability to restructure and have authority over discourse on the Orient and its position in global history.<sup>29</sup>

In his explanation of the impact of Orientalism, Said also touches on the representation of the Orient and Orientals in Western visual media and written texts. He points out that the West has taken it upon itself to represent the Orient and its people and cultures because it operates under the belief that the oriental people cannot depict themselves. He goes on to problematize such actions saying, "My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence — in which I do not for a moment believe — but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting."<sup>30</sup> In addition to Said's insightful critique of Western orientalism, when considering female militancy in the Middle East we must understand their experiences fit into interlocking systems of patriarchy and oppression.

In Black feminist, Patricia Hill Collins' "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought", she explains how the various intersections of social inequality relate to the many differences amongst people that cause oppression of marginalized groups, which she captures through the phrase *matrix of*

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<sup>29</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," *Social Problems* 33, no. 6 (1986), S18



*domination*.<sup>31</sup> Collins notes that Marginalized groups often gain a status of being an "other" and points out that Brittan and Maynard claim "domination always involves the objectification of the dominated; all forms of oppression imply the devaluation of the subjectivity of the oppressed."<sup>32</sup> This same matrix of domination and its subsequent construction of "dichotomous oppositional difference", which focus on differences rather than similarities can be reflected in the West's colonialist and imperialist interactions with the Orient.

I find joint use of critiques of orientalism and the feminist concept of *matrix of domination* to be critical tools in my study of US and UK media's framing of female militancy in the Middle East as they highlight the multiple systems of dominance and oppression which characterize these media's relationship to the peoples and issues within the Orient. With this in mind, I argue that the US' and UK's historical misrepresentation and their continued biased framing of news events and activities, particularly involving Middle Eastern women to their role within this great matrix of domination.

***Orientalized bodies and Arab Womanhood in the Media***

The portrayal of "Arab womanhood" in the Western imagination is by no means a new phenomenon, and the increased representation of these bodies in current US and UK media is merely a resurgence based in recent events connecting the "West" to the Middle East, including 9/11, the so-called Arab Spring, and ongoing conflict within the region.<sup>33</sup> Technology has enabled the rapid spread of stereotypical images of "women of cover" and however else the media choose to portray "oppressed Muslim women", through

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<sup>31</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," *Social Problems* 33, no. 6 (1986), S18

<sup>32</sup> Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within", S20.

<sup>33</sup> Amira Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S.* 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

blogs, online newspapers, and social media.<sup>34</sup> At the same time we see newer images of women taking part in protests, such as the “girl in the blue bra”<sup>35</sup> in Egypt, Iranian women protesting in 2009’s Green movement, and Palestinian women protesting against the Israeli occupation. In recent decades, US and UK news sources have sent us many messages of what it means to be a Muslim woman in the Arab world—are they oppressed wives, daughters, or bitter widows? Are they the naïve mothers of terrorists or are they the “terrorists” themselves? As we go through a process of deconstructing and analyzing the ways in which Muslim women are perceived in US and UK media, we must find and critique the orientalist and gendered discourses abound in US and UK representations of Muslim women.



Figure 1 Arabian Women With the Yachmak. [Postcards from *The Colonial Harem*] (left), *Girl in the Blue Bra* (right)

<sup>34</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 9.

<sup>35</sup> Kainaz Amaria Facebook Twitter Tumblr Instagram, “‘Girl In The Blue Bra’ Symbol Of Egypt’s Ongoing Strife,” NPR.org, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/pictureshow/2011/12/21/144098384/the-girl-in-the-blue-bra>.



Figure 2 An opposition supporter at a rally for Mir Hussein Mousavi in Tehran before the general election last year (right), Muslim women protesting the bombing and occupation of Palestine by Israel (left)<sup>36</sup>

The bodies of Arab and Muslim women within the Middle East serve as particular points of focus in the US and UK media’s imagination based on both their gender and location within the Orient. Through US media and pop culture in particular, we have seen the production of Euro-US centric imaginings of Arab womanhood in visual mediums of film, television, and the news—often reduced to either “erotic, romanticized, magical, and sexualized, as with most images of belly dancers or harem girls, or they are portrayed as helpless, silent, and utterly dominated by an excessive Arab patriarchy, as in representations of the veiled woman or the harem slave”.<sup>37</sup> Academic Amira Jarmakani suggest that these constructions of Arab womanhood often come to “serve as an immediately recognizable shorthand for larger themes of orientalist exoticism, licentious sexuality, and heteromasculinist fantasies about owning and possessing women”.<sup>38</sup> US and UK media have created and reinforced what she calls cultural mythologies—“second order sign systems, which have been unmoored from the particular conditions in which they might traditionally be embedded and retooled as signifiers of dominant ideologies in

<sup>36</sup> “The Myth of Iran’s Twitter Revolution,” *The Guardian*, June 11, 2010, sec. Comment is free, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/jun/11/iran-twitter-revolution-myth>.

<sup>37</sup> Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

the U.S. cultural context in which they are created.”<sup>39</sup> These cultural mythologies have shifted since the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and have been shifting with greater intensity after 9/11 and the US and UK’s continued pursuit of their imperialist goals and security issues as they relate to terrorism in the Middle East. While trite representations of belly dancing women and genies still exist, other images such as the burqah clad Arab woman are gaining popularity.

Feminist anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod focuses on “Western” media’s portrayals of Muslim women and the implications these misrepresentations hold for our societal understanding of the lives of Muslim women, especially the portrayal of the veil as the symbol of women’s oppression within the Middle East.<sup>40</sup> She notes that when “Western” audiences are presented with images of the veiled woman they see, “the Muslim woman does not have the same freedoms we have. The woman ruled by her religion. The woman ruled by her men”.<sup>41</sup> As it is well documented that most people receive their information about ethno-racial groups from mass media, these images of oppression are internalized by the Western public to define Arab women as oppressed and Arab men as the oppressors.<sup>42</sup> These heteromasculinist derived notions of Muslim womanhood have also been used by US politicians such as President George W. Bush to morally validate the military invasions of other nation-states such as Afghanistan and later Iraq.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, “The Muslim Woman: The Power of Images and the Danger of Pity,” *EuroZine*, accessed October 28, 2015, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-09-01-abulughod-en.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Watt, “Challenging Islamophobia Through Visual Media Studies”

<sup>43</sup> Abu-Lughod, “The Muslim Woman: The Power of Images and the Danger of Pity.”

*Imagined Communities*

Political scientist Benedict Anderson first created the concept of “imagined community” as a means to analyze nationalism. An imagined community, unlike a conventional community is not based on everyday face-to-face interaction among its members, but is a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group.<sup>44</sup> Anderson believes that nations are an “imagined political community”, “imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” and a community because

regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.<sup>45</sup>

In his text, Anderson suggests that media also plays a role in creating imagined communities as it has the power to reach mass audiences and address the public. Similar to the beliefs of Entman (1993), he sees the mass media’s use of images and vernacular as means to perpetuate certain stereotypes while those who relate to such images are further drawn to that imagined community.

Near East historian James Gelvin, identifies the creation of the world system of nation-states as being one of the most defining characteristics of modern history and suggests that this European-instigated trend would come to define the Middle East as we

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<sup>44</sup> Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended ed. (London; Verso, 1991), 6.

<sup>45</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

see it today.<sup>46</sup> In studying the evolution of the great empires of the Middle East, the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals, he shows how interconnected the histories of the West and East really are. The development of a world economy has also contributed to the formation of an interconnected history although European colonization and later Western imperialism would create an imbalance through which they could manipulate and dominate the Middle East. A relevant example of European domination in the Middle East is the signing of the Sykes-Picot agreement.

The Sykes-Picot agreement, made between the British and French in 1916, and a product of increased interaction between the East and West would forever change the geography of the Middle East. This secret accord's creation of so called "spheres of influence" at the conclusion of World War I can directly be connected to the resistance movements currently being undertaken by Palestinians and the Islamic State.<sup>47</sup> In the case of Palestine, this agreement would allow the British to take away the Palestinian people's right for self-determination resulting in large tracts of their land being taken for the creation of Israel. Nationalists and resistance movements within Palestine fight to reassert their right to self-determination, but also to protest and resist Israeli's unlawful occupation and continued settlement of their lands. The Islamic State's rise can be interpreted as a reaction to the continued European imposition of state and territory lines as begun by the Sykes-Picot agreement and a desire to return to a pre-nation-state period when Islamic caliphates ruled the region.

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<sup>46</sup> James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

<sup>47</sup> Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, 9.

Understanding the concept of imagined communities as well as the inception and domination of the nation-state system is essential to this thesis as imposed nation-state systems have greatly impacted the context within which the women included in this thesis live and operate within. It is through groups' resistance to the metaphorical carving of the Middle East, that we can begin to see similarities between the movements of Palestine and the Islamic State and the conflicts that have ensued. Although similarities do exist we must remember that their long-term goals as well as their means of resisting this system are very different. As these groups attempt to re-imagine their communities, we also see the ways in which gender norms are also constructed and imagined to fit the demands of their social, political, and economic contexts.

***Women in State Formation***

Deniz Kandiyoti, in her study entitled, "Identity and It's Discontents: Women and the Nation", explores the the often contradictory implications nationalist projects have had on women within post-colonial societies, at times enfranchising women and at other times infringing upon their rights.<sup>48</sup> She suggests it is the articulation of elements of national identity and cultural difference that serve as a catalyst for nationalistic policies which seek to control women. Iranian academic Minoos Moallem, in her book, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, Moallem takes Kandiyoti's notion further in suggesting that controlling women's dress and an emphasis on sexual honor, particularly within the context of an Islamic society quickly becomes a sign of national honor.<sup>49</sup> She also draws

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<sup>48</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, "Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation," *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 20, no. 3 (1991): 429–43.

<sup>49</sup> Minoos Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, 54.

on French philosopher Michel Foucault's work *Biopolitics* in interpreting the body as "a site where culture acts on individuals to turn them into subjects".<sup>50</sup> Bodies are important sites of nationalist and religious imagining, when we look at women's bodies within Palestine and the Islamic state we find that they are "a site of political performance in the particular context of modern nationalist and fundamentalist," essential to their respective imagined communities, but also open to manipulation by foreign media.<sup>51</sup>

Using Anderson's descriptions of nationalism, Kandiyoti shows how the very language of nationalism uses women as "the symbolic repository of group identity... nationalism describes its object using either the vocabulary of kinship, motherland or home in order to denote something to which something is nationally tied".<sup>52</sup> Nationalist movements rely heavily on a gender regime, which allows leaders and dominant ideologies to construct narratives of womanhood to benefit larger state-building goals, in order to maintain their group identity. These same policies mobilize women when they are needed for labor or to serve as fighters at the war front, but often force women to return to domestic or subordinate roles within the public sphere as seen in Algeria's fight for independence. In my thesis I wish to highlight the ways in which women in the Middle East both subvert and navigate the gender regimes that exist, particularly in times of war and conflict, in their efforts to author their own stories and experiences.

### **Thesis Structure**

In the first chapter of this thesis, I study women's testimonies, histories, and realities within Palestine and the Islamic State and how they can be used to rationalize

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<sup>50</sup> Mino Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, 60.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>52</sup> Kandiyoti, "Identity and Its Discontents."



women's militancy. My analysis shows that these women's engagement in armed struggle is not not always something imposed on them, but is instead their participation in armed struggle is better understood as falling into the larger context of an encounter. These women encounter many systems of oppression and every day violence that they must navigate in order to act according to their own free-will, particularly when participating in larger movements that may not always focus or consider gender equality to be a main goal.

In order to provide the most wholesome analysis possible, within the second chapter I focus on the construction of gender roles by those in power in order to show how the key actors and dominant ideologies within conflict instrumentalize women through their constructed narratives of womanhood. Through this chapter we see that key actors often act in a mirror image of foreign medias in positing their views of gender roles with respect to the women who participate in conflict and war. As we peel off the layers of what truly draw women into conflict, we gain clarity on women's self-narrated motives in partaking in and/or providing ideological support of militancy and armed struggle as a form of resistance.

In the third and final chapter I closely examine US and UK media's framing and representation of women participating in and/or supporting armed resistance in Palestine and The Islamic State, exposing how orientalist, sexism, and misunderstanding of Islam inform their reporting. I believe that in order to truly understand the essence of female militancy in the Middle East, we must keep their voices in the epicenter, but also consider the local context, geopolitical context, and social structures within which these women operate.

Finally, in my conclusion I return to how US and UK media, Islamist, and nationalist representations and constructions of womanhood mirror each other while often masking women's own agency as they navigate their cultural and political waters. In the case of Palestine and the Islamic State, this masking complicates women's attempts to define their roles in larger struggles for both secular and Islamic statehood, selfhood, and nationhood within larger contexts of conflict and upheaval in our post-colonial context. Overall, I assert that women's experiences in times of conflict and war in the Middle East shows that gender roles are more fluid and dynamic than we often think.

## Chapter One

### Gendered Encounters: Navigating Conflict and Resistance within Palestine and the Islamic State

*“Some women give their own souls; they fight and are martyred, even ordinary women; this is a form of resistance.”*

*Dr. Mariam Saleh, an elected Hamas member of the Palestinian Legislative Council*<sup>53</sup>

As Lila Abu-Lughod points out, Muslim women within the Middle East are often seen as “victims of war and conflict”, but also victims of Islam and patriarchy which are believed to restrict their roles within their societies.<sup>54</sup> This overt focus on oppression and victimization causes us to lose sight of the many proactive and essential roles that women play within resistance movements and in times of war and conflict. Is it fair to conflate a woman’s action within a society’s gender roles as inherently oppressive or lacking agency without considering their contexts and lived realities? How can we gain a better understanding of women’s roles in resistance movements without resorting to stereotypical explanations when we see women in roles that cultural norms and prejudices perceive as inherently male?<sup>55</sup> “Western” discourse as presented through media might fail to put these women into context before attempting to rationalize their actions, but my analysis will concentrate on how women navigate these constructs.

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<sup>53</sup> Maria Holt, “Agents of Defiance and Despair: The Impact of Islamic Resistance on Palestinian Women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,” *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 11, no. 3/4 (September 2010): 397–415.

<sup>54</sup> Abu-Lughod, “The Muslim Woman: The Power of Images and the Danger of Pity.”

<sup>55</sup> Cindy D. Ness, *Female Terrorism and Militancy Agency, Utility, and Organization*, *Contemporary Terrorism Studies*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; Routledge, 2008. <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=325346>, 220.

In this chapter, I use Patricia Hill Collin's concept of "paradigm of difference"<sup>56</sup> as the theoretical reasoning for framing women's engagement in resistance movements as an encounter that is both fluid and dynamic. I contend that women's participation in armed struggle emerges from a combination of various external and internal pressures including military occupation, religious movements, and other details of the larger socio-political context of the Middle East.

### **Historical Perspectives: Women's Armed Rebellion, Resistance, and Political Violence in Palestine**

The Israeli occupation of Palestine and subsequent conflict between Palestinians and the Israeli state has birthed one of the longest standing resistance movements within the Middle East and spans much of the twentieth century into the current twenty-first century. While some sources try to frame the conflict as between religious groups—Jews and Muslims, this conflict is based in a fight for territory and the right to exercise political control over it. Female militancy within Palestine has been well documented both by external and local media sources and provides a strong and historic case study for the representations of Middle Eastern women as active participants in war and conflict. Palestinian women have played a consistent role in the nationalist movement in Palestine, struggling beside Palestinian men in the fight for both the creation of a Palestinian nation and the right for displaced Palestinians to return. Understanding the history of military occupation and the process of settler colonialism that continues to impact Palestinian's way of life is essential to any critique of media framing of Palestinian women's struggles to resist.

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<sup>56</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, "Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection," *Race, Sex & Class* 1, no. 1 (1993): 25–45.

Understanding Palestinian women's long history of struggle and resistance in relation to its unique socio-political context is a process that much feminist literature has failed to do. Without looking at this larger history and the relevant factors that continue to impact women's participation in struggle, including military struggle, we lose valuable insight into the "many forms of gendered resistance' ...[for] since the early days of the Palestinian national struggle, a distinctive expression of women's resistance against invasion, colonisation and humiliation has gradually evolved."<sup>57</sup> The increasing participation of women in more visible combatant roles and in the larger women's autonomous movement did not emerge within a vacuum, but was and continues to be shaped and influenced by a larger global context and history of domination.<sup>58</sup> As we will see, Palestinian women have and continue to participate in the Palestinian nationalist movement in the ways that they see fit while attempting to cope with "Israel's unrelenting brutal policies of economic strangulation, political suffocation and the social destruction it has and continues to wreak on the Palestinians".<sup>59</sup> The historical trajectory and dynamics of Palestinian women's resistance must be understood in relation to not only their Israeli occupiers, but also the gender hierarchy that prevails within Palestinian society.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century different peoples began to come together and form nations that could support their rights of self-determination and rule. In 1882 Jewish people across the world also began to organize

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<sup>57</sup> Holt, "Agents of Defiance and Despair."

<sup>58</sup> "The Palestinian Women's Autonomous Movement: Emergence, Dynamics, and Challenges." *Gender & Society* 12, no. 6 (1998): 649–73.

<sup>59</sup> Ronit Lentin, *Thinking Palestine*, 1 online resource (vii, 264 pages) vols. (London; Zed Books; 2008), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=368676>, 175.

under the Zionist movement, which called for the creation of a Jewish homeland.<sup>60</sup>

Zionist Jews quickly began to seek out a location for their homeland and eventually chose Palestine, as it was the first site for the Jewish people as described by their holy book.<sup>61</sup>

While Zionism created a national consciousness for Jews, it differed greatly from the beliefs of early immigrants who followed the Orthodox religious practices and spent most of their time studying. Those that would come after them, especially around the start of World War I were more secular and arrived with the goal of creating a Jewish State.<sup>62</sup>

Whilst these more secular migrants used Zionism to facilitate ideals of Jewish nationalism, Palestinians and other Arabs were also developing a national consciousness of their own.

At the start of World War I, Palestine was still part of territory held by the weakening Ottoman Empire—a territory that Husayn ibn ‘Ali, the patriarch of the Hashemite family, increasingly wanted for the Arabs. After brokering a deal with the British, the Arabs led a revolt against the Ottoman Empire and won, beginning the British mandate in Palestine. When the Ottoman Empire fell at the end of World War I, France and Britain were able to gain “quasi-colonial authority” within the region through the

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<sup>60</sup> MERIP, "Primer on Palestine, Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, last modified 2014, [http://www.merip.org/primer-palestine-israel-arab-israeli-conflict-new?ip\\_login\\_no\\_cache=461da1ae6db99be45c8c4611ccab513#The Land and the People](http://www.merip.org/primer-palestine-israel-arab-israeli-conflict-new?ip_login_no_cache=461da1ae6db99be45c8c4611ccab513#The Land and the People).

<sup>61</sup> Zionist's specific claiming of Palestine being a homeland for Jews is based on “ancient *Biblical Promises* of four thousand years ago that God promised Abraham that ‘unto thy seed have I given this land...’ and that the words ‘seed of Abraham’ mean only those who today are, by religion, Jews whether or not they are the physical descendants of Abraham”. Sami. Hadawi, *Bitter Harvest: A Modern History of Palestine*, 4th rev. and updated ed. (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1991).

<sup>62</sup> Joel Beinin and Lisa Hajjar, "Palestine, Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict a Primer," last modified February 2014, PDF.

mandate system. Contrary to the agreement originally made between the Hashemites and Britain, the Arab territories were split up through the secret Sykes-Picot agreement and Transjordan and the Palestinian mandate were created. This same Palestinian mandate would later be appropriated as the “Jewish Homeland” as promised in the Balfour Declaration of 1917. The vast displacement that would follow, served as a catalyst for many social and political movements amongst the Palestinian people.

Palestinian women’s activism can be traced back to the 1920s when Palestinian women first began officially to organize in 1921 with the creation of the Palestinian Women’s Union.<sup>63</sup> Although the creation of this union was a predominantly upper- and middle- class project, it remains an important example of women’s coming together to demonstrate opposition of the continued Zionist migration that was threatening their home and existence.<sup>64</sup> These same women would go on to lead a demonstration against the Balfour Declaration and organize the first General Palestinian Women’s Congress in Jerusalem in 1929.<sup>65</sup> Later during the 1936-39 revolt, Palestinian women occupied many diverse roles ranging from being caretakers for the injured and hiding rebels to publically demonstrating and taking up arms to defend their land, but their roles were still inhibited by the gender expectations of Palestine’s more conservative society.<sup>66</sup> Throughout this time, “legal and illegal coercive measures”, including Great Britain’s Land Transfer

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<sup>63</sup> Rabab Abdulhadi. “The Palestinian Women’s Autonomous Movement: Emergence, Dynamics, and Challenges.” *Gender & Society* 12, no. 6 (1998): 649–73.

<sup>64</sup> Holt, Maria. “Agents of Defiance and Despair: The Impact of Islamic Resistance on Palestinian Women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.” *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 11, no. 3/4 (September 2010): 397–415.

<sup>65</sup> Moha Ennaji and Fatima Sadiqi, *Gender and Violence in the Middle East* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2011).

<sup>66</sup> Sami. Hadawi, *Bitter Harvest: A Modern History of Palestine*, 4th rev. and updated ed. (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1991).

ordinance of 1920, which created many new land regulations biased towards Zionist settlers under the new British mandate.<sup>67</sup> Zionist settlers' used other tools of oppression including "taxation, imprisonment, and collective punishment" of Palestinians, that were used to seize Palestine's cultivated land as well as economically, politically, and socially to strangle the Palestinian people.<sup>68</sup>

#### **Al-Nakbah: Gender and Statelessness**

Many Israelis commemorate 1948 as the birth of the Jewish homeland, much needed after the atrocities committed against Jews during the Second World War. On the other hand, Palestinians and other Arabs reflect on this year and are overcome with a sense of loss—for 1948 was as *al-Nakbah*, or the catastrophe. After *al-Nakbah*, life within Palestine was altered as villages were destroyed and large groups of Palestinians were forced into exile. In 1948, only about 150,000 Palestinians remained in the area that became the State of Israel. Following the war of 1948–1949, this land was divided into three parts: The State of Israel, the West Bank (of the Jordan River) and the Gaza Strip. For Palestinians living within the new state of Israel, identities would become exponentially more complicated as they were now labeled "the present-absentees" by Israeli law. They were granted Israeli citizenship and the right to vote, but in many respects they were and remain second-class citizens, since Israel defines itself as a Jewish state and the state of the Jewish people. Over the years, thousands of other Palestinians

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<sup>67</sup> Hiba Al-Azraq, "COHRE-BADIL Study on Israel's Land Regime and Press Conference in Geneva: Israeli Seizure of Land and Housing Has Made a Two-State Solution Impossible," *BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights*, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://www.badil.org/en/publication/press-releases/19-2005/1617-press-386-05.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class* (SAGE, 1995).





Figure 3 Maps of Palestine from 1948-2010 [<http://www.jvpchicago.org/resources/brief-history/>]

It is in 1948 that we see Palestinian womanhood greatly politicized. Like their male counterparts, *al-Nakbah* was a period characterized by massacres, forced exile, displacement, and eviction as the newly formed Israeli state's conduct is often considered to be a case of ethnic cleansing.<sup>69</sup> In this traumatic time, women began simultaneously to assume responsibilities for the family and nation.<sup>70</sup> As Margaret Gonzalez- Perez points out, "the discrimination and segregation of Palestinians in general, and of Palestinian women in particular, is integral to the colonization process as women are considered to be the "boundary markers" of Palestinian social and sexual property."<sup>71</sup> Women's immediate responses to *al-Nakbah* included directing most of their energies toward relief

<sup>69</sup> Ennaji and Sadiqi, *Gender and Violence in the Middle East*.

<sup>70</sup> See figure 3; Artist/Designer/Photographer: Burhan Karkoutly Language: Arabic Year: Circa 1978 Publisher: General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/mother-and-fighter> Arabic translation: The woman, Mother, and fighter on the path to liberation The General Union of Palestinian Women is a foundation of the revolution

<sup>71</sup> Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, "Palestine, Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan: Internationalization and Localization," accessed December 27, 2015, <http://www.jpcs.in/upload/15173564Gonzalez%20Perez.pdf>.

efforts and “support within the framework of charitable societies and organizations” furthermore “to cope with the huge influx of refugees and help the people deal with the effects of dispossession’ which could be interpreted as a domestication of women’s roles”.<sup>72</sup> Palestinian women’s strategies of assuming more domestic roles within their society represents a sort of patriarchal bargain of sorts,<sup>73</sup> but also emphasizes that gender can be used to “mediate the process of coping for survival”.<sup>74</sup> It is within the aftermath of *al-Nakbah* that the birth of political organizations and the rise of women’s political resistance in the joining of new nationalist political movements took place. From 1948 until 1967 women joined groups such as Al-Fatah, the Arab National Movement, Al-Baath, and the Jordanian Communist Party.<sup>75</sup>

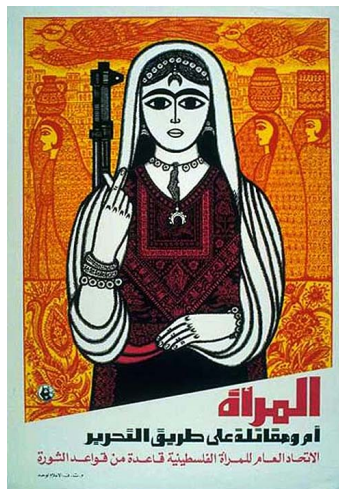


Figure 4 General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW)

<sup>72</sup> Holt, “Agents of Defiance and Despair.”

<sup>73</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, “Bargaining with Patriarchy,” *Gender & Society* 2, no. 3 (September 1, 1988): 274–90.

<sup>74</sup> Aitemad Muhanna. *Agency and Gender in Gaza: Masculinity, Femininity and Family during the Second Intifada*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013.

<http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1426865>.

<sup>75</sup> Ennaji and Sadiqi, *Gender and Violence in the Middle East*.

**Regional Conflicts: Women and the Arab-Israeli Conflict**

In 1967, the overwhelming defeat of the Arab regimes and Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem and the PLO's subsequent takeover by guerrilla groups from 1968-69 changed the Palestinian political landscape.<sup>76</sup> The PLO's newly adopted charter quickly moved to defined armed struggle as the "only strategy for the liberation of Palestine" and martyrdom became the ultimate act of sacrifice and courage. This new strategy in symphony with the harsh realities of occupation and a need to resist caused a relaxing in social rules and roles that enabled Palestinian women to join guerrilla groups and further expanded women's opportunities for political resistance through armed struggle.<sup>77</sup> In May 1967, four Palestinians, including two men hijacked a Sabena Airlines plane in Brussels and forced it to land at Lod, drawing international attention to the plight of Palestinians. Also as a product of this new emphasis on armed struggle, women in the PFLP had their own training camps in Jordan and in Lebanon, as well as separate women's sections, until the early 1980s.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ennaji and Sadiqi, *Gender and Violence in the Middle East*.

<sup>77</sup> Rabab Abdulhadi. "The Palestinian Women's Autonomous Movement: Emergence, Dynamics, and Challenges." *Gender & Society* 12, no. 6 (1998): 649–73

<sup>78</sup> Cindy D. Ness, "In the Name of the Cause: Women's Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (September 1, 2005): 353–73,



Figure 5 Dalal Mughrabi, the leader of a Military operation near Tel Aviv in 1978

On March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1978, Dalal Mughrabi<sup>79</sup> at the age of nineteen, lead a group sailing from from Lebanon to participate in a string of attacks along Israel’s main coastal highway from Haifa to Tel-Aviv.<sup>80</sup> Mughrabi was a member of al-Asifah, a resistance organization that concentrated on armed struggle as a means for liberation.<sup>81</sup> Mughrabi’s death during the operation shot her to stardom with the Palestinian people hailing her as a heroine and a martyr. To this day she is still honored by many Palestinians who believe that she “sacrifice[d] for her country and is a symbol for every Palestinian girl.”<sup>82</sup> The “Martyr Kamal Adwan Operation”, as it was named by al-Asifah, left 36 Israelis dead, and is still considered one of the deadliest attacks in Israeli history and occurred within a

<sup>79</sup> See figure 4; Language: Arabic Year: 1978 Publisher: PLO Unified Information <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/path-to-the-homeland>

Arabic translation: Martyr Kamal Adwan Operation The path to the homeland

<sup>80</sup> Isabel, “Palestinians Honor a Figure Reviled in Israel as a Terrorist.” *The New York Times*, March 12, 2010, sec. Section A; Column 0; Foreign Desk.

<sup>81</sup> William B. Quandt, Paul Jabber, and Ann Mosely Lesch, *The Politics of Palestinian Nationalism*, A Rand Corporation Research Study; Rand Corporation Research Study. (Berkeley,: University of California Press, 1973).

<sup>82</sup> Isabel, “Palestinians Honor a Figure Reviled in Israel as a Terrorist.” *The New York Times*, March 12, 2010, sec. Section A; Column 0; Foreign Desk.

larger context of “political despair and hegemonic silencing”.<sup>83</sup> While there were significant causalities on both sides, the operation was part of a highly strategic political move since the resistance occurred on the eve of then-Prime minister Menachem Begin’s trip for peace talks with Egypt.<sup>84</sup> Although their attempts to derail the Israeli-Egyptian peace talks failed, Mughrabi’s participation in acts of political resistance through armed struggle is just one of many examples of Palestinian women’s continued negotiation of aspects of their normative historical gender roles, responsibilities, and relations.

### **The First Intifada, Second Intifada, and Beyond: Challenging Occupation**

The first Intifada began on December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1987, women and men stood side by side in a democratic and grassroots movement that brought all sectors of Palestinian society together to rebel against their Israeli occupiers.<sup>85</sup> Little girls and little boys could often be seen throwing rocks at Israeli defense forces. Although the call for an independent Palestinian state was a call to men and women alike, shifts in the local context would eventually cause women to step back from the forefront of the movement.<sup>86</sup> During the First Intifada, “the burden of occupation”, challenged traditional Palestinian gender roles, making room for “Palestinian women [to have] a political voice and strengthened their role in society as heads of households, as political and

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<sup>83</sup> Ennaji and Sadiqi, *Gender and Violence in the Middle East*.

<sup>84</sup> “This Week in History: Israel’s Deadliest Terror Attack.” *The Jerusalem Post* | *JPost.com*. Accessed February 16, 2016. <http://www.jpost.com/Features/In-Thespotlight/This-Week-in-History-Israels-deadliest-terror-attack>.

<sup>85</sup> Rabab Abdulhadi, “The Palestinian Women’s Autonomous Movement: Emergence, Dynamics, and Challenges.” *Gender & Society* 12, no. 6 (1998): 649–73.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

environmental activists, and as intermediaries between the Israeli army and Palestinian youth’.”<sup>87</sup>

The signing of 1993 Oslo Accords was the first of many agreements and accords that were based on creating peace within Palestine and Israel, but for the most part only upheld the Israeli status quo.<sup>88</sup> When the Second Intifada had begun in 2000, Palestinians continued to face overt discrimination and occupation. Additionally, Palestinian political parties Fatah and Hamas controlling of the movement largely limited and curtailed Palestinian women’s ability to freely participate in public resistance.<sup>89</sup> The increasingly militant Islamic forms of resistance, which came to dominate the al-Aqsa intifada quickly began to place restrictions on women’s dress and mobility—stifling women’s participation in any type of public resistance.<sup>90</sup> Ironically, in January 2002, during the growing restrictions placed on women’s participation, Wafa Idris became the first female Palestinian martyr when she went on her martyrdom mission.<sup>91</sup> This seeming contradiction challenges the effectiveness of Palestinian men restricting Palestinian women’s movement and ability to participate in armed struggle due to their interpretations of gender norms, but it is important to remember from the broader context that Chechen women were the first Islamic females to engage in militancy, clearing the

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<sup>87</sup> Maria Holt, “Agents of Defiance and Despair: The Impact of Islamic Resistance on Palestinian Women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,” *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 11, no. 3/4 (September 2010): 397–415

<sup>88</sup> Douglas J. Feith, “The Inner Logic of Israel’s Negotiations: Withdrawal Process, Not Peace Process,” *Middle East Quarterly*, March 1, 1996, <http://www.meforum.org/284/the-inner-logic-of-israels-negotiations-withdrawal>.

<sup>89</sup> Victor, *Army of roses*.

<sup>90</sup> Holt, “Agents of Defiance and Despair.”

<sup>91</sup> Bennet, “Arab Woman’s Path to Unlikely ‘Martyrdom.’”

way for other Islamic females to engage in *jihad*.<sup>92</sup> As Maria Holt points out, ‘male control’ is by no means absolute; it is conditioned by the framework of the Israeli Occupation and by women’s actions on their own behalf that challenge unquestioning male dominance not rooted in authentic cultural practices”.<sup>93</sup> From 2000 to 2005, eight Palestinian women<sup>94</sup> followed in Idris’ footsteps in order to resist threats to familial stability and the potential nationhood of the Palestinian people.<sup>95</sup>

Palestinian women have and continue to frame their frustrations and desire to participate in armed struggles as a reaction to the various ways in which the Israeli occupation and other regional political actors have and continue to compromise their personal security, right to life, economic independence, and the larger issue of Palestine’s larger right to self-determination. The realities of occupation are felt by all:

To be honest, when it comes to the impact of Israel’s siege and colonial policies on the people of Gaza, indeed all of Palestine, I do not think that the experiences of men and women differ from each other. When Israel deliberately bombards schools, both males and females are affected. When talking about the limits Israel forces upon our aspirations, both genders share the same suffering. The Israeli government acts with indifference to the Palestinian population. The same lethal policies are applied to men, women and children in an indiscriminate manner.<sup>96</sup>

*Rana Baker, a student of business administration at the Islamic University in Gaza and a freelance journalist*

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<sup>92</sup> Ness, “The Rise in Female Violence.”

<sup>93</sup> Holt, “Agents of Defiance and Despair.”

<sup>94</sup> Diaa Hadid and Rami Nazzal, “Young Palestinian Women Join the West Bank Turmoil,” *The New York Times*, December 1, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/02/world/middleeast/young-palestinian-women-adopt-unfamiliar-role-in-seeking-to-become-killers.html>.

<sup>95</sup> Aitemad Muhanna, *Agency and Gender in Gaza: Masculinity, Femininity and Family during the Second Intifada*, (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013)

<sup>96</sup> “Palestinian Women: The Backbone of Resistance,” Liberation School, accessed February 3, 2016, <http://liberationschool.org/palestinian-women-the-backbone-of-resistance/>.

The daily trauma faced by Palestinians, is bound to incite both feelings of hopelessness and a desire to engage in resistance regardless of gender. Cynthia Ness argues that over the past several decades, the use of violence has been granted a new degree of legitimacy in traditional as well as modern society as the product of larger structural and cultural changes.<sup>97</sup> As “the blurring of private and public space” continues to occur in Palestinian society, there has been a democratization of violence with women’s participation in armed struggle, particularly martyrdom mission, gradually becoming an accepted form of resistance.<sup>98</sup> What is a woman to do when neither the kitchen nor the street is free of insecurity and danger?

Palestinian women do not interpret their participation in armed struggle as a naïve over reaction or a meaningless act of revenge, but as a form of political agency, for their use of violence is “driven by conditions, context and language that are unique to the setting in which it [has] emerge[d]”.<sup>99</sup> While some Palestinian women have found strategies such as mothering, reproducing, and serving as keepers of collective memory to be effective in resistance, others have made the deeply personal decision to make their bodies a weapon, “renegotiating aspects of their normative historical gender roles, responsibilities, and relations” in the ultimate sacrifice.<sup>100</sup>

Andaleeb Takatkeh, a young woman from the West Bank, not only participated in political violence to hurt her occupiers, but “her actions [also] filled the void left by the inaction of Arab leaders”, when she went on a martyrdom mission in 2002. In her widely shared last message to the world, Takatkeh said “I’ve chosen to say with my body what

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<sup>97</sup> Cindy D. Ness, “The Rise in Female Violence,” *Daedalus* 136, no. 1 (2007): 84–93.

<sup>98</sup> Ness, “The Rise in Female Violence.”

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Muhanna, *Agency and Gender in Gaza*, 14.



Arab leaders have failed to say... My body is a barrel of gunpowder that burns the enemy.”<sup>101</sup> In her martyrdom, her body was no longer an object to be manipulated or objectified, but a political weapon that voiced the frustrations and injustices endured by Palestinians as a people. Her critique of Arab states draws attention to both the continued silence of regional powers and their unwillingness to engage with Israel in a more active and militaristic manner. Takatkeh most likely came to the same conclusion that many other Palestinians, both men and women have drawn—with the imbalance of power between Palestine and Israel, conventional warfare is not a viable option. Passivity is not an option, for as Palestinian American activist Eman Khaleq puts it, “We don’t do this (protest and resist) for the fame or the protest photo; we struggle because our lives depend on it.”<sup>102</sup> For some, the anti-colonial struggle must be waged through means of violence.<sup>103</sup>

Once again, Palestinian women have gained public attention for their most recent participations in armed struggles following the bloody and destructive attacks on Gaza during the IDF’s operation *Protective Edge* of the summer of 2014 when more than 2,200

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<sup>101</sup> Charles Tripp, *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 35.

<sup>102</sup> “Palestinian Women: The Backbone of Resistance,” *Liberation School*, accessed February 3, 2016, <http://liberationschool.org/palestinian-women-the-backbone-of-resistance/>.

<sup>103</sup> “The Kitchen or the Battlefield? Women’s Experiences of Violence and ‘Suicide Terrorism’ in the Palestinian Territories,” *Middle East Monitor - The Latest from the Middle East*, accessed February 22, 2016, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/guest-writers/2090-the-kitchen-or-the-battlefield-womens-experiences-of-violence-and-suicide-terrorism-in-the-palestinian-territories>.

were left dead and an estimated 20,000 Palestinian homes destroyed.<sup>104</sup> In October of 2015, a little more than a year after the war, Tuesday, October 13<sup>th</sup> was declared a “day of rage” with both men and women alike taking to the streets in many different cities to protest the Israeli occupation.<sup>105</sup> Photos<sup>106</sup> capturing the crowing unrest show women with traditional Palestinian kuffiyehs covering their faces as they use slingshots to throw rocks at Israeli soldiers.



*Figure 6 Palestinian Protesters throw stones during clashes in the West Bank city of Bethlehem [Abed Al Hashlamoun/EPA]*

During the months of October and November of 2015, it is believed that women and girls accounted for about 20 percent of all Palestinian attackers.<sup>107</sup> During this same period, Israeli authorities say that young women including three teenagers participated in armed struggle through stabbing, attempting to stab, or intending to stab Israeli soldiers

<sup>104</sup> “Israel-Gaza Conflict: 50-Day War by Numbers: 2,139 Palestinians Dead,” The Independent, August 27, 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israel-gaza-conflict-50-day-war-by-numbers-9693310.html>.

<sup>105</sup> “Intifada or Not, Something Powerful Is Going on,” accessed February 3, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/10/palestine-intifada-powerful-151016094419464.html>.

<sup>106</sup> See figure 5, *ibid*.

<sup>107</sup> Hadid and Nazzal, “Young Palestinian Women Join the West Bank Turmoil.”

or civilians.<sup>108</sup> I believe that the adoption of assertive behaviors is a response to “the stark imbalance of power between Israelis and Palestinians” which has meant that “conventional warfare is out of the question and therefore Palestinians have been forced to seek alternative methods to wage their anti-colonial struggle.”<sup>109</sup> Young women are playing an increasingly large role in armed struggle as they struggle to make sense of the persecution of their people—the deaths of their family members, the restriction of their movement, and the lack of economic opportunities within their communities. How should one cope with these types of realities? When you cannot imagine a future where you do not live in fear, hopelessness, or the desire to resist?

The plethora in Palestinian women’s expressions of resistance can be understood by recognizing that windows of opportunity and the changing political context affect different categories of Palestinian women differently, thus producing distinct manifestations of resistance. Palestinian women, much like their male counterparts grapple with the insecurities of life whether it be as a second class citizen in the Jewish state of Israel or as a colonial subject within the Palestinian territories. The current generation of Palestinian women have only known life under occupation;

The main reason for insecurity is the Israeli occupation. It is possible that while you are sitting inside your house, it will be destroyed by a [missile]. I do not feel secure enough to send my kids to school for the same reason. I am not able to move freely or even go to visit my friends due to that. Everywhere you are at risk for Israeli attacks.

*University Student, Village (Gaza Strip)*<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Hadid and Nazzal, “Young Palestinian Women Join the West Bank Turmoil.”

<sup>109</sup> Holt, “Agents of Defiance and Despair.”

<sup>110</sup> The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, “Palestinian Women and Security: Why Palestinian Women and Girls Do Not Feel Secure” (Geneva, Switzerland: The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2010), [http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/palest\\_women\\_security\\_eng\[1\].pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/palest_women_security_eng[1].pdf).

Young Palestinians have only known the wasted time spent at check points, the home demolitions, the late night arrests, and the deafening silence of surrounding Arab countries as they build refugee camps for Palestinians.

Peace processes have and continue to fail Palestinians. As the prominent Palestinian psychiatrist and activist Dr. Eyad Sarraj said when speaking on the rise of suicide bombing amongst Palestinians, “We have tried the United Nations and its Security Council, which by the way have made excellent resolutions on our behalf. For example Resolution 194<sup>111</sup> calling on Israel to allow us to return to our homeland, but to no avail. So we kept wandering around, between airports and refugee camps, waiting for a hero or an earthquake. All we wanted was to go home.”<sup>112</sup> The Camp David accords have not prevented the occupation and continued settlement of Israelis on Palestinian land. Egypt and Syria’s losses to Israel proved early on that even they could not save Palestine. International systems for justice have failed Palestine and can easily be seen as a lost cause. These women’s desire to participate in armed struggle should be considered abnormal when Palestinian women already have a past of being martyrs and resisters who have dedicated their lives to fighting for the recognition of Palestinian’s equal right to land, life and pursuit of happiness.

### **The Rise of the Islamic State**

Since its declaration of creating an Islamic State in June of 2014, the self-named Islamic State (IS) has played a large part in the continuation of violence and conflict in

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<sup>111</sup> see here; “Resolution 194,” UNRWA, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://www.unrwa.org/content/resolution-194>.

<sup>112</sup> Eyad Sarraj, “Why We Have Become Suicide Bombers Understanding Palestinian Terror,” Middle East Realities, August 16, 2001, <http://www.middleeast.org/read.cgi?category=Magazine&num=347&standalone=&month=8&year=2001&function=text>.

the Middle East as part of the group's stated goal of creating a transnational caliphate, an area exclusively under the rule and authority of a Muslim leader.<sup>113</sup> Various sources have come up with different frames for understanding the rise of IS, with "Terrorism experts view[ing] IS as an al-Qaida offshoot and attribute the absence of spectacular attacks to date to what they view as a lack of organizational capacity. [In addition], [c]riminologists see IS as a mafia-like holding company out to maximize profit" and "Scholars in the humanities point to the apocalyptic statements by the IS media department, its glorification of death and the belief that Islamic State is involved in a holy mission"<sup>114</sup>.

When looking at the rise of the organization I follow the analysis of scholar Nelly Lahoud which suggests that, "the evolution of the IS is best understood as an outcome of both design and accidents" within a particularly tumultuous political landscape.<sup>115</sup> The group is highly organized with the group's territorial gains and governance structure being metered out according to its interpretations of Islamic teachings—all parts of their plan for building a caliphate. IS is also the product of "accidents" in the political games in the region which have allowed the created advantageous conflicts, political instability, and military landscape within the Middle East and North Africa that the group now exploits.<sup>116</sup> Its diverse sources of funding which include oil, donations, and war loot has

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<sup>113</sup> The Editors, "On ISIS," Middle East Research and Information Project 45, no. *MER* 276 (Fall 2015), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer276/isis>.

<sup>114</sup> SPIEGEL ONLINE Germany Hamburg, "The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State," SPIEGEL ONLINE, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/islamic-state-files-show-structure-of-islamist-terror-group-a-1029274.html>.

<sup>115</sup> Muhammad al-'Ubaydi et al., "The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State" (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center at Westpoint, December 2014).

<sup>116</sup> al-'Ubaydi et al., "The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State."

and continues to provide the group with the money needed to govern and provide social services for the people within its territory.<sup>117</sup>

The Islamic State is led by the “previously little-known preacher named Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi” who proclaimed himself head of the caliphate, the Islamic State, immediately demanded the loyalty of Muslims worldwide in 2014, encouraging them to immigrate and join the Ummah, the Islamic religious community, in IS territory.<sup>118</sup> Al-Baghdadi has been presented to be “a descendant of the tribe of Quraysh” Abu Muhammad al-‘Adnani the former cleric and spokesperson for Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which is one of seven conditions to qualify for the office of caliph according to classical Sunni scholars.<sup>119</sup> Under his leadership, the Islamic State has been “the perpetrator of choreographed outrages, the enslaver of women, the looter of antiquity and the purveyor of vicious sectarianism”, with the help of its estimated 35,000 legions who both serve as combatants and administrators in its constructed state-like apparatus centered in Raqqa, Syria.<sup>120</sup> Al-Baghdadi has made it clear that for those fighting for IS “ejecting infidels and apostates through jihad comes first, but holding the community together after this is accomplished comes next.”<sup>121</sup>

The Islamic State is “frequently described as an offshoot of al-Qaeda, in order to locate the group at the extreme end of the jihadi spectrum, which in turn is at the fringes of Sunni Islamism, both in terms of its puritanical or Salafi doctrine and its rigid

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<sup>117</sup> al-‘Ubaydi et al., “The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State.”

<sup>118</sup> The Editors, “On ISIS.”

<sup>119</sup> al-‘Ubaydi et al., “The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State.”

<sup>120</sup> The Editors, “On ISIS.”

<sup>121</sup> al-‘Ubaydi et al., “The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State.”

enforcement of same”.<sup>122</sup> It is very important to understand that while IS’ does promote a certain brand of Islam, it in no way has the power to define what Islam is for the millions of Muslims around the world. For the most part, the group disregards Sunni jurisprudence and similar to its predecessor al-Qaeda, “IS justifies its violence against non-Muslims with the idea that they are infidels (*kuffar*) and its attacks on Muslims, including Sunnis, with the notion of *takfir* or excommunication”.<sup>123</sup> The Islamic State does not seek membership in the United Nations and has no desire to be part of the global community of nation-states.<sup>124</sup> Accordingly to the Islamic State’s, not only do Western forces need to be removed from the region, but regional players also cannot be trusted. For example, “The Syrian regime and Iran [are] vilifie[d] as *rawafid* or refusers of true Islam because [the Islamic State] identifies them with Shi‘ism; the Russians [IS] hates as godless supporters of Assad; the Turks and Gulf Arabs [IS] disdains as handmaidens of the West, like the rest of the opposition in Syria, particularly the Kurdish militias”.<sup>125</sup> IS seeks to resist and rebel against the larger nation-state system and its creation such as the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement and “redraw today’s world map and create a global Islamic state, a caliphate”.<sup>126</sup> If we define states as “entities that claim a monopoly on violence, provid[ing] basic services and promulgate an ideology” and recognize that “in their founding moments, states-in-the-making that seek absolute sovereignty may orchestrate spectacles of extraordinary violence not just to deter the violence of others but also to

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<sup>122</sup> al-‘Ubaydi et al., “The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State.”

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> The Editors, “On ISIS.”

<sup>126</sup> al-‘Ubaydi et al., “The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State.”

smother all forms of dissent,” the Islamic State can and should be viewed as a state-building movement although arguably more violent and destructive than the case of Palestine<sup>127</sup>.

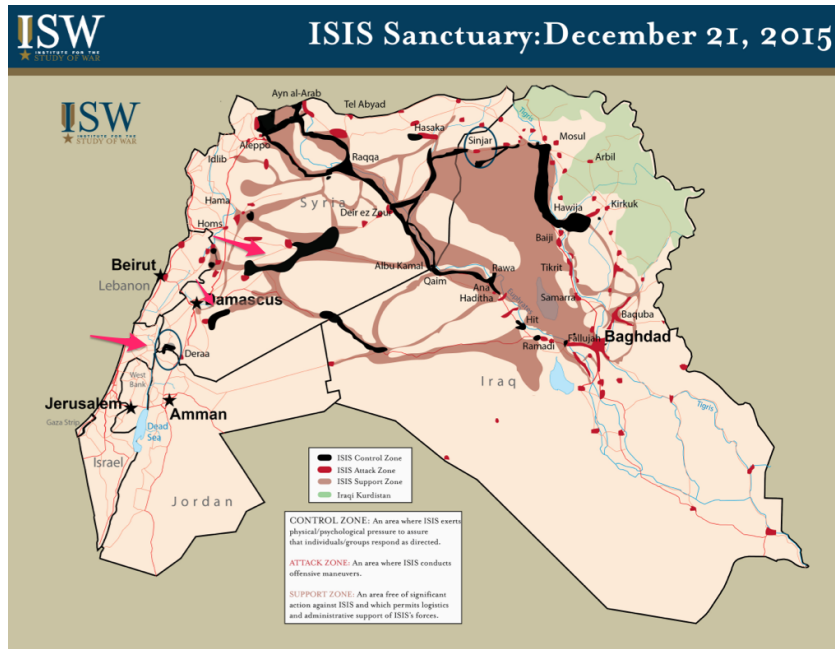


Figure 7 Islamic State sanctuary as of December 2015, with IS gains in Syria during 2015 indicated [Institute of the Study of War and Business Insider]

### ***Iraq***

The Islamic State’s presence in Iraq can be traced back to Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi’s 2004 establishment of al-Qaeda in Iraq when combatants were first enlisted to fight against the US occupation of Iraq as well as the Iraqi government which was seen as being filled with Shi’a political parties that took over in 2005.<sup>128</sup> IS’ growth within Iraq can be directly related to two causes; “the political sectarianism that was introduced by the 2005 constitution and the forced displacement (tahjir qasri) of people on the basis of religious affiliation to create a demographic map along sectarian lines”<sup>129</sup> After the

<sup>127</sup> The Editors, “On ISIS.”

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> al-‘Ubaydi et al., “The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State.”



dissolving of Saddam Hussein's government, many Baathists who had been army and intelligence officers were left without unemployed, ostracized, and would find that they had no place within the new government.<sup>130</sup> One scholar of Iraqi politics, Saad Jawad, believes that the US ousting of Saddam Hussein as well as his government "reduc[ed] the Iraqi state to a collection of Shi'as, Sunnis, Kurds and other minorities," which provided causation for "the new constitution emphasis[ing] differences and divisive issues rather than focusing on the uniting elements of Iraqi society."<sup>131</sup> The increase in sectarianism within Iraq and its domination within political discourse allowed different Shia and Sunni militant groups to form and eventually displace people—furthering sectarian schisms within Iraqi society. IS took advantage of this rise in sectarianism particularly during the Maliki government when Iraqis demonstrated in 2012 and 2013 against the government. When peaceful protest became violent, IS combatants attempted to join the fight with their Sunni brethren in Ramadi in January 2014, only to be pushed out. Later, IS would attack and overtake the city of Mosul in the Nineveh province, beginning their reign of terror in Iraq.<sup>132</sup>

Jihadis and ex-Baath political party members have come to play a large role in the Islamic States operation and military efforts in Iraq. Their partnership between Baathists and Salafi Jihadism is an old one, connected to Saddam Hussein's "faith campaign" in an attempt to "portray himself and his regime as protectors of (Sunni) Muslim piety" in the 1990's due large military and economic losses following his ill-fated invasion of

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<sup>130</sup> al-'Ubaydi et al., "The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State."

<sup>131</sup> al-'Ubaydi et al., "The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State."

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

Kuwait.<sup>133</sup> Their combined forces have given the man power as well as military strategy to continue and grow their operation in Iraq. From November 2011 to May 2014 (before the IS's advance into Mosul), the IS self-reported over 19,000 military operations in Iraq alone.<sup>134</sup>

### *Syria*

In 2011, Syrians took to the street to protest the al-Assad regime as the citizens of other Arab nations such as Tunisia and Egypt were beginning to openly protest their dictators.<sup>135</sup> The movement, part of the so called Arab Spring, has led to the development of a 5 year civil war in Syria—one that continues to be intensified and prolonged due to foreign interventions and proxies. The rise of the Islamic State in Syria has been far more subtle than its growing influence in Iraq, with the group infiltrating northern Syrian communities through Dawah centers which began opening in 2013.<sup>136</sup> The Dawah centers were described as being “innocent looking missionary offices, not unlike the ones that Islamic charities have opened worldwide” and were open to all members of the community. As soon as IS was able to find enough recruits to serve as spies it began to expand its presence and participate in military operations absorbing fighters from other Jihadi organizations and eliminating rivals through blackmail and assassination.<sup>137</sup>

The Islamic State's military wings in Syria were initially filled with foreign fighters who were immigrating to the region to join in the fight against the Assad regime. These fighters who had begun entering the region in 2012, would assist IS in one of its

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<sup>133</sup> The Editors, “On ISIS.”

<sup>134</sup> al-‘Ubaydi et al., “The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State.”

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Germany, “The Terror Strategist.”

<sup>137</sup> The Editors, “On ISIS.”

largest territory acquisitions with the taking of al-Raqqa, Syria, the working capital of the caliphate that has been mostly under control of the IS since January 2014.<sup>138</sup> Once a “sleepy provincial city on the Euphrates river” al-Raqqa and its people were infiltrated and then forcibly subjugated to IS’ rule of the city—taking advantage of the political uncertainty within the country. While IS has made some progress in gaining territory in Syria, in December of 2013 both secular Syrian brigades from across the country and the Islamist group al-Nusra Front joined together to wage war against the IS.<sup>139</sup>

In the case of Syria, IS benefits greatly from its status as a second tier threat with Assad regime forces as well as opposition groups fighting amongst themselves, the fight against IS has not given as much attention as it deserves. The only group to fully and effectively fight against IS has been the Kurdish forces, who push IS out of Kobane and the areas bordering Turkey.<sup>140</sup> As we see in the examples of Syria and Iraq, IS has and continues to thrive because of the instability within these countries and the inability for sound plans for national reconciliation to be reached.

#### **Recreating the Islamic Ummah: Women’s Voices in the Islamic State**

As a fairly new resistance movement, scholarly work on the Islamic State is still forthcoming—particularly women’s accounts on their experiences living within IS territory. While this lack of information does limit the amount of study and analysis that can be done on Muslim women’s voices within the Islamic State, the experiences of Palestinian women can inform the questions and concentrations in future academics pursuit of this topic. As a transnational movement that has been forcibly taking control of

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<sup>138</sup> al-‘Ubaydi et al., “The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State.”

<sup>139</sup> Germany, “The Terror Strategist.”

<sup>140</sup> The Editors, “On ISIS.”

territory within many nation states and attracts supporters from all over the world, emerging accounts of women's experiences from IS territory must be closely and further analyzed. Although women within the Islamic State are currently restricted to roles of support within the Islamic State, many have made it evident that they would like to participate in armed struggle. Trends amongst current experiences can shed light on women of the Islamic State's potential progression to filling more combat roles. As in the case of Palestine, there are many diverse experiences and motivations for women desiring to participate in or directly supporting armed struggle in the Islamic State. Is their resistance a means of survival, as a political weapon, or something altogether different? What aspects of these women's lived realities might attract women to seek out armed struggle on behalf of the Islamic State? Using existing accounts from women who are currently or have been associated with the Islamic State, I wish to begin answering some of these questions in an attempt to better understand the diversity of activism that exists within the Islamic State.

***Khadijah Dare***

In 2014 soon after the beheading of American journalist James Foley, Khadijah Dare became one of the most prominent female faces of the Islamic State when, she posted a tweet on social media openly seeking to participate in jihad. The then 22-year-old convert from Lewisham, south London, tweeted; “Any links 4 da execution of da journalist plz. Allahu Akbar. UK must b shaking up haha. I wna b da [sic] 1st UK woman 2 kill a UK or US terrorist!” pledging to do what no other woman within the Islamic State had done yet—fully participate in armed struggle.<sup>141</sup> Her fame only grew as it later

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<sup>141</sup> “ISIS Gender Equality? British Woman Vows to Become First Female to Behead Western Prisoners in Syria,” *Al Bawaba*, accessed October 1, 2015,

became clear that she and her husband were the stars of a short documentary piece filmed in Syria, focusing on their lives on the war front and respective transitions from England and Sweden. In the film *Khadijah*, who then was going by the alias of Maryam, was filmed shooting guns and discussing weapons with her fighter husband as it told the story of her leaving her friends and family behind at home to make hijrah to Syria.

During one of many interviews, *Khadijah* frames her leaving England as a journey to find a husband who was “willing to just sacrifice their life in this world for the life in the hereafter.”<sup>142</sup> Throughout the rest of the short documentary, *Khadijah* continues to justify her actions as well as those of her husband as a religious duty, even urging other Muslims to “stop being so selfish...focusing on your families or studies” and entreats them to emulate her and immigrate to Syria and join the holy war.<sup>143</sup> In other segments she additionally describes her husband’s duty “to liberate the country”, a central theme throughout the documentary. When questioned about being classified as a terrorist, she responds that,

We haven’t invaded any land. Taken their houses, their food, raping their women, killing their men, we haven’t done that. The Muslims have not done that. It’s the people who have come to us who have done that. And yet we are called the terrorists.<sup>144</sup>

*Khadijah*’s explanation of why she should not be labelled a terrorist, speak to a question Rafia Zakaria poses in her article, “Women and Islamic Militancy”; “Is it possible that ISIS appeals to some Muslim women, not because they are fooled by it, but because its

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<http://www.albawaba.com/editorchoice/british-female-first-behead-prisoners-syria-598356>.

<sup>142</sup> Channel 4 News, *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria*, accessed February 27, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hAIKlQ2g1Q>.

<sup>143</sup> Channel 4 News, *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria*.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

political vision seems to offer solutions to some of their problems?”<sup>145</sup> Khadijah’s response to the question of being a terrorist is filled with the rhetoric of liberation of Muslim people and critiques the poor treatment of her Muslim brothers and sisters in Syria and supports Zakaria’s conclusion that for many the Islamic State provides “an escape from both the ghettoized status of Islam in the West as well as the restrictive cultural mores of many Muslim countries; just as crucially, it can also seem like a legitimate response to being victimized by U.S.-led wars that promise female empowerment but deliver widespread destruction.”<sup>146</sup>

Khadijah also speaks of prejudice being an issue that impacted her decision to leave England for Syria saying that, “Before I used to wear the face veil it was fine, but when I started to cover my face people used to say ‘go back to your country’. I used to reply, ‘I was born around the corner’.”<sup>147</sup> Her newly found faith and her practice of it made her feel ostracized and to a certain extent a stranger in her own land. In her article “Jihad and Girl Power: How ISIS Lured 3 London Girls”, Katrin Bennhold posits the following, “In post-9/11 austerity Britain, a time when a deep crisis of identity and values has swept the country, fitting in can be harder for Muslim girls than for boys... [Muslim girls] see Western fashions sexualizing girls from an early age, while Western feminists look at the hijab as a symbol of oppression.”<sup>148</sup> Her arguments highlights how England’s specific cultural context which is filled with xenophobic and imperialist rhetoric

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<sup>145</sup> Rafia Zakaria, “Women and Islamic Militancy,” *Dissent* 62, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 118–25.

<sup>146</sup> Zakaria, “Women and Islamic Militancy.”

<sup>147</sup> Channel 4 News, British Women Joining Jihad in Syria.

<sup>148</sup> Katrin Bennhold, “Jihad and Girl Power: How ISIS Lured 3 London Girls,” *The New York Times*, August 17, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/18/world/europe/jihad-and-girl-power-how-isis-lured-3-london-teenagers.html>.

contributed to Khadijah and possibly other Muslim women's decision to make *hijrah* (emigrate) and join the Islamic State.<sup>149</sup> With the 'liberation' from the secular life in places like England, the ability to marry a jihadi, and to create a sense of belonging within the caliphate that the Islamic State seems to provide, it becomes easier to understand one woman's draw to join the Islamic State. Interestingly, despite the many abilities that the Islamic State provides women like Khadijah, who have migrated from "Western" countries, the ability to openly practice their faith, the gender hierarchy present with the group and the host culture of Syria still restricts women's roles to a more domestic realm—preventing women from truly engaging in armed struggle.

### *Shams*

Shams is the alias of another type of woman in the Islamic State, highlighting those who migrate to territories of the Islamic State as a means of fulfilling what they consider to be a religious duty, but additionally supports the Islamic State through their professional skills.<sup>150</sup> The 26-year-old Malaysian, is known for her diary of the time she claims she has spent in the Islamic State-held cities Taqba and Raqqa using various forms of social media to share details about her marriage to a Morocco-born jihadi with the *nom de guerre* Abu Baraa.<sup>151</sup> On several occasions, Shams shared posts with pictures about jihad as well as words of encouragement for other women contemplating *hijrah* to join the Islamic State on her now removed Tumblr blog entitled Dairy Of A Muhajirah ("one

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> "ISIS Wife Blogs on Romance and 'martyrdom,'" accessed February 28, 2016, <http://ara.tv/nd2tv>.

<sup>151</sup> "Diary of a Jihadi Bride: Ex-Doctor Keeps Journal of Time with ISIS," *Mail Online*, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2843901/The-secret-diary-jihadi-bride-Doctor-leaves-middle-class-life-Malaysia-travels-join-ISIS-keeps-journal-time-Syria.html>.

who has emigrated”).<sup>152</sup> Her role as a doctor was something that Shams made highly public and actually states that she first travelled to Syria in order to use her medical expertise to treat wounded jihadis.<sup>153</sup>

Figure 8 Shams Facebook post: Dairy Of A Muhajirah<sup>154</sup>

Shams’ comments show a dedication to the ideals of the Islamic State and a love



for Jihad saying, “A life without jihad is like drinking sea water. It keeps you thirsty & cause you dehydrated [sic]. That's the condition of our Ummah [international Muslim community] today.”<sup>155</sup> While Shams rarely addresses “western” governments as the enemies of ‘true Muslims’ within the Islamic State she does speak about the Islamic State ensuring the correct practice of Sharia law for all Muslims in the region.

<sup>152</sup> “Not Found,” accessed February 28, 2016, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com/post/97721291669/the-life-of-a-muhajirah-in-the-islamic-state-my#notes>.

<sup>153</sup> “Diary of a Jihadi Bride.”

<sup>154</sup> Ellie Hall BuzzFeed News Reporter, “An ISIS Love Story: ‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part,’” BuzzFeed, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/ellievhall/an-isis-love-story-till-martyrdom-do-us-part>.

<sup>155</sup> Reporter, “An ISIS Love Story.”





Figure 9 Tweet by Shams

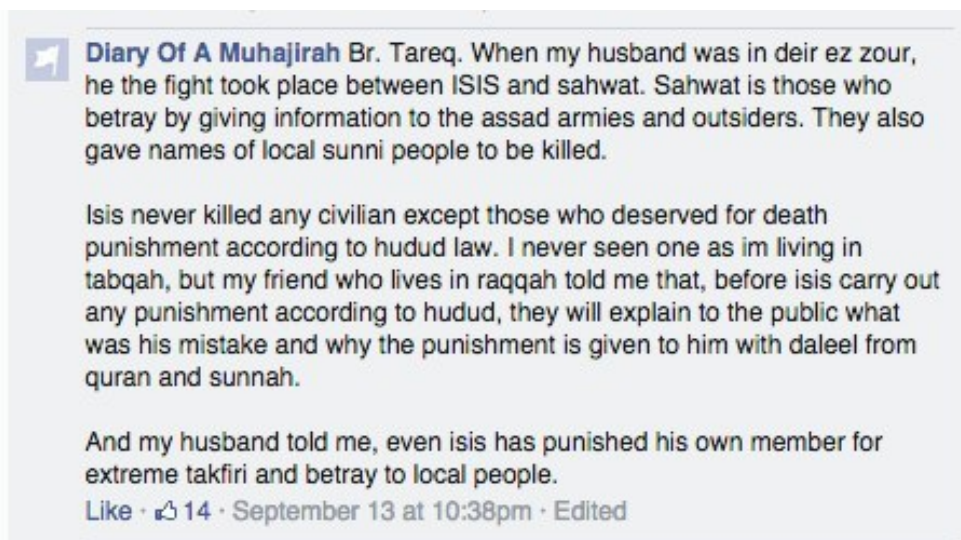


Figure 10 Facebook: Diary Of A Muhajirah

For Shams, her draw to the Islamic State is very much rooted in the community provided by the Islamic State. Within the territory of the Islamic State and as the wife of a jihadi, she is part of the Ummah, or Islamic community, that the group claims to represent. As an individual dedicated to this community and the idea of martyrdom being both the ultimate expression of her faith and a means of defending the Ummah—if given the opportunity, she might pursue an armed role within the Islamic State’s resistance movement.

**“Khadija”**

The rise of the Islamic State and its forcible seizure of lands throughout the Middle East has drastically changed the lives of many people living within the region. For those trying to survive within the Islamic State's brutal and authoritarian rule, becoming active in the organization is a means of stability within the civil unrest of the Syrian War. As Khadija's story shows, there are stark differences between the lives of women who migrate to join the Islamic State and those whose lives are turned upside down when their towns are over taken or they are displaced by the lack of economic prospects.

Khadija was one of many Syrians who joined peaceful protests against the government of President Bashar al-Assad after the Syrian uprising began five years ago. In an interview with a CNN reporter she described her life immediately after the uprising saying, "Everything around us was chaos... Free Syrian Army, the regime, barrel bombs, strikes, the wounded, clinics, blood -- you want to tear yourself away, to find something to run to... My problem was I ran away to something uglier."<sup>156</sup> As life and the realities of civil unrest weighed on Khadija she began talking to an Islamic State fighter who described the group as "...going to properly implement Islam."<sup>157</sup> After living with such uncertainty, Khadija got in contact with a cousin who told her that she could join her and her Islamic State-affiliated husband in Raqqa and become a member of the al-Khanssaa brigade where her cousin worked in.

Khadija was able to talk her family into moving to Raqqa, but this would be a choice that she would later regret. In her new role, Khadija policed other women within

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<sup>156</sup> Arwa Damon and Gul Tuysuz CNN, "Exclusive: Confessions of a Female ISIS Member - CNN.com," CNN, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/06/world/meast/isis-female-fighter/index.html>.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

Raqqa, making sure that they were dressed and behaving according to the Islamic States rules. For pay, she received \$200 a month and received food rations—an ample amount for a single woman. When reflecting on her time in the brigade she said, "At the start, I was happy with my job. I felt that I had authority in the streets. But then I started to get scared, scared of my situation. I even started to be afraid of myself."<sup>158</sup> Discouraged by the brutality of Islamic State leaders toward all those under its rule including women, she eventually made the decision to leave the Islamic State. Khadija saw first-hand how “The Al Khansaa Brigade illustrates well the twofaced nature of ISIS ‘feminism.’ On the one hand, it offers leadership roles and empowerment for women. On the other hand, it enforces inherently antifeminist policies”, further emphasizing the groups gender hierarchy.<sup>159</sup>

***Syrian Women of al-Khansaa***

In a 2015 *New York Times* article, three Syrian women, all former members of the Islamic State morality police who escaped to Turkey were interviewed about their experiences both together and separately, over the course of two multiday visits.<sup>160</sup> All three women spoke of living independent lives prior to the Syrian uprising and the Islamic States seizure of their hometown of Raqqa about which they observed, “Syrians [have] become second-class citizens — at best...Not only had Raqqa residents become subjects of the Organization’s mostly Iraqi leadership, but their place in society fell even

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<sup>158</sup> CNN, “Exclusive.”

<sup>159</sup> Zakaria, “Women and Islamic Militancy.”

<sup>160</sup> Azadeh Moaveni, “ISIS Women and Enforcers in Syria Recount Collaboration, Anguish and Escape,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/22/world/middleeast/isis-wives-and-enforcers-in-syria-recount-collaboration-anguish-and-escape.html>.

further overnight.”<sup>161</sup> While none of the women believed in the Islamic States ideology, they did all become members of the al-Khanssaa brigade, undergoing compulsory military and religious training together. As the reporter summarizes, “In the moment, each choice seemed like the right one, a way to keep life tolerable: marrying fighters to assuage the Organization and keep their families in favor; joining the Khanssaa Brigade to win some freedom of movement and an income in a city where women had been stripped of self-determination.”<sup>162</sup>

Each of the women eventually came to see that their roles within the Islamic State would not guarantee them a new life of happiness. While joining the al-Khanssaa brigade gave these women power, as their time within the brigade went on, Asma, Dua, and Aws began to see that their power would always be restricted in accordance to their nationality. As Aws explained, ““As women, our status depended on his [their husband’s] status, among the male fighters, this had been clear from the beginning: Salaries, cars, neighborhoods and housing were allocated in large part by nationality”.”<sup>163</sup> In a time of uncertainty, these women craved power and stability, but only saw prejudice and injustice. As the months went on they realized that in actuality the Islamic State had become an authoritarian monster. They saw a group with no real outlet to voice grievances and that stoned a woman when she held up a sign protesting against the Islamic State in front of a police station, justifying her punishment by falsely accusing her of adultery. Their reality became bleak and they eventually could not stand to live in the Islamic State.

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<sup>161</sup> Moaveni, “ISIS Women and Enforcers in Syria Recount Collaboration, Anguish and Escape.”

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

As they began to see how they were being used and manipulated as police women and forced into being the wives for martyrs, Asma, Dua, and Aws eventually left Raqqa for Turkey. The experiences of these young women show how native Syrian women attempt to navigate the invasion of Islamic State forces by inserting themselves with the power structures of the Islamic State. Participating in the Islamic State was about attempting to survive and to reclaim the life that they knew—where they had the power to make decisions even if it was over the punishment of others. To an extent, the women’s participation within the Brigade was about reclaiming and asserting their dignity as Syrians while their town became overrun by foreigners who all claimed to want to liberate them, but proved only to oppress. In a poignant state, Asma says, “Who knows when the fighting will stop? Syria will become like Palestine; every year, people think: ‘Next year, it will end. We will be free.’ And decades pass. Syria is a jungle now.”<sup>164</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In looking at the diverse experiences of women in the Islamic State and Palestinian, we see the many ways that these women have created spaces for themselves to participate in and/or support armed struggle while also navigating “preexisting cultural context of gender hierarchy, local conditions, and international and regional developments”.<sup>165</sup> The pursuit of martyrdom is not something restricted by gender, but instead should be seen as a particular form of resistance that becomes more attractive and significant within contexts of overt oppression and silencing of peoples. Women, like men, have political motives for their actions, but also deal with additional societal ideals

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<sup>164</sup> Moaveni, “ISIS Women and Enforcers in Syria Recount Collaboration, Anguish and Escape.”

<sup>165</sup> Rabab Abdulhadi, “The Palestinian Women’s Autonomous Movement.”

that often seek to restrict or compartmentalize their actions.

Contrary to many assertions made by Western feminists, the Palestinian examples explored above have shown that Palestinian women's participation in armed struggle is an individual choice informed by many aspects of their lived experiences including a desire to contribute to the larger nationalist movement. These women understand a key point that many forget—the bodies of Palestinian women are politicized. Without understanding the history and context of the occupation it is easy to overlook this fact, but the politicization of their bodies is something that Palestinian women do not have the privilege of forgetting. Why should their bodies, an area already politicized not be allowed to become their weapon? Do their actions lose legitimacy simply because they are non-state actors, women, or a combination of both?

As the Islamic State continues to grow and mature as a resistance and state-building movement of sorts, it is important to remain cognizant of the developments of women's participation in armed struggle in Palestine, but also realize that the two cases, although located in the same region are not the same. As we have seen, this transnational organization has the support of many people in its territories, but it also seen as an authoritative and violent group that has manipulated and taken advantage of many of those who are dealing with civil unrest in countries such as Iraq, Syria, and Libya. In comparing the experiences of *muhajirahs*, female migrants, and the natives who eventually joined the Islamic State it becomes clear that one woman's liberation is another's oppression. We cannot not allow the existence of women's groups such as the al-Khanssaa brigade to represent Islamic feminism(s), as any empowerment of migrant women stems from the oppression of natives within the territory of the Islamic State.

While it is important to allow women to describe their own experiences and

responses to the conflict that characterizes their lives, it is of equal importance to study the ideologies and actors who seek to construct their own counter-narratives of womanhood. In the next chapter I move away from women's testimonies to focus on the powerful gender constructs that they navigate.

## Chapter Two

### Mother, Daughter, Wife, or a Martyr: Narratives of Womanhood

*The Palestinian woman is the first teacher... She is the carrier of the idea of Palestine in this land.... She has the great and rare humane role as "guardian of our generations" in revolutions and intifadas as well as in horizons of peace.... The Palestinian woman has constructed institutions... building Palestinian society in its lively, social, legal, economic, cultural, and human aspects.... We cannot forget woman's role in our land in education, and the shaping of the Palestinian human's memory from the moment he comes into life..... Woman is the inspiration of artists in all of the human ages.... The Palestinian woman is kneaded from the dough of this homeland's earth, fragrant with its orange and lemon flowers, worked with its Za'tar and olives.... She is a homeland named Palestine, the stem of our first birth.*

Excerpt from an article in a woman's journal published by the Jerusalem Center for Women's Studies, titled "My Homeland in a Woman" (Kul un-Nisa, Apr. 1996)<sup>166</sup>

Various actors within resistance movements in the Middle East construct their own narratives of womanhood—placing women into the gender roles that they see fit. As Cynthia Cockburn explains in her studies on gender and war, there is a difference in how men and women are positioned within conflict, which can plausibly be extended to extend such analysis to resistance movements.<sup>167</sup> Whether mothers, daughters, wives, or even martyrs, these women's purposes are often interpreted and manipulated in combination with gendered lenses and ideological leanings. In this chapter I describe how nationalist and Islamist ideologies have impacted resistance groups' imaginings of womanhood within their particular contexts. Most importantly, I elaborate on what is the purpose of confining women to these roles and what exactly do they entail. In this chapter I undertake here a contextualized study of women's roles within resistance movements

<sup>166</sup> Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel*, c2002, 69.

<sup>167</sup> Wenona Mary Giles and Jennifer Hyndman, *Sites of Violence Gender and Conflict Zones*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 27.



and state building projects in Palestine and The Islamic State as defined by different groups and their connection to society, conflict, and their respective movement ideologies.

Ann McClintock argues, “All nationalisms are gendered and all are invented... all nations depend on powerful constructions of gender”.<sup>168</sup> Gender is key to understanding these imagined communities as “systems of of cultural representation whereby people come to imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community”.<sup>169</sup> In most male-derived definitions of nationalism, “Women are typically construed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency”.<sup>170</sup> I also focus on gender issues surrounding nationalism as they are generally “most sharply articulated during periods of military conflict, when men’s and women’s bodies become the site of that conflict”, which can be seen within both Palestine and the Islamic State.<sup>171</sup> In the following sections I will focus on the four major ways that women are implicated in the building of imagined communities as enumerated by Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias that include;

- As biological reproducers of the members and boundaries of national collectivities
- As active transmitters and producers of the national culture
- As symbolic signifiers of national difference

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<sup>168</sup> Anne McClintock, “Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family,” *Feminist Review*, no. 44 (1993): 61–80

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> Edward. Mortimer and Robert Fine, *People, Nation and State: The Meaning of Ethnicity and Nationalism* (London ; I.B. Tauris, 1999), [http://bvbr.bib-bvb.de:8991/F?func=service&doc\\_library=BVB01&doc\\_number=008810565&line\\_number=0001&func\\_code=DB\\_RECORDS&service\\_type=MEDIA](http://bvbr.bib-bvb.de:8991/F?func=service&doc_library=BVB01&doc_number=008810565&line_number=0001&func_code=DB_RECORDS&service_type=MEDIA).

- As active Participants in national struggles<sup>172</sup>

### **Nationalism & Palestinian Women**

In the case of Palestine, in their attempts to mobilize large amounts of people, “the Palestinian national movement were forced to deal with an important paradox: how to define and conceptualize women’s roles without disturbing the delicate gendered balance in Palestinian society”, in response they carefully constructed images of Palestinian womanhood.<sup>173</sup> After the formal creation of the state of Israel and proliferation of Palestinian nationalist groups, Palestinian leadership drew on societal norms including patriarchy in their construction of women’s roles which often “reaffirm[ed] the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct” and “pressur[ed] women to articulate their gender interest within the terms set by traditional nationalist discourse.”<sup>174</sup> Palestinian womanhood became a signifier of “national honor”, with imaginings of motherhood being key to their nationalist project.<sup>175</sup>

### **Motherhood**

Within areas of conflict including many places in the Middle East, these contexts of instability and violence have complicated mainstream notions of motherhood. In this section I look at the ways in which mothering and motherhood have been defined, experienced, and in some cases renegotiated within contexts of violence and nationalist and resistance movements.

In Julie Peteet’s ethnographical text, *Icons and Militants: Mothering in the Danger Zone*, she states that the “Key to understanding motherhood within Palestine is

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<sup>172</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, “Women and the Biological Reproduction of ‘the Nation,’” *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Links Across Differences: Gender, Ethnicity, and Nationalism, 19, no. 1–2 (January 1996): 17–24.

<sup>173</sup> Rabab Abdulhadi, “The Palestinian Women’s Autonomous Movement”, 654.

<sup>174</sup> Rabab Abdulhadi, “The Palestinian Women’s Autonomous Movement”, 654.

<sup>175</sup> Anat Berko and Edna Erez, “Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women’s Liberation or Oppression?,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 6 (2007), 494–495.

understanding the historical connection between masculinity and war”.<sup>176</sup> For a long time, manhood in Palestine was not directly associated with “war-making activities”, particularly when Palestine was under Ottoman rule. Instead, a man’s honor was derived from his ability to evade conscription. As political situations have changed, Palestinian masculinity has now come to be rooted in the ability to protect, defend, and sustain home and family through militancy or social astuteness.<sup>177</sup> In contemporary Palestinian formulations of gender, becoming a mother is the fulfilment of womanhood and the attainment of femininity.<sup>178</sup> Peteet argues that Palestinian women have reconstructed narratives of motherhood and “responded to this conflation of mothering with nationalism and act[ing] within its parameter while asserting their own demands and claims on, as well as critiques of, the polity.”<sup>179</sup>

Motherhood at its most fundamental definition is based on a woman’s ability to birth and take care of her children. Within the Palestinian context, the biological aspect of motherhood is often conceptualized as a national duty to bear many children (Massad 1995; Peteet 1991: 184; Sharoni 1995: 35) in order to replenish wartime losses, which categorize fertility and reproduction, cultivating a sense of contribution and commitment to the national struggle.<sup>180</sup> This is no surprise, especially “when one considers... the central role the myth (or reality) of ‘common origin’ plays in the construction of most ethnic and national collectivities” and that “one joins the collectivity usually by being

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<sup>176</sup> Julie Peteet, “Icons and Militants: Mothering in the Danger Zone,” *Signs* 23, no. 1 (1997): 103.

<sup>177</sup> Peteet, “Icons and Militants”, 103.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*.

born into it”.<sup>181</sup> The ability to give life prized within Palestine and the Islamic State as one see Palestinian women speaking of holding “*batin askari*” (military womb) and women of the Islamic State being praised as birthing the so called “cubs of the caliphate”.<sup>182</sup>

In her study on the behavior and politics of reproduction in the city of Galilee entitled, *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel*, anthropologist Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh explains how, “Reproductive practices and discourses have become an important marker of self and other because they are a central framework in Israeli definitions of self and Palestinian other.”<sup>183</sup> Her study connects the Israeli government and Palestinian nationalist leadership’s game of “political arithmetic” to biological reproductive methods being used to sustain the state.<sup>184</sup> Pro-natalist policies were officially implemented by the Israeli government beginning in 1949, in order to encourage the Jewish birth rate and achieve Zionists’ goals of creating a “demographically homogeneous” Israel.<sup>185</sup> In response to this “threat”, Palestinian leadership began to emphasize the role of women’s bodies within the nationalist project. Women were now “considered markers of national boundaries, not only symbolically but physically as well.” Even much later in communiques of the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising addressed to Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during

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<sup>181</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, “Women and the Biological Reproduction of ‘the Nation,’” *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Links Across Differences: Gender, Ethnicity, and Nationalism, 19, no. 1–2 (January 1996): 17–24

<sup>182</sup> Peteet, “Icons and Militants”, 114.

<sup>183</sup> Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel*, c2002, 155.

<sup>184</sup> Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel*, 24.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

the first intifada, Palestinian women were primarily addressed by their reproductive capacities or as mothers of prisoners and martyrs.<sup>186</sup> These reproductive activities continue to be a form of nationalism and resistance in Palestine and increasingly in the Islamic State.

Within nationalist discourse in Palestine, it is important that Palestinian women produce “not just babies but *Palestinian* babies.”[sic]<sup>187</sup> This duty is based on “an imagined biological/genetic foundation—a conflation of birth and genetics with nationality.”<sup>188</sup> It is within this ideological framework that biological Palestinian paternity becomes essential to the nationalist movement and a Palestinian woman’s marriage to a man of a different nationality a viable threat. Women’s relationships become fictional markers of the national collective.<sup>189</sup>

Peteet’s ethnographical research indicates that there are various forms of mothering in Palestine, including “other-mothering” or “activist-mothering” have become forms of political resistance through which these women support their communities while under the attack of oppositional forces.<sup>190</sup> Through “Other mothering”, women moved past the nurturing aspect of motherhood into the realm of survival. This is particularly significant as the ongoing occupation and wars that have resulted in the Israeli occupation of Palestine have directly contributed to this form of mothering. In her interviews, Peteet found that mothers even framed housework as a task of struggle (*nidal*)—“to survive

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<sup>186</sup> Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, *Birth of the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel*, 65.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> Peteet, “Icons and Militants”, 104.

and maintain the family in crises referenced national participation”.<sup>191</sup> Within “activist mothering” women can keep their more nurturing duties while also engaging in political participation and activism. As women embrace and renegotiate gendered roles within their society they create more ways to relate to the nationalist agenda.

Similar to the case in Palestine, women in the Islamic State have seen many roles emerge for women, but as detailed in a Manifesto and case study by the all-female al-Khanssaa brigade “the purpose of her existence is the Divine duty of motherhood”.<sup>192</sup> As the biological producers for the caliphate, women who, “enjoy the rule of God in the shadow of the Caliphate” and are exhorted to

fear God and fulfil your duties to the state, be careful not to do any harm to it, knowingly or unknowingly. Bring up the sons of the Caliphate to know true Tawheed. Bring up its daughters such that they know chastity and decency. Know that you are the hope of the Umma. The guardians of the faith and protectors of the land will emerge from you.<sup>193</sup>

Women do not fight for the Islamic State, instead performing instead a range of domestic duties once they have settled in controlled regions. Ideals of femininity and womanhood within IS are all steeped in the most conservative and literal interpretations of Islam, which it believes will ensure that “everyone fulfil their Rightly ordained roles.”<sup>194</sup> As a whole, Muslim women are told that “woman was created to populate the Earth just as man was” and that “her creator ruled that there was no responsibility greater for her than that of being a wife to her husband.”<sup>195</sup> The author further dictate the role of

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<sup>191</sup> Peteet, “Icons and Militants”, 114.

<sup>192</sup> Charlie Winter, “Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women By the Al-Khanssaa Brigade” (Quilliam, February 2015), 18.

<sup>193</sup> Winter, “Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women By the Al-Khanssaa Brigade”, 41.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

women saying, “Verily God has ordained this sedentary existence for women, and it cannot be better in any way, for He is the Creator and He Knows what works and what does not in religion” and quoting the Qur’anic verse “And stay in your houses” (Quran 33:33) to legitimate this view through appeal to scripture.<sup>196</sup> In its efforts to return to the “purity” of the Islamic community at the birth of Islam, IS uses its defined gender roles in the formation of its resistance movement and creation of its state.

Unlike the case of Palestinian women, as the Islamic State is a far newer political entity, women within IS do not yet have the ability to renegotiate these constructed narratives of womanhood, but I predict that as political situations change and the division between the private home and the frontline are further blurred, these narratives will also change. On January 27, 2002, Yasir Arafat he summoned a crowd of reportedly more than a thousand women who he called his ‘Army of Roses’ and invited them to join the armed resistance against Israeli occupation in an attempt to increase support from the Palestinian people.<sup>197</sup> He encouraged these roses to “*shahida* all the way to Jerusalem”, his use of the feminine term for martyrdom allowing for a change in gender roles, challenging societal imaginings of womanhood.<sup>198</sup> When IS finds itself in a position where it too needs more physical support as well as media attention, it may too move to permitting women to participate in more militant roles—thereby instigating a democratization of violence.

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<sup>196</sup> Winter, “Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women By the Al-Khanssaa Brigade”, 17.

<sup>197</sup> Barbara Victor, *Army of roses: inside the world of Palestinian women suicide bombers* (London: Robinson, 2004).

<sup>198</sup> Victor, *Army of roses*.

### **Martyrdom and Militancy**

Since the first Intifada, Palestinian women have gained more visible roles in the Palestinian national struggle through demonstrating, sending sons out for jihad, and participating in jihad themselves. In *Brides of Palestine/Angels of Death: Media, Gender, and Performance in the Case of the Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers*, Dorit Naaman posits, “When women opt to fight alongside men, they challenge the dichotomy of woman as victim/man as defender. They challenge not only the images of women as victims of war but also the traditional patriarchal binary opposition that postulates women as physically and emotionally weak and incapable of determining and defending the course of their own lives.”<sup>199</sup> In taking up the role of militant, these women exercise their political agency—reacting to the abnormal and unjust reality of their lives under occupation through means that simultaneously strikes fear into their occupiers while drawing observers attention to their plight.

Upon the completion of their operations, many of these women become icons of Palestinian resistance. One of the first and most famous examples of this is Leila Khaled, who is famous for first assisting in two hijackings in 1969 and 1970. A photo taken of her with AK-47 in hand and a black and white Palestinian kuffiyeh covering her head, quickly became the icon for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Khaled was not only a mother in her own right, but also a “political warrior”—creating her own definition of a Palestinian woman rooted in a deep love for her homeland and an

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<sup>199</sup> Dorit Naaman, “Brides of Palestine/Angels of Death: Media, Gender, and Performance in the Case of the Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers,” *Signs* 32, no. 4 (2007): 933–55.



opposition to the Israeli occupation.<sup>200</sup> Her likeness can still be found in many different mediums whether in the form of pop art, street art, and photography.<sup>201</sup>



Figure 11 Leila Khaled on the Separation Wall

The Palestinian reality—filled with violence, injustice, and steadfastness continues to reclaim space for the re-envisioning and imaging of gender difference beyond the symbolic status women as icons of the nation. After Leila Khaled and her partner Dalal el Moughrabi so prominently opened the door to more militant roles for Palestinian women, many others pushed beyond her and took up martyrdom operations. The martyrdom mission of Wafa Idris, on behalf of al-Aqsa Brigade in January of 2002, represented a turn in women’s jihad. Following her attack, Hamas leaders said that Jihad was an obligation also for women because Islam does not differentiate between women and men on the battlefield.<sup>202</sup> This is especially significant, for as an Islamist organization and one of the ideological frameworks used within the Palestinian nationalist movement,

<sup>200</sup> Amelia Smith, “Leila Khaled: Icon of Palestinian Liberation,” *Middle East Monitor - The Latest from the Middle East*, accessed November 9, 2015, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/media-review/book-review/4342-leila-khaled-icon-of-palestinian-liberation>.

<sup>201</sup> Figure 10, Palestine 2012, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/leila-khaled-mural>

<sup>202</sup> Naaman, “Brides of Palestine/Angels of Death.”

Hamas' acceptance of female martyrdom shows that gender roles in Palestine are not stagnant, but indeed open to redefining.

***Hamas and the Role of Women***

Hamas was formed on December 9<sup>th</sup> 1987, during the first intifada by the Muslim Brothers. The new group called themselves the Islamic Resistance Movement, or Hamas and quickly became a contending resistance movement separate from and outside the Palestine Liberation Organization and Fatah.<sup>203</sup> Hamas describes itself as being committed to implementing “the true Islamic principles and teachings with regards to women, completely independent of certain cultural norms and societal backwardness.”<sup>204</sup> In her text, “Islamist Women of Hamas: Between Feminism and Nationalism”, Islah Jad contends that “Islamists, like nationalists, seek to establish an ideal society that depends upon a particular conception of the ideal woman” and for much of its history Hamas has not been an exception.<sup>205</sup> She goes on to argue that, “the formal ideology of Palestinian Islamists largely stems not from religious texts but from accommodation to contending positions. The ‘traditions’ that the Islamist, like the modernist nationalist, seeks to revive are ‘invented’ [sic] and, like those of the nationalist, are modern constructs (Hobsbawm 1983: 2–3).”<sup>206</sup>

Over time Hamas' gender ideology has fluctuated and changed. As part of its goal to end the Israeli occupation, Hamas' website currently states that it “attempts to engage the whole population, regardless of gender or age, in the liberation movement is a

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<sup>203</sup> Islah Jad, “Islamist Women of Hamas: Between Feminism and Nationalism,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (June 2011), 176.

<sup>204</sup> Hamas, “Hamas and Women: Clearing Misconceptions,” *Hamas Islamic Resistance*, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://hamas.ps/en/post/45>.

<sup>205</sup> Jad, “Islamist Women of Hamas”, 177.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

necessity” citing a Qur’anic verse which says, “The Believers, men and women, are protectors of one another; they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil.”<sup>207</sup> For some time militant roles within Hamas were reserved for men, and even when women were allowed to move beyond traditional gender roles “the female martyr is constructed as embracing culturally accepted gender norms at the same time that she steps outside of them—she is modest, chaste, and a purveyor of family honor in her personal life, whereas she is fierce, courageous, and the equal of men in the name of the cause.”<sup>208</sup> In 2002, Hamas leader Abd al-Aziz Rantisi described attacks led by female combatants as the most important “strategic weapon” of the Palestinian resistance and said that, “There is no reason that the perpetration of suicide attacks should be monopolized by men”.<sup>209</sup> In this vein, Female militancy becomes just another embodiment of the sacred, justifying this new role in the eyes of Islamists such as Hamas. Based on the organization’s current understandings of gender roles, females can serve in the Consultative Council, which is responsible for the outline of the overall strategy of the Hamas movement and the decision-making body as well as the Political Bureau, Cultural Bureau, and an additional committee specialized in women’s affairs within the movement.

As we see in the case of Palestine, when traditional gender roles are challenged in resistance groups, it is in the service of militancy or jihad.<sup>210</sup> Jihad in the sense of violent military action within the Islamic State is only given to women by appointment and only “if the enemy is attacking her country and the men are not enough to protect it and

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<sup>207</sup> Hamas, “Hamas and Women.”

<sup>208</sup> Ness, “In the Name of the Cause,” 365

<sup>209</sup> Julian Madsen, “Suicide Terrorism: Rationalizing the Irrational,” *Strategic Insights* III, no. 8 (August 2004).

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

the imams give a fatwa for it.”<sup>211</sup> IS has gone further to say that women's ultimate jihad is migration to the Dawlah where they will live and fulfil their role of “support[ing], that is be[ing] the base of men, Marrying well, that is marrying a fighter” and will later “accord status and respect to women [who have] demonstrate[d] their commitment to the cause.”<sup>212</sup> IS continually reinforces its gender roles, even gendering jihad so that women may give back to the state in a means that still aligns within what they define as women’s “true nature”. Despite the creation of a “softer” jihad, there are many women within the Islamic state who have shown interest in fulfilling a more active and armed role in IS’ resistance movement and citing the story of Nusaybah bint Ka’ab, may seek to change this in the future.<sup>213</sup>

The al-Khanssaa Brigade has provided some women within IS to fulfil a more physical role that allows them to enter the public sphere. The brigade is made up of around 25 to 30 Middle Eastern women and is tasked with patrolling the streets of Raqqa and Mosul to ensure that women observe the clothing rules for women as outlined by the Islamic State and Sharia law.<sup>214</sup> These women reportedly undergo a month-long training and are allowed to carry guns. Middle Eastern women are chosen for the Brigade because IS officials believe that Arab women are especially knowledgeable on topics of Shari’a

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<sup>211</sup> Charlie Winter, “Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women By the Al-Khanssaa Brigade” (Quilliam, February 2015).

<sup>212</sup> “Isis: The ‘Central’ Role of Women in Forming the next Jihadist Generation.” International Business Times UK. Accessed December 15, 2015. <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/isis-central-role-women-forming-next-jihadist-generation-1521058>.

<sup>213</sup> Nusaybah bint Ka’ab is a historical Islamic figure who had a presence on the battle field in the battle of Uuhud as a precedent. Zakaria, Rafia. “Women and Islamic Militancy”, 122.

<sup>214</sup> “ISIS ‘Female Gestapo’ Bite and Whip Any Woman Who Steps out of Line.” Mirror. Accessed October 1, 2015. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/isis-female-gestapo-leading-campaign-6046944>.

since they have usually been raised within Islamic societies. In an interview with CNN, a former member of the brigade spoke of punishing women who broke the law and then men who permitted them to do so with lashing and in some cases biting.<sup>215</sup>

### **The Islamic State's Hierarchy**

The Islamic State (IS) as a movement is unique in the sense that it attracts women from all over the world. As such a global movement, women from all over the world have the opportunity to play both biological and non-biological roles within the state.<sup>216</sup> This past summer, one of the most influential women within IS was arrested. Umm Sayyaf, wife of IS's head financier Abu Sayyaf, was arrested by U.S. military personnel during a raid targeting her husband. Her arrest not only provided the U.S. with important intel on the inner workings of the Islamic State, but also launched Umm Sayyaf into the limelight. Umm Sayyaf became the paragon for the elite class of women within the IS. During interrogation sessions, she discussed her role in IS in relation with her husband's status. Umm Sayyaf claimed to help run IS's networks of female operatives as well as "playing enforcer for the men's sex slaves".<sup>217</sup> Based on intel from Umm Sayyaf, it was found that IS' institutional structure is based on a hierarchy of power and information.

On its lowest rungs, women within IS' power hierarchy are tasked with serving the sexual needs of IS's male members<sup>218</sup> and are expected to fulfil their roles as mothers

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<sup>215</sup> "Exclusive: Confessions of a Female ISIS Member - CNN.com." CNN. Accessed December 15, 2015. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/06/world/meast/isis-female-fighter/index.html>.

<sup>216</sup> Although there is opportunity, it is still restricted by IS' gendered interpretation of Islamic law.

<sup>217</sup> Shane Harris Youssef Nancy A., "U.S. Has No Idea How Long It Will Keep an ISIS Bride Locked Up," *The Daily Beast*, June 11, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/06/11/u-s-has-no-idea-how-long-it-will-keep-an-isis-bride-locked-up.html>.

<sup>218</sup> Umm Sumayyah al-Muhajirah, "Slave-Girls or Prostitutes," *Dabiq*, n.d.

of the next generation of lions. On the next rung, we find the women of al-Khanssaa Brigade who serve as a force to police women within IS, ensuring that women dress modestly at all times. On the highest rung are the female professionals who help staff the hospitals and schools of IS, and are permitted to leave the domestic space due to their high level of education.<sup>219</sup> Almost on the same level as these professional women are the IS recruiters. Recruitment is very important in guaranteeing the growth of the Dawlah and women are integral to not only the process of online recruitment, but also the creation of propaganda for IS.<sup>220</sup> These media-savvy women create accounts on Tumblr, Instagram, Kik, Twitter, and other social media networking platforms in order to spread IS' message and guide other women to IS territory.<sup>221</sup> Although the propaganda they send out is about the idea of alienation and belonging, the carefully crafted rhetoric used in recruiting other females is based in sisterhood and finding best friends, or spiritual fulfilment.<sup>222</sup> It is in these ways that women within the Islamic State merge their religious duty and responsibility towards the caliphate to engage in resistance.

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<sup>219</sup> Carolyn Hoyle et al., *Becoming Mulan?: Female Western Migrants to ISIS*, (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015), [www.strategicdialogue.org/ISDJ2969\\_Becoming\\_Mulan\\_01.15\\_WEB.PDF](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/ISDJ2969_Becoming_Mulan_01.15_WEB.PDF).

<sup>220</sup> "Isis: The 'Central' Role of Women in Forming the next Jihadist Generation." International Business Times UK. Accessed December 15, 2015. <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/isis-central-role-women-forming-next-jihadist-generation-1521058>.

<sup>221</sup> For more information, see this report; Ashley Binetti, "A New Frontier: Human Trafficking and ISIS's Recruitment of Women from the West," INFORMATION2ACTION (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2015), 4/8/16, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/sites/giwps/files/I2A%20-%20A%20New%20Frontier%20-%20Human%20Trafficking%20and%20ISIS's%20Recruitment%20of%20Women%20from%20the%20West.pdf>.

<sup>222</sup> Katrin Bennhold, "Jihad and Girl Power: How ISIS Lured 3 London Girls," *The New York Times*, August 17, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/18/world/europe/jihad-and-girl-power-how-isis-lured-3-london-teenagers.html>.

### Conclusion

As we have seen in the analysis of gender roles within resistance movements in Palestine and the Islamic State, both Islamists and nationalists “seek to establish an ideal society that depends upon a particular conception of the ideal woman.”<sup>223</sup> In my research I have found an overwhelming trend among many American, Israeli, and European academics and opinion makers who use the idea of Arab society and the religion of Islam’s “oppressive” gender roles to discount the various roles that women play within conflict, war, and resistance within the Middle East.<sup>224</sup> What these ‘experts’ fail to understand is that “women are social beings dynamically interacting with their social environments responding to multiple discourses and reflecting on diverse individual experiences” and that “each gender’s experience must be contextualized and located in a specific time and space”.<sup>225</sup>

When exploring women’s roles in more militant political engagement we must keep an open mind. Women do not pursue these roles merely to “achieve high status” within their communities, but because they believe that they have the power and ability to do something—to take an action in order to help their community reach its ultimate goals. Both women and men, movement leaders and individuals, can use the ideology of gender to “cope with the consequences of chronic personal and familial security” as well as exhaustive demands of the creation of a nation-state.<sup>226</sup> It is not our job to approve or

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<sup>223</sup> Islah Jad, “Islamist Women of Hamas: Between Feminism and Nationalism,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (June 2011), 176–201

<sup>224</sup> Some examples of these academic works include; Margaret Gonzalez-Perez’s “Palestine, Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan: Internationalization and Localization,” and Barbara Victor’s famous book, *Army of roses: inside the world of Palestinian women suicide bombers* (London: Robinson, 2004)

<sup>225</sup> Muhanna, *Agency and Gender in Gaza*, 12.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

disapprove of the ways in which women navigate gendered spaces, but to remind ourselves that concepts of masculinity and femininity are not fixed—following a particular course of action does not make one more of a man or less of a woman. In the next chapter, I will highlight the ways in which media have contributed to the creation of the biased representations of female militancy in the Middle East that have come to dominate mainstream conceptualizations of conflict in the region.



**Chapter Three:**  
**Warriors, Widows, and Jihadi Brides: Media Representations and Framing of Women in Conflict**

*“The bogus ‘war on women’ is so 2012  
 What’s hot now? The ‘war with women’”  
 -Monica Crowley*



*Figure 12 illustration on Islamized women joining the ISIS cause<sup>227</sup>*

Image and representation have come to play a large role in how we understand and perceive war, conflict, individuals who participate in such activities. The twenty-first century has seen an expansion in global communication with the rise of online news sources and social media’s use as a platform to disseminate information. As two of the most impactful threats to peace and stability in the Middle East, the rise of the Islamic State and the Israeli Occupation of Palestine continue to fill the headlines of newspapers around the world. US and UK news sources have often framed conflict within the Middle East in overly simplistic terms. These news sources often follow the same storylines the protagonists and usual “bad guy Islamist terrorist” attacks the antagonist leading to a

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<sup>227</sup> Illustration on Islamized women joining the ISIS cause, Linas Garsys/The Washington Times, 2014

struggle or conflict, but what about the women? How does Western media portray the women who choose to participate in acts of political and/or violent resistance within the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the formation of the Islamic State?

Utilizing media framing theory, critiques of Orientalism, and gender analysis to examine Western news stories portrayal of women engaged in resistance movements, I argue that the media representations of these women are built upon orientalist and gendered media frames that cause the general public to minimize and undermine their participation and experiences within these conflicts. I focus on this issue within the context of US and UK media representation because our media—newspapers, tweets, podcasts, and blog—are where we as Americans often encounter and receive information on current events in the Middle East. By critically studying this media, we see that just as the nationalist and resistance movements often utilize gender myths to create support for their causes, US and UK media sources communicate their own versions of these gender myths in their reporting. Many of these constructed narratives of current events misrepresent women in the Middle East in times of war and conflict and it is not until we attempt to breakdown these constructs that we will be able to gain a more balanced and holistic perspective on women in the machinery of war.

#### **Women and the Reporting of War in the Middle East**

Directly following the attacks on 9/11, images of Arab women were increasingly used in US news media with women either wearing a hijab or burqah.<sup>228</sup> In these cases, we see how the media was selective in deciding how Muslim women are captured and

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<sup>228</sup> “Facing up to the Hijab: How Different Nations Treat the Muslim Veil,” *Al Bawaba*, May 31, 2015, <http://www.albawaba.com/slideshow/facing-up-to-the-hijab%3A-how-different-nations-treat-the-muslim-veil-700598>.

presented within specific representation frameworks. For example, American politicians use the trope of the oppressed Muslim women in attempts to gain support for intervention within the region.<sup>229</sup> These manipulations prevent us from appreciating the variety of women's lives across the Muslim or Middle Eastern worlds – differences of time and place and differences of class and religious interpretation.<sup>230</sup> This might then explain why the US and UK's are both disturbed and fascinated when presented with images of Muslim women in the Middle East participating in resistance, more particularly militarized or violent forms of resistance.

Although women are impacted in many ways during times of war and conflict, it is not unexpected for their images and stories to be absent from the news, unless they articulate the West's preconceived notions of Arab women's position and roles within their societies and further justify Western oriental thought. This absence is unsurprising as media theorist Herbert Gans points out, for "the news reflects the white male social order" leaving no space for Arab women's voice.<sup>231</sup> Omissions of these women's voices not only impacts journalists' work, but also affects the historical record, creating male-dominated narratives of life during war.<sup>232</sup> Western society's conceptions of war, violence, and death are heavily biased according to gender stereotypes, which we see in

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<sup>229</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Muslim Woman: The Power of Images and the Danger of Pity," *EuroZine*, accessed October 28, 2015, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-09-01-abulughod-en.html>.

<sup>230</sup> Abu-Lughod, "The Muslim Woman: The Power of Images and the Danger of Pity."

<sup>231</sup> Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979): 61.

<sup>232</sup> Susan Keith and Carol B. Schwalbe, "Women and Visual Depictions of the U.S.-Iraq War in Print and Online Media," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (February 8, 2010): 4–17.

news articles focusing on women who choose to participate in more violent or militaristic forms of resistance.<sup>233</sup>

When we take a broad look at US and UK media's reporting on female combatants we quickly see that these women's non-conformity is often what causes the spotlight to fall on them. There are constantly attempts to fit these women into conventional molds of femininity, which undermine their capacity as figures of violence.<sup>234</sup> Females combatants are often sexualized and their physical descriptions comprise some of the first information featured in news stories reporting on them. As Brigitte Nacos points out in her study of the portrayal of female combatants in media, "When we cannot understand women in roles that cultural norms and prejudices perceive as inherently male there is a tendency to resort to stereotypical explanations".<sup>235</sup> Moreover, network television and newspaper coverage of "terrorism" is overwhelmingly episodic—focusing solely on who did what, where, and how, rather than exploring overarching themes or contexts, which could possibly explain why certain individuals choose to participate in "terrorist" acts. Armed resistance is a political act and often used as a means for bringing about political change out of necessity, yet US and UK media often fails to pause and question what these individuals' goals are and what circumstances push these actors to pursue more intense actions.<sup>236</sup> In the rest of this

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<sup>233</sup> Cindy D. Ness, *Female Terrorism and Militancy Agency, Utility, and Organization*, Contemporary Terrorism Studies; Contemporary Terrorism Studies. (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2008): 57, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=325346>.

<sup>234</sup> Claire Corp, "High Heels and Hijackings: An Examination of the Place of Women in Terrorism," *Warwick Sociology Journal*, no. Issue One: Feminism and the perception of women in contemporary society (2014 2013): 23–29.

<sup>235</sup> Ness, *Female Terrorism and Militancy Agency, Utility, and Organization*, 220.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

chapter, I will conduct my own media analysis of media frames, including physical appearance, the family connection, terrorism for the sake of love, the naïve and out of touch terrorist, and the Islamic fundamentalist.<sup>237</sup>

### **The Physical Appearance Frame**

Reporting based on physical appearance and feminine features is prevalent in stories focusing on women, but are even more noticeable when analyzing stories focused on female combatants and resisters within the Middle East. Their actions are constantly juxtaposed by their physical beauty and emphasized as unnatural by focusing on their feminine characteristics. Two of the earliest examples of media framing stories of Arab female combatants in terms physical appearance are Leila Khaled and Wafa Idris.

#### ***Leila Khaled***

Palestinian Leila Khaled skyrocketed into celebrity after becoming the first woman to hijack an airplane in 1969, following up with another hijacking in 1970. An activist and leader within the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)—a resistance movement formed in 1967 to struggle against the Israeli occupation of Palestine—Khaled dedicated her life and hijackings to drawing the world’s attention to the plight of Palestinians.<sup>238</sup> While her iconic photo clutching a gun has become a symbol of rebellion, several decades after her original hijacking, media sources still use this photo overly to emphasize her physical appearance to undermine her work in liberation.

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<sup>237</sup> Ness, *Female Terrorism and Militancy Agency, Utility, and Organization*, 208.

<sup>238</sup> Smith, “Leila Khaled.”

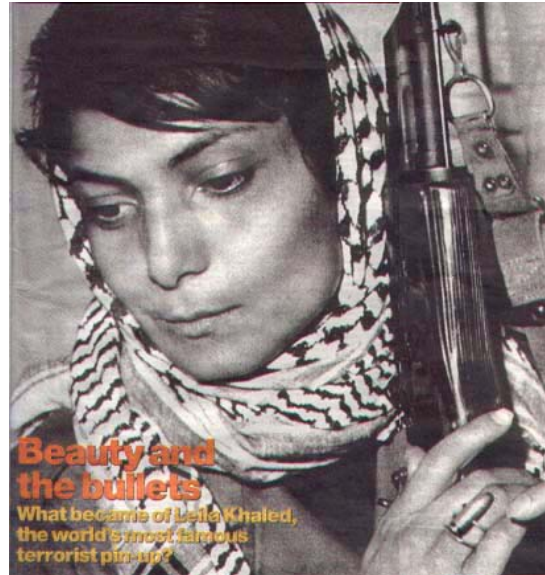


Figure 13 Leila Khaled photographed in 1969

In Katharine Viner’s article on Leila Khaled she refers to the rebel as “the international pin-up of armed struggle”. While she does make a reference to “female power” she goes on to describe Khaled as having “fragile hands” with “shiny hair wrapped in a keffiah” and “the delicate Audrey Hepburn face refusing to meet your eye”.<sup>239</sup> Her power is supposedly inspiring, but mostly because of the fact that she conforms to US and UK media’s beauty standards. Tellingly, Viner claims that “the reason behind her image’s enduring power... [is] beauty mixed with violence”.<sup>240</sup> Her ability to represent feminine charms and a calculated militaristic resolve feeds into US and UK media’s orientalist and gendered framework. She is perceived as their “token terrorist”, the woman who oddly rebels against orientalist tropes of the oppressed and voiceless Arab woman while remaining feminine.

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<sup>239</sup> See figure 12

<sup>240</sup> Katharine Viner, “I Made the Ring from a Bullet and the Pin of a Hand Grenade,” *The Guardian*, January 25, 2001, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/jan/26/israel>.

**Wafa Idris**

Wafa Idris was a 28-year-old Palestinian woman divorcee living with her family in a refugee camp when she participated in a suicide bombing attack in 2002. Detonating a 22-pound bomb, she killed both herself and an 81-year-old man, injuring 100 others.<sup>241</sup> In an article entitled, *Twisted by anger, she turned to terror*, run in a London newspaper, Idris' physical features were among the first pieces of information given about her suicide bombing. She was described as, "an attractive, auburn-haired graduate who had a loving family and liked to wear sleeveless dresses and make-up", essentially a modern and feminine woman.<sup>242</sup>



Figure 14 Wafa Idris, [Photo: AFP/Newscom] (left), Wafa Idris on Time magazine cover (right)

<sup>241</sup> James Bennet, "Arab Woman's Path to Unlikely 'Martyrdom,'" *The New York Times*, January 31, 2002, sec. World, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/31/world/arab-woman-s-path-to-unlikely-martyrdom.html>.

<sup>242</sup> "Twisted by Anger, She Turned to Terror," *The Times (London)*, January 31, 2002, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/lxacui2api/api/version1/getDocCui?lni=451S-MM60-00GN-Y313&csi=270944,270077,11059,8411&hl=t&hv=t&hnsd=f&hns=t&hgn=t&oc=00240&perma=true>.

In other articles, her status as a divorcee and inability to fulfil her wifely duties of having children serve as frames to identify some of the supposed causes of the anger that drove her to go on her martyrdom mission. It is her failure as a woman that is focused on while the reality of her life—the numbers of wounded Palestinians that she was exposed to on a daily basis through her job as a paramedic or the other realities of Israeli occupation—is barely mentioned. Interestingly Wafa’s image was on the cover of a 2002 issue of *Time* magazine; yet the main article focused on male combatants who were deemed unlikely suspects because they came from prosperous families or were not religious.<sup>243</sup> Here we see how an Arab woman’s photo becomes a stock image, used for its shock factor, but her story remains untold.

#### **The Family Connection Frame**

The family connection frame seeks to portray female combatants in relation to women’s “traditional” roles within the family. Articles and news stories focus on motherhood and marital status, simultaneously undermining the political significance of their actions and vilifying them for abandoning their familiar responsibilities. Women such as Palestinian combatant Reem Riyashi and 3 sisters who along with their children left the UK to join IS in Syria serve as two examples of women’s stories being framed as rebelling against conventional narratives of womanhood.

#### ***Reem al-Riyadh***

When news came out that on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2004, that the 22-year-old Reem al-Riyashi, the mother of two toddlers, had killed herself and 4 Israelis in a suicide bombing, audiences were in shock. Catchy headlines called her a *Bomb-ma* and *Terror*

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<sup>243</sup> Amanda Ripley, “Why Suicide Bombing Is Now All The Rage,” *Time*, accessed November 9, 2015, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,227546-4,00.html>., see figure 8



*Mom* capturing the first signs of US and UK medias obsession with her motherhood.<sup>244</sup> In the *New York Daily* news article, *BOMB-MA MADNESS: She Blows up and Kills 4 Israelis*, the authors begin by saying of Reem, “A Palestinian woman with two toddlers chose murder over motherhood”.<sup>245</sup> Throughout the article Reem is constantly chastised for her desire to, “turn my body into deadly shrapnel against the Zionists and to knock on the doors of heaven with the skulls of Zionists” because of her status as a mother.<sup>246</sup> Some attention is paid to the fact that she was Hamas’ first female martyr, but the article quickly moves on to describing her family situation citing that, “and her husband got into a fight with the rest of the family two months ago and she vanished after that”. Little time is spent describing the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the subsequent struggles that they face. She is instead portrayed as just a disgruntled wife who “blew herself and four Israelis to smithereens”.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> “TERROR MOM KILLS 4 ISRAELIS - ‘PARTS OF MY BODY CAN FLY ALL OVER,’” *The New York Post*, January 15, 2004, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/lncui2api/api/version1/getDocCui?lni=4BG3-TX00-008R-F48W&csi=270944,270077,11059,8411&hl=t&hv=t&hnsd=f&hns=t&hgn=t&oc=00240&perma=true>.

<sup>245</sup> By Mahmoud Habboush in Gaza City and Corky Siemaszko in New York Daily News Writers, “BOMB-MA MADNESS She Blows up and Kills 4 Israelis,” *Daily News (New York)*, January 15, 2004, sec. NEWS.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 15 Reem Saleh Al-Riyashi with her daughter Duha (right) Al-Riyahi with her children, Getty Images 2004(left)

Soon after her death Hamas released photos that showed Reem al-Riyashi with her children while dressed in military garb and holding a gun. In one case she is posed with her small daughter who is holding what looks to be an explosive.<sup>248</sup> Despite the fact that US and UK Media often vilifies women like Reem, in her farewell video, she seems to truly care for her children, saying, “God gave me two children and I loved them so much. Only God knew how much I loved them”.<sup>249</sup>

#### **The Naïve, Out of Touch, and in Love frame**

In media reports and accounts that fall within this frame, women who choose to participate in acts deemed as “terrorism” or are caught providing any type of support for armed non-state actors are framed as naïve and out of touch with reality. Their actions are not seen as resistance or a means to upset disproportionate power differentials, but instead as merely baseless acts of revenge realized through terrorism—the weapon of the

<sup>248</sup> “Tot Pushed to Be like Bomber Mom,” *NY Daily News*, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/tot-pushed-bomber-mom-article-1.215082>.

<sup>249</sup> By Mahmoud Habboush in Gaza City and Corky Siemaszko in New York Daily News Writers, “BOMB-MA MADNESS She Blows up and Kills 4 Israelis.”

weak.<sup>250</sup> Particularly in the case of Muslim women, we see large claims of women being “brainwashed”, “manipulated”, and “tricked by their male counterparts. In some cases, we even see that these women begin to support and become active in resistance movements because of love and/or promises of marriage. This type of framing can be seen in the reporting of Palestinian combatant Ayat al-Akhras’ attack as well as the recent growth in articles detailing the lives and stories of the so-called “brides of ISIS”.

*Ayat al-Akhras*

On February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2002, Ayat al-Akhras became the third and youngest female Palestinian martyr when she blew herself up in front of a West Jerusalem supermarket at the age of 18.<sup>251</sup> As the shock of such a young woman participating in a bombing attack began to settle in, the media quickly jumped on the opportunity to “tell her story”—providing readers with “insights” into who she supposedly was as a person and what would drive her to such a violent and desperate act. Ayat’s story was of particular interest to the media as one of her two Israeli victims was a 17-year-old young woman named Rachel. News articles of Ayat’s martyrdom oscillate between blatant bias and a twisted piece of chic-lit attempting to “explain” the female suicide bomber phenomenon.

In the *ABC World News* article entitled “At 18, bomber became martyr and murderer”, and *Newsweek Global* article entitled, “A Jihad of her own” we are taken through both Ayat and Rachel’s stories. While both articles touch on Ayat’s life living within the conflict—seeing her brother and neighbors become victims of the Israeli army’s violence, this aspect of her life is not emphasized. Ayat’s everyday reality was

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<sup>250</sup>Ness, *Female Terrorism and Militancy Agency, Utility, and Organization*, 229

<sup>251</sup>Graham Usher, “At 18, Bomber Became Martyr and Murderer,” *The Guardian*, March 29, 2002, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/mar/30/israel3>.

shaped by the Israeli occupation as she attempted to live a “normal” teenage life in Bethlehem's Dehaisha camp, which is home to 10,000 Palestinian refugees.<sup>252</sup> We immediately see Ayat being portrayed as full of anger and resentment with one article saying, “both young women were intent on their missions. One was searching for spices and fish for a Sabbath dinner. The other was looking for an answer to her rage”.<sup>253</sup> Throughout the *ABC World News* article Ayat is referred to as “outraged” and “angry” in comparison to her “nonpolitical” Israeli counterpart.<sup>254</sup>



Figure 16 Ayat al-Akhras

In “A Jihad of her own” we see a mixture of familiar framing tropes. Ayat is framed as yet another victim who fell prey to the “recruiting [of] the vulnerable and disenfranchised [in]to terrorist organizations”.<sup>255</sup> At the same time there is an emphasis on the fact that she was engaged to be married unlike her Israeli victim Rachel. Not only

<sup>252</sup> Graham Usher, “At 18, Bomber Became Martyr and Murderer,” *The Guardian*, March 29, 2002, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/mar/30/israel3>.

<sup>253</sup> “2 Teenage Girls Die in Mideast Tragedy,” *ABC News*, January 6, 2006, <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=126183&page=1>.

<sup>254</sup> “2 Teenage Girls Die in Mideast Tragedy.”

<sup>255</sup> Janine di Giovanni, “A Jihad of Her Own,” *Newsweek Global* 162, no. 10 (March 14, 2014): 62–68.

was she tricked into committing a violent act, but she is presented as another oppressed or disadvantaged Muslim woman whose reality was “framed by future marriage and a more traditional societal role”.<sup>256</sup> The combination of Ayat’s young age, gender, and socio-religious context make not only her story an easy target for the press, but also catapulted females participating in insurgencies and liberation fights within the Middle East into the limelight.

### **The Brides of ISIS**

Several media outlets have published sensationalized news headlines speaking of “Brides of ISIS” and “jihadi brides” since the influx of women and foreign fighters in order to join the Islamic State. These often overtly biased news sources focus on foreign and Syrian women’s marriages to IS fighters as well exotic stories of ‘jihad al-nikah’ or ‘sex jihad’. As journalist Jalal Zein Eddine points out in his own article questioning the concept of being ‘happily married to ISIS’, these types of articles attempt to overlook the complexities of war and conflict.<sup>257</sup>



*Figure 17 Aqsa Mahmood [Tumblr/Enterprise]*

<sup>256</sup> di Giovanni, “A Jihad of Her Own.”

<sup>257</sup> “Happily Married to ISIS?,” accessed October 1, 2015, <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/565453-happily-married-to-isis>.

The tales of these women are spun into captivating narratives where we are presented with stories of delusional women. In a September 2014 *Guardian* article entitled “Schoolgirl Jihadis: The Female Islamists Leaving Home to Join Isis Fighters”, we are told the stories of several young western girls who left the West to join the Islamic state. We are supposedly given a look into their perspective.<sup>258</sup> We are told about the recent convert Karen and “how naive she had been” and the infamous three schoolgirls from Bethnal Green who made headlines after sneaking into Syria via Turkey all without their parents knowing.<sup>259</sup> In other articles we see the story of Aqsa Mahmood—the British Muslimah who was an “intelligent and popular teenager” who, like normal girls her age, “loved to listen to Coldplay” but is now widely believed to be one of IS’ main female recruiters.<sup>260</sup> Aqsa seems to have been tricked into joining IS and becoming radicalized, but does not speak very much on her life in Britain and what might have led a teen who was living a “normal life” to leave her family and home to join the IS’s cause as the bride of a Jihadi fighter and recruiter. While it is important that US and UK media sources pay attention to women’s increased roles supporting and working within the Islamic State, we must remain critical of their framing and analysis—remaining conscious of the fact that there is a plurality of experiences within this conflict. Not every

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<sup>258</sup> Harriet Sherwood et al., “Schoolgirl Jihadis: The Female Islamists Leaving Home to Join Isis Fighters,” *The Guardian*, September 29, 2014, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/29/schoolgirl-jihadis-female-islamists-leaving-home-join-isis-iraq-syria>.

<sup>259</sup> Nabeelah Jaffer, “The Secret World of Isis Brides: ‘U Dnt Hav 2 Pay 4 ANYTHING If U R Wife of a Martyr,’” *The Guardian*, June 24, 2015, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/24/isis-brides-secret-world-jihad-western-women-syria>.

<sup>260</sup> “Teenage Girl Leaves for ISIS, and Others Follow,” *The New York Times*, February 25, 2015, sec. Section A; Column 0; Foreign Desk.

woman was tricked to move to Syria nor is every young female Palestinian combatant dealing with uncontrollable teenage angst.

### **The Islamic Militant Fundamentalist Frame**

As the religion of Islam and its followers have come under scrutiny within the past few decades, it is no surprise that Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism are overwhelmingly present in the US and UK media's portray of female suicide bombers, fighters, and sympathizers. Media that operates within this frame include articles that overly analyze or emphasize religious praxis and contain images that play into the Western imagination's obsession with Islamic dress. The Islamic fundamentalism and radicalization frame can be best understood by analyzing the US and UK's media coverage of Palestinian combatant Hiba Daraghmeh and articles on women in the Islamic State.

### ***Hiba Daraghmeh***

On May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2003, 19-year-old Palestinian suicide bomber Hiba Daraghmeh detonated her bomb outside a mall in the Israeli town of Afula, killing three people and injuring many more. She was the first woman to carry out an attack for the group Islamic Jihad.<sup>261</sup> Her faith and more conservative interpretations of Islam quickly became Western media's focus after her attack. In the *New York Times* article entitled, "A Scholar of English Who Clung to the Veil", the article's author begins to tell Hiba's story by pointing to her religiosity: "In 10th grade she began veiling herself... a religious devotion that is rare" in her hometown of Tubas. It is also noted that "She was known as a member of the 'Islamic bloc' of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, students said, and she helped the bloc stage exhibits of political posters and cartoons, at which it sold cassettes of songs calling

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<sup>261</sup> James Bennet, "A Scholar of English Who Clung to the Veil," *The New York Times*, May 30, 2003, sec. International Style / Middle East, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/30/international/middleeast/30BOMB.html>.

for jihad, emphasizing her openly Islamist and “radical” leanings.<sup>262</sup> Portrayed thus, Hiba is merely a fundamentalist Muslim, driven to her violent actions by her “Obsesse[sion] with religious ideals.”<sup>263</sup>

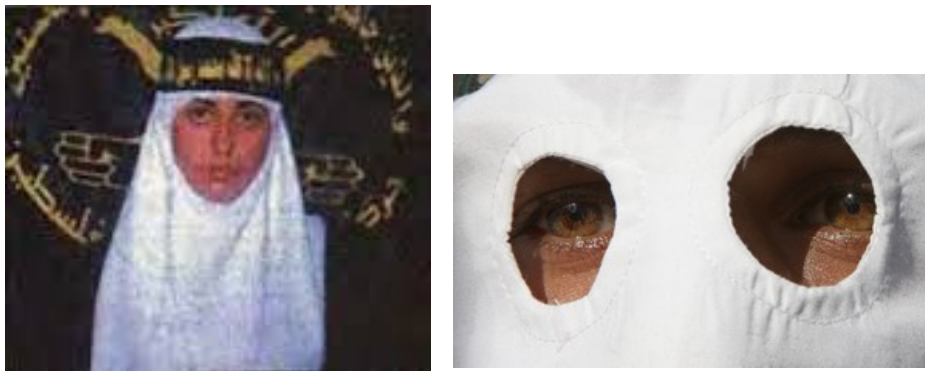


Figure 18 Hiba Daraghme and woman wearing veil

In the case of Hiba, her veiling and modest dress would come to serve as a visual symbol of her conservatism and pursuit of Islamic jihad. The imagery of a full face covering—perceived as particularly foreign to western audiences, is invoked in the *New York Times* as well as the *Independent’s* reporting of Hiba’s attack. In a sensationalized retelling, Hiba is described as thus: “The white veil she also wore -- a badge of Islamic fundamentalism – [which] concealed her head, mouth and nose”; “Only her almond-coloured eyes were visible to the outside world.” Her Islamic dress is not only used to symbolize her extremism and further otherize her and women who choose to adhere to this type of dress. We see this in the description of the Jellebab; “The Jellebab is the flowing costume that envelopes the entire body. The white veil covering all but the eyes

<sup>262</sup> Bennet, “A Scholar of English Who Clung to the Veil.”

<sup>263</sup> “The Story of Hiba, 19, a Suicide Bomber. Can the Road-Map Put an End,” *The Independent*, accessed November 7, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/the-story-of-hiba-19-a-suicide-bomber-can-the-road-map-put-an-end-to-all-this-106336.html>.



is a badge of fanatical Islam shunned by most Palestinian women including Hiba's mother, sisters and female relatives".<sup>264</sup> This western obsession with Muslim women's clothing that surfaces in the reporting on Hiba's attack further illustrates the West's unhealthy obsession and fascination with Islamic dress—boxing Muslim women into roles they deem acceptable and creating a media circus when they happen to defy them.

***Reporting on the Islamic State and Islamic fundamentalism***

The Islamic fundamentalist frame must be understood differently within the context of media analysis of the Islamic State due to the group's ideological ties to a more conservative and radicalized interpretation of Islam. Both women and men subscribe to these ideologies. It is hard to ignore religion in any analysis of the Islamic State as the group invokes Islam frequently to give legitimacy to the movement and its operations.

In conclusion, through analyzing the many media frames found within the US and UK media's reporting on women's roles and actions within the context of conflict within the Middle East, we see an overwhelming trend of delegitimizing women's participation—especially when it is believed to be too violent. These portrayals and defining in terms of outdated conceptions of femininity and cultural mythologies are a form of violence in itself producing a “deadening effect... on our capacity to appreciate the complexity and diversity of Muslim women's lives—as human beings”.<sup>265</sup> Indeed these women are human beings who are operating within a challenging political, economic, and societal context. They do not deserve to have their political actions and acts of resistance quickly written off as delusional, a departure from the norms of

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<sup>264</sup> “The Story of Hiba, 19, a Suicide Bomber. Can the Road-Map Put an End”

<sup>265</sup> Abu-Lughod, “The Muslim Woman: The Power of Images and the Danger of Pity.”

womanhood, expressions of teenage angst, or as malicious acts of terror or baseless revenge in the portrayals discussed above. This type of reporting inhibits US and UK audiences from gaining a more in-depth and holistic view of conflict within the region, while fulfilling these governments' (especially the US) desire to be viewed as remaining committed to their regional allies (Israel) while delegitimizing others' actions (Palestinian resistance). As we have seen women are not only in the machinery of, war they are a mechanism of war. They are both manipulated and willing actors; they are both victims and perpetrators. Women respond to their unique context—defying and redefining gender roles along with them.

## Conclusion

It is commonly said that war is the great equalizer, which in a sense is true. Both women and men are impacted by the insecurities of war and may seek to fight, but this context of instability does not change the fact that patriarchy and other systems of oppression are at play. We must remember, “Militant national liberation movements may inspire women’s movements; they do not necessarily ensure equal rights and opportunities, nor do they restructure asymmetrical gender relations”<sup>266</sup> and that;

Third World women have thrown themselves into national struggles with an energy that derives ultimately from their social oppression, and in doing so have often expressed their own critiques and aspirations. National movements have formed both a liberating and constraining framework for change in women's lives, as stages of state and economy formation call them into new kinds of political action and labour.<sup>267</sup>

As the many examples from the two case studies used in this thesis show, Muslim women’s participation in and/or support of armed struggle in the Middle East is much more complicated and nuanced than US and UK media representations show. Just as the significance of methodologies and tools of resistance fluctuate and change according to context, so do Muslim women’s models of agency. Local, national, and transnational actors/institutions, cultural norms, and history have been and will continue to be instrumental in the shaping particular models of agency, allowing Muslim women to meet specific individual and collective goals.<sup>268</sup> These models of agency are as fluid and dynamic as Muslim women’s identities within the region—products of meaningful encounters.

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<sup>266</sup> Peteet, “No Going Back?”

<sup>267</sup> “Palestinian Women.”

<sup>268</sup> Kandiyoti, “Bargaining with Patriarchy.”

Interestingly, although on seemingly opposite sides of the conflict, constructions of Muslim womanhood found in US and UK media representations and in the various Islamist and nationalist ideologies steering their resistance movements mirror each other. Their constructions of womanhood seek to mask Muslim women's agency and ability to navigate the cultural and political waters of their respective societies, instead burdening women with their ideologically constructed responsibilities that are in reality highly gendered. These constructs do little to take into account that our modern constructs of femininity and masculinity have been created, but not cemented—as context and realities change, so do the feminine and the masculine. This reductive method misguides the public's understanding of the complexity of the political situation in the Middle East and how it impacts women. In addition, “to see women as such passive bystanders would be a narrow view that ‘assumes that women's first interests reside in an unquestioned gender identity and ignores... the links between women and their communities’” (Aretxaga 1997: 10).<sup>269</sup>

So what are we to make of the continued rhetoric of women's oppression within the Middle East—of the evidence that shows how they are often instrumentalized and manipulated by the movement leaders and ideologies that they encounter? We must first think critically about why US and UK mass media sources might prefer to define women's experience by these types of factors. These types of narratives led to the mass silencing of women's experiences during times of conflict in the Middle East and North Africa, allowing the US and UK to down play and defer their responsibility to the region as international actors who have and continue to instigate conflict within the region while

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<sup>269</sup> Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation*, 66.

also framing any future intervention as a heroic mission to save the very people who they victimize. Their method leaves little room for counter arguments and perpetuates the continuation of orientalist conceptions of the people of the Middle East and fetishizing of Arab woman. Second we must acknowledge and seek to understand how and women in particular are often instrumentalized within these movements.

In conclusion, I would encourage academics and general audiences alike to engage in more critical readings of all media. When we come across news reports of female militancy within the Middle East, see images of Arab and Muslim women in popular culture let us look beyond the mainstream messaging. Let us remember that femininity's association with peace is a myth rooted in "western historical glorification of women as morally superior and the glorification of motherhood".<sup>270</sup> Just because some people within our society still buy into these Victorian ideologies, does not mean that we have to follow suit. As long as we absent mindedly consume these misrepresentations we allow dominating powers to continue their campaigns of misinformation that thrive on shrouding the Middle East, its people, and political situations in mystery. Most importantly, instead of passively accepting dominant narratives of conflict within the region, I implore us all to remember that in seeking out knowledge from diverse sources can positively impact our understanding of the world around us. People are speaking, women are speaking—it is our job to listen.

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<sup>270</sup> J. Ann. Tickner, *Gender in International Relations : Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security* (New York : New York , 1992), 59.

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