# Martyrdom on Video:
# Testimonial Videos, Femininity, Islamism, and Palestinian Martyrdom in the Second Intifada

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> *When you want to carry out such an attack, whether you are a man or a woman, you don't think about the explosive belt or about your body being ripped into pieces. We are suffering. We are dying while we are still alive.*[1]
>
> Andaleeb Takatkeh,
> Palestinian Suicide Bomber
> 12/04/2002

## INTRODUCTION

The Second Palestinian Intifada began in 2000, and continued until 2005.[2] During that time, hundreds of Palestinians became suicide bombers, imploding themselves in crowded streets and marketplaces in attempts to kill Israelis—sometimes members of the Israeli army and police forces, but often private citizens as well. Wafa Idris, a twenty-seven year old Palestinian woman, killed herself and two Israelis in a crowded Jerusalem street in January 2002. Idris's act of suicide bombing was the first instance of a woman acting as a suicide bomber in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. She was followed by seven other successful suicide bombings by Palestinian women during the Second Intifada, as well as several unsuccessful attempts.[3] There have also

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[1] Andaleeb Takatkeh, "Video Testimony, 13 April 2002," *accessed in* Frances S. Hasso, "Discursive and Political Deployments by/of the 2002 Palestinian women suicide bombers/martyrs." *Feminist Review* 81 (Nov 2005): 29-30. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3874340, and Julie Rajan, *Women Suicide Bombers: Narratives of Violence.* London: Routledge (2011): 91. https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.4324/9780203821831.

[2] The Intifada began in September 2000, in direct response to Likud leader Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount, and is generally agreed to have ended with the Sharm el-Sheik Summit between Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas and Sharon in February 2005, although it did not result in an immediate end to violence.

[3] Dorit Namaan, "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. Accessed through JSTOR. Language of "success" in terms of suicide bombing has become common, but is jarring. A "successful" suicide bombing attack means that the attacker managed to kill themselves, and often others as well, although sometimes "success" is still denoted in cases where the attacker only managed to injure others. "Unsuccessful" attacks are those in which, for any reason, the attacker failed to detonate the bomb and inflict death and injury upon themselves and others. I use this language throughout this study due to its seemingly widespread acceptance amongst scholars of suicide bombing who have come before me.

been several successful attacks since the end of the Intifada in 2005, mostly between 2005 and 2008, at which point Hamas ceased support for suicide bombing operations.[4] However, for the purposes of this study, I will be focusing on the identifiable Palestinian women who successfully completed suicide bombing attacks from 2002 to 2005.[5] Only eight identifiable female Palestinian suicide bombers completed successful suicide attacks over the course of the Second Intifada. In contrast, there were more than ten times as many male Palestinian suicide bombers in this same period.[6] However, the women became far more sensationalized in the immediate aftermath of their attacks, and the continuing salience of discussions surrounding their decisions and acts has received a large amount of media and academic attention compared to the relatively small number of women who have actually engaged in suicide bombing attacks.

Mohammed Hafez argues that throughout the second half of the 20th century, Palestinian people experienced multiple compounding traumas that were inflicted upon them not only by the Israeli government (most especially in the 1948 Naqba), but also by international bodies, such as the United Nations's 1947 sponsorship of the Partition Plan, and by neighbouring Arab leaders, who consistently failed and manipulated the Palestinian cause.[7] Amal Amireh, in her 2003 article "Complicity and Subversion: Body Politics in Palestinian National Narrative", discusses how for

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[4] Hamas' discontinued support for suicide bombers came initially in the informal ceasefire that characterized the lead-up to the 2008-2009 Gaza War, and continued in the wake of the war.

[5] Although there were nine total successful attacks completed by Palestinian women during the Second Intifada, one of the women has never been identified. She also did not record a testimonial video. Given that I am looking at the public martyrdom of these women after their suicide bombing attacks, I am disregarding this unidentifiable case.

[6] Mohammed M Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs: The Making of Palestinian Suicide Bombers.* Washington D.C., United States Institute of Peace Press (2006): 79-86.

[7] Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, 46-48.

several generations, "Palestinian nationalism was experienced as humiliation."[8] This has led to expressions of Palestinian nationalism as different from expressions of nationalism amongst state-holding citizens and groups.[9] Sentiments of Palestinian nationalism are expressed as opposition against those who prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state.[10] Over much of the past seven decades, and in particular during the two intifadas, Palestinian nationalism was therefore expressed against the Israeli state and people, including the use of suicide bombings and terrorist attacks.

Of particular relevance to discussions of nationalism and suicide bombing attacks is Robert Pape's seminal work *Dying to Win: the Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. Pape, through thorough compilation, analysis and examination of all suicide attacks carried out between 1980 and 2003, determines that nationalistic ties to land, in conjunction with foreign occupation of said land, is the driving force behind the majority of all suicide bombing operations.[11] Although his study might seem somewhat dated to us today, it is almost contemporaneous to the Second Intifada, 2000-2005. Talal Asad's 2007 work *On Suicide Bombing* is another seminal work that considers suicide bombing and "religiously motivated terrorism", asking whether indeed such terrorism exists, and what distinguishes it from other forms of terrorism.[12]

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[8] Amal Amireh, "Between Complicity and Subversion: Body Politics in Palestinian National Narrative," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 751. https://muse-jhu-edu.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/article/46610.

[9] Khalidi, Rashid. *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness.* Columbia University Press (1997): 11-12. www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/khal15074.

[10] Ibid., 19.

[11] Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism.* New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks (2005), 79-85.

[12] Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*. New York: Columbia University Press (2007).

In this study, I examine the frameworks through which the women's suicide bombing attacks were viewed at the time, and I seek to subvert the standard approaches to conceptualizing their acts. In common portrayals, the women's choices to commit suicide bombing attacks are most often understood in relation to either their feminine bodies and female identity, or their relationship to Islam. These two factors are frequently perceived as being the driving force behind the women's choices, and form the basis for analysis of their actions. However, throughout this study I argue that these frameworks are not entirely helpful. While many of the women did relate their acts to their femininity and Muslim identity, they did not do so in the ways that they were represented as having done. Rather, through their recorded video testimonials and violent suicide bombing attacks they consciously rejected such frameworks and instead centered their Palestinian nationalist identities in their choices to commit suicide bombing attacks. These women did not represent themselves in monolithic terms such as "female martyr", or "Muslim martyr"; rather, the thread running through every recorded testimonial is that of Palestinian nationalism, and therefore Palestinian martyrdom. This is not to say that each individual did not see themselves and their choice to die by suicide bombing as intimately connected to their femininity, their Muslim identity, or both, but that counter to dominant perceptions and narratives, these women all saw themselves as martyrs for Palestine, and expected to be accepted and celebrated by the community primarily as such.

In Chapter One, I analyze the frameworks through which these women suicide bombers were viewed in the aftermath of their attacks. Analyzing these externally imposed frameworks is important in exploring the martyrdom aspect of their suicide bombing acts, despite the fact that perceptions of their acts do not necessarily reflect the motivations or intentions of each suicide

bomber. Firstly, as members of a majority-Muslim society, the female suicide bombers of the Second Palestinian Intifada were understood at the time through a framework of perceptions and interpretations of Islam. Secondly, they were analyzed through the framework of their female identity; that is, they were seen as "female suicide bombers", instead of suicide bombers. While similar narratives around each of these frameworks do appear in some of the women's testimonials, they are certainly not universal. However, their motivations were often totalized and grouped together in the aftermath of their acts, and the narratives surrounding their martyrdom reflect such totality. Therefore, I commence with an analysis of these frameworks through history, drawing on the history of Islamic martyrdom and female martyrdom. I conclude the first chapter with a brief survey of the procession of female suicide bombings through the Second Intifada, discussing the circumstances and acts of each of the women without introducing the narratives built by their testimonials, and by others in the wake of their deaths.

Chapter Two opens with a discussion of the video testimonials recorded by seven of the eight women who committed suicide bombing attacks during the Second Intifada. In analyzing the women's testimonials, particular attention is paid to the women's stated motivations, as well as the women's descriptions of their own desire for martyrdom. In order to bolster my analysis of the video transcripts, I also analyze interviews by family and friends given in the aftermath of the suicide bombing events. Throughout this analysis, I show how the stated desires of the suicide bombing women are neither directly reflective of a framework of "femininity", nor an "Islamic" one. Rather, these women committed their suicide bombing acts as Palestinians first and foremost. In order to bolster this argument, I discuss ideas of Palestinian nationalism, "masculine" nationalism, and Orientalist perceptions.

In conclusion, by using the video transcripts recorded before the women's deaths, and family interviews, this thesis shows that the widespread and mainstream assumptions made about the female Palestinian suicide bombers were misplaced. Rather than being predicated on the stated motivations of the suicide bomber by the suicide bomber herself, and members of her family, they were motivated by longstanding and previously held gendered and political assumptions. This thesis shows how a critical centering of the women's testimonials underlines the framework of Palestinian nationalism as the most accurate one to describe the women's motivations to commit suicide bombing attacks.

**Methodologies**

The subject matter of a topic such as this is not easy to analyze without first discussing the language surrounding narratives of martyrdom, terrorism and suicide bombing. Idris and other suicide bombers are seen as 'martyrs' by Palestinians fighting to free themselves from Israeli occupation, and as 'terrorists' by Israelis, who are victims or potential victims of their acts. The decision to use terms such as "martyrdom" or "terrorism" depends largely upon which side of a conflict one finds oneself on. Those who are dubbed terrorists usually do not believe themselves to be such, and see their attacks as expressing legitimate grievances against a state that has oppressed them, caused them suffering, or otherwise driven them to such ends.[13] In this study, I use the language of "martyrdom" far more than "terrorism", because I am discussing the bombings from the point of view of the bombers, and those who view them as martyrs. Such

[13] Namaan, "Brides of Palestine/Angels of Death," 938-939.

language does not seek to invalidate the trauma, suffering and death these women have caused to their victims and the Israeli community as a whole.

The Second Intifada, as a facet of the Palestinian Israeli conflict, is a direct continuation of the modern conflict that began with the late nineteenth century Zionist movement.[14] The modern conflict pits two distinct groups with historical claims to the land against one another.[15] This study does not seek to validate one side, or invalidate the other, but focuses on the narratives of the Palestinian perspective, and therefore I use terminology more common to the Palestinian community when discussing female suicide bombing attacks.

Although the terminology of martyrdom has historical salience for a variety of other reasons which will be later discussed, the dichotomy of "martyrdom" vs. "suicide" is particularly important for suicide bombers who practice Islam, as all of the women I look at did.[16] The Qur'an's denunciation of suicide has led to the questioning of Islamist commemoration and celebration of suicide bombers as martyrs.[17] Obeisance to the Qur'anic injunction against suicide is reflected in global statistics: despite the fact that Muslim countries, and Muslim people are associated with the largest plurality of suicide attacks around the globe, recorded suicide rates in Muslim countries are among the lowest in the world according to data collected by the World

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[14] Charles Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents*. 9th edition. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's (2017): 1.

[15] Ibid., 2-3.

[16] Frances S. Hasso, "Discursive and Political Deployments by/of the 2002 Palestinian women suicide bombers/martyrs." *Feminist Review* 81 (Nov 2005): 27. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3874340.

[17] Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, "The False Islamization of Female Suicide Bombers." *Gender Issues* 28 (April 2011): 52. https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1007/s12147-011-9097-0. The terms "Islamist" and "Islamism" are used throughout this thesis to avoid using the absolutist terms "Islam" and "Islamic", to abstain from making totalizing assertions and assumptions about the religion as a whole. I do not use "Islamist" and "Islamism" to invoke recent negative connotations of fundamentalist terrorism that have become increasingly mainstream in the years since the 9/11 attacks.

Health Organization since 1950.[18] The global average rate of ordinary suicide in that period ranged from 11 to 15 per 100,000, while in Muslim countries such as Egypt, Syria and Iran have been below 1 per 100,000, and in Kuwait, Turkey and Bahrain below 5 per 100,000.[19] This suggests an understanding of suicide attacks as different from 'ordinary suicide' amongst Muslims, which has been debated and reconciled by Islamist theologians.

As Christopher Reuter discusses, interpretations of the Qur'an and the *hadith* regarding questions of martyrdom have changed over time.[20] Theological debates continue to this day, but most Islamist scholars, and political leaders, have articulated suicide bombing as an intensification of battle-martyrdom.[21] Or, as articulated by Hamas official Abdelaziz al-Rantisi, "He who wants to kill himself because he's sick of being alive—that's suicide. But if someone wants to sacrifice his soul in order to defeat the enemy and for God's sake—well, then he's a martyr."[22] Both Reuter and al-Rantisi are making the same point: that, essentially, the Qur'an and *hadith* are living documents open to interpretation and re-interpretation, as is necessary for any religious or political document that remains relevant over centuries and millennia. In the same vein, however, such texts are also vulnerable to politically-motivated reinterpretations.[23]

"Suicide bombing attacks" is the most accurate, and widely used term to describe the acts these women performed—quite literally, committing suicide and violent bombing attacks at the

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[18] Pape, *Dying to Win,* 181-182. Pape's examination ended in 2003, so presumably these statistics from the World Health Organization are from 1950-2002.

[19] Pape, *Dying to Win*, 182.

[20] Christopher Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing,* Princeton, Princeton University Press (2004): 120.

[21] Ibid. Conceptions of battle martyrdom, *jihad* and *shahid* will be elaborated on further in Chapter One.

[22] Ibid.,123.

[23] Ibid., 120-124.

same time. However, different language has also been used by scholars to mean the same thing, including language such as “death acts,” “implosion,” and “suicide acts”. Throughout this study I have chosen to use “suicide bombing attacks,” almost exclusively, as it is both most accurate, and most evocative of the violence these women are voluntarily inflicting upon themselves and others.

In examining the women’s personal motivations to commit suicide bombing attacks, I use a combination of recorded video testimonies by the women themselves, and post-death testimonies from family members of the women. While I rely most heavily upon the testimonies themselves, given that they are the most direct representation of the women’s motivations, other sources of information are necessary where the women’s testimonials have been impossible to access in full or, as in the case of Wafa Idris, they did not record a video. Accessibility of the videos was an issue. Some videos are readily accessible in video form, or through transcripts and translations done by previous scholars. However, several are impossible to access in full, and for two it is impossible to find written transcriptions or English translations. In the extant literature, scholars often mention the recorded videos of those two women without discussing their contents. Therefore, my reliance on post-death testimonials of family is somewhat necessary, but also a natural complement to my discussion of the different frameworks of martyrdom that have been and can be applied to discussions and narratives of the women’s suicide bombings. In using this combination of sources I have sought to create the most accurate account of these women’s desires to commit violent suicide, and achieve martyrdom. It is necessary to note that there are many unseen variables that may have influenced each of the women as they recorded their testimonial videos, including whether or not their words were written out ahead of time, the

presence of other people in the room and the amount of time between the video and the death act.[24] However, to attempt to infer differences between the women's stated motivations and desires and any other, non-articulated thoughts, is simply not possible, and would be inappropriate. Therefore, this study takes the testimonial videos at face value, as the stated desires of each of the women.

Appendix A, at the end of this study, showcases the collected transcripts in the most complete form that I believe exists within the extant literature on this subject. Transcriptions of the women's testimonials were collected from several sources, including Rosemarie Skaine's *Female Suicide Bombers,* Frances S. Hasso's "Discursive and Political Deployments by/of the 2002 Palestinian women suicide bombers/martyrs,", Mohammed M. Hafez's *Manufacturing Humans Bombs: The Making of Palestinian Suicide Bombers* and V.G. Julie Rajan's *Women Suicide Bombers: Narratives of Violence*.

**Literature Review**

This study relies on the previous work of many scholars, whose close analysis and study of the phenomenon of suicide bombing, the Second Palestinian intifada, martyrdom, and the eight women on whom I focus my study, has been integral.[25] This study owes much to the authors,

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[24] A discussion of the physical realities of the spatial and logistic realities of filming the testimonial videos would be very interesting, and likely could result in another project of similar length to this one. However, for a variety of reasons—including lack of access to all of the videos, my primary interest in the testimonials, and the constricting length of this project—I have chosen to focus on the testimonials themselves, and not the other elements of the video process.

[25] I use this section both as an overview of the many authors whose arguments and analyses were integral to my own thesis, and also to present the positions of authors that I seek to repudiate throughout this thesis. This is done because I rely upon the latter authors for factual information, and felt it necessary to bring them into the literature review—once I had done so, introducing their narratives, and my opposition to them, was a logical continuation.

mentioned immediately above, who have translated and transcribed the testimonial videos. Work on the global history of suicide bombings, as well as the history of martyrdom in Islam and female martyrdom that was central to this work includes Robert Pape's *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,* David Cook's *Martyrdom in Islam,* Julie Rajan's *Women Suicide Bombers: Narratives of Violence,* Christopher Reuter's *My Life is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing,* Shannon Dunn's "The Female Martyr and the Politics of Death," and Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry's edited volume *Women, Gender and Terrorism.*

In researching the extant literature on the women's motivations, desires and choices leading up to their suicide bombing attacks, two different points of view became clear. Several authors who are more "Western" in their approach to analyzing the suicide bombers, tended to deprive the women of agency in their own violent deaths. By "Western" I mean several things in this context. Firstly, that the authors are from Western societies such as the United States and the United Kingdom, which, especially in the wake of 9/11, have found themselves in ideological conflict with non-Western, and particularly majority-Muslim, societies. Additionally, present throughout their narratives are normatively Western assumptions about Islam, and the roles of women in Islamist societies. In contesting this position, I seek to situate the agency of these decisions with the women themselves, and to reject the Western assumptions of my own positionality. While concerns about enablers of anyone seeking their own violent death are legitimate, the concerns presented by authors such as Barbara Victor, Anat Berko, and Rosemarie Skaine remove mental and physical agency almost entirely from the women themselves. Such Western, Orientalist othering of the women ties into perceptions of both femininity and Muslim identity presented in Western media in the wake of the women's suicide bombing attacks. Both

the video-taped testimonials of successful women suicide bombers, and interviews by unsuccessful women, show the women's agency; in fact they detail how the women sought out operatives from rebel groups to aid their suicide bombing attempts, and help articulate their own political beliefs.[26]

Consider, for example, the work of Barbara Victor who closes her book *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers,* by stating that "the only 'road map' that has been successful in this part of the world is the one that leads a hopelessly desperate young woman into the clutches of those who are only too willing to provide her with the weapons of self-destruction."[27] Berko locates Idris' suicide in relation to her marital situation, arguing that it holds primary responsibility for her death.[28] According to Berko, "A childless married woman is like a tree that cannot bear fruit, and her husband gets rid of her through divorce. Wafa Idris… is a tragic example of what happens in such a situation."[29] With this argument, Berko totalizes Idris to her biological reproductive capabilities, makes normative assumptions about the role of women in Palestinian society, and dismisses other personal, non-childbearing reasons that could have led Idris to her suicide act. Such assumptions are not only disproven by the contents of the women's testimonials, family testimonials after their deaths, and interviews from unsuccessful bombers, they are also dangerous, as they misinterpret the violent potential of women within conflicts such as the Second Intifada. Ignorance of the violent

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[26] Julie Rajan, *Women Suicide Bombers: Narratives of Violence*. London: Routledge (2011): 158-159. https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.4324/9780203821831.

[27] Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers*. Pennsylvania, Rodale Books Inc. (2003): 292.

[28] Anat Berko. *The Path to Paradise: The inner world of suicide bombers and their dispatchers.* London: Praeger Security International (2007): 139.

[29] Ibid.

potential of women as suicide bombers has only contributed to the deadliness of many of the attacks they have perpetrated.[30] Often termed "passing", due to cultural presumptions about female lethality, as well as gendered clothing customs, suicide bombing women in many conflicts have been able to enter "enemy" spaces with less suspicion, allowing them to inflict more damage than a male counterpart could potentially have done.[31] While much of the historical information presented by Skaine, Victor, Berko and others who express these same assumptions has been helpful and valuable to this thesis, many of the assumptions and narratives presented therein need to be read very critically.

Many authors who have written on Palestinian women suicide bombers do afford them agency, while also giving measured discussion to the influences and processes that affected their decisions. These authors include Julie Rajan's *Women Suicide Bombers: Narratives of Violence*, Doriit Namaan's "Brides of Palestine/Angels of Death: Media, Gender, and Performance in the Case of the Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers," Jessica Davis' *Women in Modern Terrorism: From Liberation Wars to Global Jihad and the Islamic State*, Bilal Hamamra's "Witness and martyrdom: Palestinian female martyr's video-testimonies" and Laleh Khalili's *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration.* Not coincidentally, these authors largely, though not entirely, come from non-Western contexts. Work on Palestinian nationalism was also central to this study, and Mohammed M. Hafez's book *Manufacturing Human Bombs:*

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[30] Jessica Davis, *Women in Modern Terrorism: From Liberation Wars to Global Jihad and the Islamic State.* London, Rowman & Littlefield (2017): 2.

[31] Ibid. A poignant representation of the deadly potential of women who are able to "pass" more readily than their male counterparts can be found in the 1966 film Battle of Algiers, dir. Gillo Pontecorvo. The film, which depicts the Battle of Algiers during the Algerian War (1954-1962), features Algerian women who dress in the style of the *pieds noirs* (French Algerians) and plant bombs in busy locations such as cafes and cafeterias. The film recreates the Milk Bar Cafe bombing in 1956, which killed 3 and injured dozens.

*The Making of Palestinian Suicide Bombers*, Rashid Khalidi's *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, Tami Amanda Jacoby's article "Feminism, nationalism, and difference: Reflections on the Palestinian women's movement," and Amal Amireh's article "Between Complicity and Subversion: Body Politics in Palestinian National Narrative" were central to analysis on the subject. The arguments of these authors provide a complement to Chapter Two's discussion of the motivations and desires of the women as stated in their video testimonials.

# CHAPTER ONE: The Second Intifada: Frameworks of Martyrdom

## History of Martyrdom in Islam

Early conceptions of martyrdom in the Islamic faith coalesced around "battle martyrs", or those who died while fighting for Allah and the Prophet Muhammad.[32] Today, nearly a millennium and a half later, the language of battle martyrs remains salient; in the Palestinian context, it has been adapted to include suicide bombers.[33] As David Cook discusses, martyrdom narratives were not central to the early Muslim experience in the same way they were to the early Christian experience.[34] I employ Christianity in this context because the relationship of the Abrahamic faiths makes Christian comparisons resonate more closely than those of other, less-related faiths with histories of martyrdom. Due to the successful territorial expansionism of the early Muslim empire under Muhammad and his successors, most Muslims in the first millennia and a half did not live under non-Muslim dominated societies.[35] While exceptions to this exist, such as the persecution of Moors in early modern Reconquista Spain, generally, Muslims did not experience persecution from non-Muslim rulers or societies until more recently.[36] Therefore, while in Christianity, martyrdom achieved religious significance during the first several hundred years of the religion, before the religion achieved political power, the opposite was true for Islam.[37] Keith Lewinstein outlines the difference in early Christian and Muslim ideas of

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[32] David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press (2007): 166. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511810688.

[33] Ibid., 170

[34] Ibid., 165.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 166.

[37] Keith Lewinstein, "The Revaluation of Martyrdom in Early Islam," in *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion*, ed. Margaret Cormack. Oxford, Oxford University Press (2001): 79.

martyrdom by arguing that Christians sought "heavenly victory" as compensation for earthly persecution, in particular in relation to Jesus Christ's own earthly life, whereas Muslims did not suffer from earthly persecution, and rather took as a lesson from the life of Muhammad that they should actively "struggle against injustice and idolatry."[38]

Such reasoning is in line with further concepts of Islamic martyrdom, which are intimately connection to the "active struggle" of a *shahid*, or martyr.[39] *Shahid*, or the female *shahida*, is the Arabic word which means generically "witness," but which appears once in the Qur'an as "martyr", and has taken on that meaning in modern contexts.[40] Martyrdom narratives of active struggle are themselves connected to *jihad*, which is defined in the Qur'an as divinely sanctioned warfare, at the end of which either martyrdom or victory is promised.[41] The earthly reality of Islam's territorial expansionism, as well as the belief of the *umma* (Muslim community) in divinely sanctioned *jihad* led to an overwhelming representation of battle martyrs among the 'canon' of early Muslim martyrs.[42] The most famous example of these was the battlefield death of Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet, and son of Ali (the fourth and last of the 'Rightly Guided Caliphs' who succeeded Muhammad after his death), who was killed at the Battle of Karbala in 680.[43]

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[38] Lewinstein, "The Revaluation of Martyrdom in Early Islam," 80.

[39] Ibid., 80-83.

[40] Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 16.

[41] Ibid., 19.

[42] Lewinstein, "The Revaluation of Martyrdom in Early Islam," 86.

[43] Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 16-17.

Ideas of *jihad* and "active struggle" remain central to modern Islamist concepts of martyrdom, especially as suicide attacks have become one of the main ways through which people achieve martyrdom in the 20th and 21st century. Both the Qur'an and the *hadith* denounce suicide; one scholar of Islam articulated this condemnation saying "In Islam, desiring to die is forbidden; believers struggle to survive and win a war, rather than choosing to die."[44] However, suicide attacks have also been rationalized by many theologians as an extension of battlefield death, and perpetrators are therefore also seen in the same vein as battlefield martyrs in their commemoration.[45]

Narratives of martyrdom within Islam are present, and are intimately connected with the act of seeking out one's own martyrdom. Rather than the act of death being the most religiously significant event of the martyrdom, it is the fight for righteous struggle that is emphasized and celebrated by Muslim communities that martyr their (mostly martial) dead.[46] These articulations usefully encompass the circumstances in which the female bombers of the Second Palestinian Intifada committed their suicidal attacks. However, one must note, if only briefly, that such narratives are suffused with gendered connotations, that remained unchallenged until the 20th century. Men who commit suicide attacks in Islam are promised to be rewarded by Allah with 72 virgins in Paradise, according to modern interpretations of several *hadiths*; no similar reward or

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[44] Gonzalez-Perez, "The False Islamization of Female Suicide Bombers," 52.

[45] Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 120-124.

[46] Lewinstein, "The Revaluation of Martyrdom in Early Islam," 80; Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 166.

promise exists for female martyrs, as they had not been imagined in the time of the Prophet or the collection of the *hadith*.[47]

In the aftermath of Wafa Idris's suicide bombing attack, debates over the commemoration, celebration and martyrdom of Idris, and other potential future women bombers played out publicly among prominent Muslim leaders of Palestinian groups. Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the leader of Hamas, was at first adamantly against the participation of women in suicide bombing attacks.[48] He eventually amended his stance, first to state that women should not "be allowed to go out for jihad without a male chaperone," and then, in 2004, to sponsor Hamas' first female bomber, who was noticeably unaccompanied by a male companion.[49] In contrast, Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, a prominent figure in the Lebanese Islamist group Hezbollah asserted that "Islam… permits women to take part if the necessities of defensive war dictate (it). We believe that the women who carry out suicide bombings are martyrs."[50] These debates, as they took place in the public sphere, though publicized pronouncements, helped to shape both popular narratives within Palestine as well as among Western observers around the women's motivations and desires, and their public martyrdom.[51] Claims or rejections of the women's martyrdom by

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[47] Rajan, *Women Suicide Bombers,* 215-216. The number of virgins a male *shahid* is meant to be rewarded with varies throughout the hadith, and various interpretations thereof, but the most common numbers are 72 and 70.

[48] Davis, *Women in Modern Terrorism*, 54-55. Hamas is an Islamist resistance movement, which can be classified as a "nationalist-religious organization striving for a Palestinian state."

[49] Ibid., 55-57.

[50] Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, quoted in Hasso, "Discursive and Political deployments by/of the 2002 Palestinian women suicide bombers/martyrs." 33. Hezbollah is a Lebanese-based Islamist group, but is very involved in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict due to historical conflict between Lebanon and Israel, and Hezbollah's stated intent to eliminate the state of Israel. This particular quotation was taken from an interview with Fadlallah in which he was asked about Palestinian women suicide bombers in the wake of Ayat al-Akhras' suicide bombing attack.

[51] Ibid., 32-35.

Islamists simply assume that the women wanted to be identified as Islamist martyrs, when this was not always evidently the case.[52]

Frances Hasso discusses shifting Islamist perceptions of female Palestinian martyrdom in her article "Discursive and Political Deployments by/of the 2002 Palestinian women suicide bombers/martyrs." She references Hamas leader Shaykh Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi, who proclaimed approval that the women of Palestine should follow the example of al-Khansa, a seventh century Arabian poet who was the mother of four sons who were killed in battle in the early Islamic period.[53] By deploying al-Khansa's story, al-Rantisi was articulating that the role of Islamic women in Palestinian resistance ought to remain confined to private sphere participation, and that their role was to uphold a "family-centred and Islamically defined social cohesion."[54] The deployments of the women's biological reproductive potential in their testimonial videos will be examined in the following chapter's discussion that rejects traditionally feminized martyrdom narratives. However, the women also challenge Islamist ideas of women's participatory spheres, as well as the women's own acceptance of traditionally Islamist ideas of martyrdom. The following section seeks to understand the history of female martyrdom, as well as the ways in which female martyrs, both ancient and modern, have been perceived by their audiences and witnesses.

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[52] Hasso, "Discursive and Political Deployments by/of the 2002 Palestinian women suicide bombers/martyrs," 32-35.

[53] Ibid., 81.

[54] Ibid.

**History of Female Martyrdom**

The history of martyred women is one that begins much earlier than the history of women suicide bombers. Once again, we can turn to Christianity to understand early martyrdom narratives about women, as the language of martyrdom is most closely connected to the canon of the Christian Catholic Church, which is where most identifiable martyred women can be found.[55] Martyred women have been subject to scrutiny and narrative questioning about their womanhood in Christianity for millennia. For example, Shannon Dunn describes a martyred Roman Christian woman named Vibia Perpetua, and examines the dominant narrative that grew out of her martyrdom, one which cast her as "becoming" a man in the moments before her death in the Roman arena at Carthage.[56] The attempt to trans-gender Perpetua at the moment of her death is likely connected to the obvious womanhood of her existence; she had been breastfeeding an infant son in prison, and is stripped half-naked before the moment of her death, making clear her womanhood.[57] However, even as Perpetua was being trans-gendered at the moment of her death, her martyrdom, as told in the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity,* was distinctly feminine.[58] She was celebrated for her nobility, as well as her modesty.

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[55] Shannon Dunn, "The Female Martyr and the Politics of Death: An Examination of the Martyr Discourses of Vibia Perpetua and Wafa Idris," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 1 (March 2010): 205. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40666466.

[56] Ibid., 206-207.

[57] Ibid., 207-208. I use "trans-gender" in this context not in the meaning of people who have a gender identity that is different from the sex that they were assigned at birth, but meaning that Roman observers knowingly changed Perpetua's gender at the time of her death to comfort their perceptions of womanhood, martyrdom, and violent death that they could not—or did not want to—reconcile with one another.

[58] Ibid., 208.

Dunn points to stories such as Perpetua's as the first iteration of the liminality of female martyrs, in particular, ones that die in martial ways.[59] As Doriit Namaan discusses, martial women remain subjected to such narratives of liminality and deviancy, especially in the age of mass media where representation occurs immediately, but also consciously.[60] This conscious aspect of martyrdom representation would be a central reason for the rise of martyrdom videos, as bombers, and the organizations that sponsor them, became increasingly aware of their now-global platform.[61] Similar to narratives around Perpetua's martyrdom, Palestinian women martyrs are cast as "brides" of Palestine, and re-cast as virgins when they enter Paradise, by Palestinian rebels and the broader Arab public.[62] They are thusly represented as not to destabilize traditional ideas of Palestinian nationalism that are based on masculine authority, in the manner of many anti-colonial nationalist movements.[63] Such masculine ideals of Palestinian nationalism, as well as Orientalist Western perceptions of female agency and Palestinian nationalism will be further discussed in Chapter Two.

Suicide attacks have been a tactic of war and conflict for centuries, demonstrated perhaps most prominently by the Japanese kamikaze flyers during the Second World War. However, the involvement of women in such death missions throughout history is almost nonexistent. Even as suicide bombing became more prominent in conflicts after the Second World War, women did not act as suicide bombers. The first conflicts to feature widespread female suicide bombing

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[59] Dunn, "The Female Martyr and the Politics of Death," 208.

[60] Namaan, "Brides of Palestine/Angels of Death," 935.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Rajan, *Women Suicide Bombers*, 225.

[63] Ibid., 224.

were the war for an ethnically Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka, and the Kurdish fight for a homeland in Turkey.[64] In each of these conflicts, one predominant group had coalesced to lead the movement, and supported both the men and women suicide bombers; for the Tamils it was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and for the Kurds it was the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).[65] These movements were also largely secular, which allowed narratives around the advent of women bombers to focus solely on their femininity and their nationalism. For Palestinian women suicide bombers, neither of these would be the case, as the fractured nature of martial Palestinian groups would play into the dominant narratives about them.

When the eight Palestinian woman suicide bombers of the Second Intifada became martyrs after their deaths, their motivations and experiences were understood primarily through the lenses of their femininity, and their perceived Islamic identity. Many analyses that followed these frameworks connected all motivations to these two narratives, and removed the agency of the women.

**Female Suicide Bombing Attacks in the Second Intifada**

The Second Intifada began in September 2000, in the immediate aftermath of Israeli Likud leader Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, the third holiest site in Islam.[66] Sharon's visit had been intended to demonstrate Jewish claims to the site, which is also the

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[64] Rajan, *Women Suicide Bombers*, 1.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Neil Caplan. *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Contested Histories*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell (2010): 207-208.

holiest site in Judaism.[67] However, tensions had been escalating since 1995, when Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated (by a radical Jewish student named Yigal Amir) for his support of the two-state solution, and his willingness to negotiate over territory with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).[68] In the wake of Rabin's assassination, the Oslo Accords, signed by Rabin and Yasser Arafat, leader of the PLO, faltered under Likud Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu, who won the 1996 election promising an end to the Oslo process.[69] Sharon's visit, and the start of the Second Intifada, occurred under the brief Prime Ministership of Labor's Ehud Barak, who was up for reelection in 2002, at the height of the Second Intifada, and was in fact succeeded by Sharon himself.

Whereas the First Intifada, 1987-1993, had been characterized on the Palestinian side by the adoption of deliberately non-violent strategies, the Second Intifada saw an immediate rise in lethal operations from Palestinians organization, including suicide bombings.[70] From September 2000 to the end of 2001, 34 male Palestinian suicide bombers completed deadly suicide attacks, resulting in the deaths of 86 people, as well as the bombers.[71] January 2002 would see the first woman suicide bomber, in Wafa Idris, as well as a further increase in Palestinian suicide bombing operations conducted, with 50 Palestinians committing violent suicide in 2002 alone.[72] Idris would soon be followed in 2002 by Dareen Abu Aisheh, Ayat al-Akhras, and Andaleeb

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[67] Caplan. *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,* 207-208.

[68] See Caplan, Chapter 10: From Boycott to Mutual Recognition, 1982-2008 for a longer and more nuanced discussion of the processes that led up to the outbreak of the Second Intifada.

[69] Efraim Inbar, "Netanyahu Takes Over," in *Israel at the Polls, 1996,* eds. Daniel J. Elazar and Shmuel Sandler. London, Routledge Press (1998): 38. Accessed through ProQuest.

[70] Caplan, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 208.

[71] Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs: The Making of Palestinian Suicide Bombers,* 81-82.

[72] Ibid., 82-84.

Tatakteh, and throughout the rest of the intifada by another four Palestinian women, Hanadi Jaradat, Hiba Daraghmeh, Reem al-Riyashi, and Zainab Abu Salem.

Idris' suicide attack took place on January 22nd, 2002, in Jerusalem. She killed herself and one elderly Israeli man, and wounded around 100 others.[73] As the first woman suicide bomber, Idris' attack reverberated throughout Israel and Palestine, and the wider world. The narratives of her martyrdom began immediately amongst Palestinians and others who upheld her act as heroic. From the Israeli perspective, the advent of female suicide bombers introduced another aspect of danger and fear into their daily lives; Palestinian women were much more capable of "passing" within Israeli society, which enabled them to enter into larger, more crowded places with less suspicion than their male counterparts.[74]

Compounding such Israeli fears, several more Palestinian women began to commit suicide bombing attacks. The women were evidently influenced by Idris, as "the first", and subsequent women bombers built a narrative through the testimonial videos that were recorded by mentioning Idris and other women who preceded them. Dareen Abu Aisheh, a 22 year old student at the University of Nablus was the second attacker, and on February 28th, 2002, killed herself, and injured four Israeli security guards.[75] Ayat al-Akhras was the third woman bomber of 2002. She caused another shockwave with her actions, as she was only 17 years old at the time of her death.[76] On March 29th, 2002 al-Akhras entered the Kiryat Yovel Supersol Market in

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[73] Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 25.

[74] Hasso, "Discursive and Political deployments by/of the 2002 Palestinian women suicide bombers/ martyrs." 81-82.

[75] Rajan, *Women Suicide Bombers*, 221

[76] Katherine VanderKaay, "Girls Interrupted: The Making of Female Palestinian Suicide Bombers." in *Terror in the Holy Land: Inside the Anguish of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* ed. Judith Kuriansky. Westport: Praeger Publishers (2006): 16. Accessed through Google Books.

Jerusalem at rush hour immediately before the Sabbath, and detonated a belt of explosives, killing herself, a seventeen-year-old Israeli girl by the name of Rachel Levy, an Israeli security guard, and injuring 28 other people.[77] Andaleeb Takatkeh was the fourth Palestinian woman to commit a suicide attack in 2002. Her attack came on April 12th at a bus top in the Mahane Yehuda market in West Jerusalem, she killed seven people (including herself), and injured another 104.[78]

Although 2002 was the deadliest year of the intifada in terms of suicide attacks, Palestinian women continued to commit attacks until the end of the intifada; in 2003 Hiba Daraghmeh, a 19 year old law student, killed three and injured between 52 and 83 people on May 18th, 2002.[79] Later in 2003, 29-year-old Hanadi Jaradat killed 19 and injured another 50 in a restaurant in Haifa, Israel.[80] 2004 saw another two attacks, as Reem al-Riyashi killed four at the Erez checkpoint between Israel and the Gaza Strip on January 14th, and Zainab Abu Salem, who killed two and injured 17 near Jerusalem on September 22nd.[81] February 2005 marked the end of the intifada, as Mahmoud Abbas and Ariel Sharon met at the Sharm el-Sheik summit. Although violence did not end completely, suicide bombings lessened significantly. In the years since the end of the intifada, several more Palestinian women have attempted suicide attacks, and some have succeeded. In the three years following the intifada, attacks continued, but in 2008 Hamas ceased its sponsorship of suicide bombers, and numbers decreased. In the years since, suicide

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[77] Rajan, *Women Suicide Bombers*, 221.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., 222

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., 221-222.

bombers have acted as “lone wolves”. However, the following chapter of this study concerns itself only with the eight women who committed violent suicide between 2002 and 2004, in the context of the intifada.

# CHAPTER TWO: Palestinian Martyrs on Video

## 'Martyrdom Videos'

As seen in Chapter One, the most prevalent frameworks through which the Palestinian suicide bombing women were perceived and understood were in relation to the religion of Islam, and in relation to their female bodies. While it is clear that one or both of these lenses were salient for most of the women, these lenses can not in and of themselves accurately describe the desires and experiences of these women. In this section, I study the individual transcripts to better understand these women's individual motivations to commit suicide attacks. I also examine interviews with family after the women's deaths to understand context that was not provided in the testimonial video. Due to the constricting length of this project, I examine in detail the cases of only four women in this section—Wafa Idris, Dareen Abu Aisheh, Ayat al-Akhras, and Hanadi Jaradat.

Before her suicide attack, Wafa Idris worked with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, which is part of the International Red Cross. During this work, she cared for many Palestinians who were harmed during the Second Intifada, and saw and experienced first hand the violence between Palestinians and the Israeli state: she herself was shot with rubber bullets three times at work.[82] Her brother, in an interview, saw these experiences as Idris' primary trigger to commit her suicide attacks, pointing to "all the terrible things she saw… the body parts, the children who were shot, the pregnant women who lost their babies at Israeli checkpoints."[83] In addition, Idris

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[82] Rajan, *Women Suicide Bombers*, 235.

[83] Wafa Idris' brother, quoted in VanderKaay, "Girls Interrupted," 14

had experienced a traumatic event within her personal life, as her husband had divorced her, at least in part for her failure to conceive a child, and had subsequently remarried.[84]

Dareen Abu Aisheh, the second female Palestinian bomber and first to record a testimonial video before her death, committed her suicide bombing attack on February 27th, 2002. Her testimonial is the lengthiest of all collected, and provides context to all three frameworks of martyrdom to be examined. Aisheh was an English student at Najah University in Nablus, and had been recognized for her academic excellence.[85] Leading up to her suicide attack, her 17-year old cousin died completing his own suicide mission in Tel Aviv, and she witnessed a fatal shooting at an Israeli checkpoint only two days before her own death.[86] Her family recalled her discussion of suicide bombing before her death, noting that once, in response to an uncle's protestations about killing civilians in suicide bombings, Aisheh said "Do you feel like a human…when the Israelis control your every move? Do you believe we have a future? If I'm going to die at their hands anyway, why shouldn't I take some of them with me?"[87]

Ayat al-Akhras' testimonial is brief, shaming Arab leaders and armies, and emphasizing the glory of God for her actions. al-Akhras was the youngest of the female suicide bombers, and a student in high school who had planned to go to Bethlehem University in fall 2002.[88] Only three years old at the 1987 outbreak of the First Intifada, much of al-Akhras' life was defined by

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[84] Rajan, *Women Suicide Bombers,* 235.

[85] VanderKaay, "Girls Interrupted," 14-15.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Dareen Abu Aisheh, quoted in ibid., 15.

[88] Ibid., 16.

conflict and tense relations between Palestinians and the Israeli government.[89] At the start of the Second Intifada, she was only fifteen years old, but over the next two years watched as three family members were killed by Israeli troops in the Gaza Strip, one of her brothers was shot (but not killed) during a camp raid on the Dheisheh refugee camp where they lived, and a family friend was killed while attempting to plant a bomb in an Israeli settlement.[90] Days before al-Akhras committed her attack, "a neighbour was shot in the chest while playing with his infant child."[91]

Hanadi Jaradat committed the deadliest of all of the women's attacks on October 4th, 2003.[92] The four months before her attack were transformative in her desire to act as a suicide bomber, as two family members, one a brother and one a cousin, who were both members of Islamic Jihad, were killed by the Israeli military.[93] In an interview, Jaradat's mother said that she would wake in the night screaming "Fadi", the name of her dead brother.[94]

This section has shown that the women who committed violent suicide were all, at least in part, immediately motivated by traumatic events in the immediate lead-up to their bombings. Although, due to length constraints, I did not look at the personal circumstances of all eight of the women, all those who committed acts of suicide bombing during the Second Intifada experienced similar traumatic events in the months before their deaths. While discussions of

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[89] VanderKaay, "Girls Interrupted," 16.

[90] Ibid., 15-16.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, 49.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

frameworks of motivation and martyrdom are central to this thesis, and necessary for an understanding of the phenomenon of female Palestinian bombers, traumatic triggering events played an integral part in each women's individual choice to commit violent suicide. Such traumatic events as explored in this section were examples of death and suffering inflicted upon Palestinian people by the Israeli government and troops during the Second Intifada, and also played a large part in the women's decisions to inflict death and pain upon Israelis in return. Discussions of frameworks can become too theoretical, and remove the direct moments of death and suffering that led to these women's acts. Although femininity, Islamism and above all Palestinian nationalism each played varying roles in their suicides, each of the women were pushed to the ultimate violent act by personal experiences with death and destruction that were unfortunately commonplace in their lives.

**Rejecting Common Frameworks of Martyrdom**

That Idris and subsequent Palestinian women suicide bombers were viewed through the frameworks of Islamist martyrdom and their own femininity should not be surprising. We have seen that the circumstances of their deaths closely matched historical circumstances in which martial Muslim martyrs and martial female martyrs died and were eventually martyred, and that politically motivated narratives, as well as normatively driven assumptions, shaped assumptions of Islamism and femininity. In this section, these frameworks will be analyzed through the women's testimonials.

Mentions of "God" and "Allah" are frequent in the women's testimonial videos—other than Andaleeb Takatkeh's brief testimony, all of the recorded videos mention one of these two

words. In many ways, notions of Islamist martyrdom are tied up in Palestinian nationalist discourses of bombing, as is evident throughout the testimonials, and as will be explored in the next section. Many of the women's testimonies accept some of the traditional ideas about Islamist martyrdom that were explored in Chapter One. For example, Hanadi Jaradat opened her testimonial by vowing that "God will reward us with a special place in heaven."[95] Dareen Abu Aisheh quotes *sura* 3:195 from the Qur'an which stated that "those who fled and were driven forth from their homes and persecuted in My way and who fought and were slain, I shall truly remove their evil and make them enter the Gardens wherein flow rivers—a reward from Allah. And with Allah is the best reward."[96] These examples show us that the devout among the women suicide bombers were assured, and likely comforted by the thought of a heavenly reward after the moment of their violent deaths. In addition, these assertions of belief may have comforted grieving family. However, nothing within the testimonies suggest that this was the primary motivation of the women, who both speak to their hatred of Zionists at far greater length, and with more zealous wording, than their mentions of heavenly reward.

The testimonies mention the greatness and the blessing of God multiple times. Each of Aisheh and Jaradat's testimonials convey a sense that the greatness of God is assisting their completion of a successful suicide attack. However, only one testimonial, that of Ayat al-Akhras,

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[95] Hanadi Jaradat, "Video Testimony, 18 May 2002," accessed in *Women: The Cult of the Suicide Bomber II*, 2006. Accessed through Films Media Group. https://www.films.com/ecTitleDetail.aspx?TitleID=33908, and *Women Suicide Bombers: Narratives of Violence.* London: Routledge (2011): 91. https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.4324/9780203821831 by Julie Rajan.

[96] Dareen Abu Aisheh, "Video Testimony, 27 February 2002," accessed in *Manufacturing Human Bombs: The Making of Palestinian Suicide Bombers.* Washington D.C., United States Institute of Peace Press (2006): 89-90 by Mohammed M. Hafez.

states that she is choosing to become a suicide bomber "for the sake of God."[97] The frequent references to God within the women's testimonials represent their own personal religion, as well as traditional narratives about Islamist martyrdom that stretch back to the time of the Prophet. However, the weight afforded to discussions of religion within the testimonials is far less than the emphasis that would, in the wake of their deaths, be placed upon Islamist framings of the women's suicide attacks in the wake of their deaths. The next section's exploration of the emphasis on Palestinian nationalism within the testimonials will show how questions of heavenly reward, and God's greatness and blessing were secondary motivations, as well as secondary concerns.

Language of implosion often equates the body to weaponry, which is present in the women's testimonials. However, many of the women intimately frame their weaponized bodies as female, introducing the dichotomy of the female body as life-giving and also death-causing into narratives formed in the wake of their deaths. Both Dareen Abu Aisheh and Reem al-Riyashi introduce the biological reproductive potential of women into their testimonials. Aisheh's testimonial transcript reads:

> Let Sharon the coward know that every Palestinian woman will give birth to an army of living martyrs, even if he tries to kill them in the wombs of their mothers at the checkpoints of death. The role of the Palestinian woman will no longer be limited to grieving over the deaths of their husbands, brothers, and fathers; we will transform our bodies into human bombs that spread here and there to demolish the illusion of security for the Israeli people.[98]

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[97] Ayat al-Akhras, "Video Testimony, 29 March 2002," accessed in "Discursive and Political Deployments by/of the 2002 Palestinian women suicide bombers/martyrs." *Feminist Review* 81 (Nov 2005): 29-30. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3874340 by Frances S. Hasso, and "Girls Interrupted: The Making of Female Palestinian Suicide Bombers." in *Terror in the Holy Land: Inside the Anguish of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* ed. Judith Kuriansky. Westport: Praeger Publishers (2006): 16. Accessed through Google Books by Katherine Vaanderkay.

[98] Dareen Abu Aisheh, "Video Testimony, 27 February 2002."

Aisheh's implicit connections between her female bodies' ability to give birth to "an army of living martyrs," and her choice to instead use it as "a human bomb" reject frameworks of gender-logic that centre women's biological reproductive capabilities. Reem al-Riyashi was the only woman Palestinian suicide bomber who already had children at the time of her suicide. al-Riyashi speaks of her children in her testimonial, saying that she "love(s) them very much" and that she is "sure that God will take care of them if I become a martyr."[99] al-Riyashi's essential rejection of motherhood in favour of martyrdom also disrupts gendered frameworks of thought. Rather than behave as a mother, she expresses—and achieves—her desire that "the shredded limbs of my body would be shrapnel, tearing Zionists to pieces, knocking on heaven's door with the skulls of Zionists."[100]

Ayat al-Akhras also implicates her femininity into her testimonial video, albeit in a different way than Aisheh and al-Riyashi. Rather than emphasize the biological potential of her female body, she emphasizes her youth, in order to shame and emasculate "the Arab armies who are sitting and watching the girls of Palestine fighting while they are asleep."[101] In doing so, al-Akhras centres and weaponizes both her youth (she was 17 when she died) and her femininity against both Israeli and complicit Arab states. Analyzed in conjunction with al-Riyashi and Aisheh's testimonials, al-Akhras is demonstrating the end point and the product of a woman's

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[99] Reem al-Riyashi, "Video Testimony, 14 January 2004," accessed in *Female Suicide Bombers*. McFarland & Company: North Carolina, (2006): 130 by Rosemarie Skaine, and Palestinian Media Watch "Female suicide terrorist Reem Riyashi in farewell video: Zionists are "enemies of my religion…How often I desired to carry out a Martyrdom-seeking operation." *Palestinian Media Watch* (Jan 14, 2004). https://palwatch.org/page/351.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ayat al-Akhras, "Video Testimony, 29 March 2002."

biological reproductive potential, the child. She is, as Aisheh says, one of the "living martyrs" to whom Palestinian women will give birth.[102] Andaleeb Takatkeh's testimonial is the most explicit rejection of a feminized framework of martyrdom from any of the women. In her video testimonial she stated: "When you want to carry out such an attack, whether you are a man or a woman, you don't think about the explosive belt or about your body being ripped into pieces. We are suffering. We are dying while we are still alive."[103] This blunt framing of her motivation to commit a suicide bombing attack points to the lived realities that propelled such decisions, in addition to rejecting feminized discourses of martyrdom.

These women's testimonials referred explicitly to their feminine bodies, and to their basic biological abilities. Even as they acknowledge such gendered frameworks, going so far as to employ them when they shame male soldiers and leaders for their inaction, they have rejected traditional assumptions of femininity in favour of centring the weaponized potential of their Palestinian bodies.

**Palestinian Nationalism**

Tami Amanda Jacoby discusses the role of Palestinian women and womanhood in ideas of Palestinian nationalism in her article "Feminism, Nationalism, and Difference: Reflections on the Palestinian Women's Movement." Although written in 1999 before the outbreak of the Second Intifada, Jacoby encapsulates much of the tension between masculine ideals of nationalism and feminine participation in nationalistic movements that became increasingly relevant in the wake

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[102] Dareen Abu Aisheh, "Video Testimony, 27 February 2002."

[103] Andaleeb Takatkeh, "Video Testimony, 13 April 2002."

of Palestinian women's involvement in suicide bombing attacks. Jacoby asks: "what space is available for the diversity of women's agency within feminisms that originate in occupation, national liberation and militarized conflict?"[104] This question resonates particularly within the context of the women suicide bombers, as the women are totalized by others around their femininity and their relationship to Islam, and are not given agency in discussions after their deaths to assert their own self-asserted motivations of Palestinian nationalism.

Julie Rajan argues that the recasting of Palestinian women suicide bombers as "proper women…who ascribed to proper social behaviours,… and fulfill traditional female social roles such as wife, mother, and daughter" was linked to male apprehensions and anxieties about feminine agency expressed in violent ways.[105] As Rajan notes, this was done by Palestinians and Arabs, in spite of the women's own statements, because of way that the agency and desires expressed by these women challenged the preconceived traditional masculine-centered ideas of Palestinian nationalism.[106] Discussions of Palestinian nationalism as masculine stem from both Palestinian and Western Orientalist assumptions about nationhood. Palestinian masculine nationalism emerged from the decades of oppression Palestinian people faced in the wake of the 1948 declaration of the state of Israel, and the Naqba. Amireh describes this as a "brand of nationalism, where men bear arms and women bear children," which is "openly advocated by the Islamic movement in Palestine."[107] Islamist ideas about suicide bombing women have been

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[104] Tami Amanda Jacoby, "Feminism, nationalism, and difference: Reflections on the Palestinian women's movement," *Women's Studies International Forum* 22, no. 5 (1999): 512. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395(99)00056-4.

[105] Rajan, *Women Suicide Bombers,* 224.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Amireh, "Between Complicity and Subversion," 757.

discussed in this study, and are remarkably similar to this articulated brand of nationalism. Although women are symbolized as "mothers of the nation," Palestinian citizenship rights transmit from father to son, laying the burden of reproduction upon women, while depriving them of the actual reproduction of national identity.[108] In addition, the land of Palestine itself is often depicted with feminine language and terms, but accompanied by male ownership thereof.[109] Such expressions of Palestinian nationalism are advanced by leaders of Islamist groups and movements, but also by secular groups led by men, who, in the context of female suicide bombers, have been forced to contend with the extreme violent potential of female Palestinian nationalism.

Western assumptions, on the other hand, are formed by longstanding Orientalist assumptions of gender, power and nationality within the broader Middle East.[110] Western observers remove female Palestinian agency from their representations of the conflict overall, as well as from the female suicide bombers themselves, casting them as easily-manipulated, trauma ridden women who are coerced into taking their own lives by Palestinian organizations such as Hamas and the PLO, and again ignoring entirely what the women stated in their recorded video testimonials.[111] Such castings employ the "intellectual, aesthetic, scholarly, and cultural energies" that have been directed towards propagating and upholding Western domination over the Orient

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[108] Jacoby, "Feminism, nationalism, and difference," 514.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Caron E. Gentry and Kathryn Whitworth, "The discourse of desperation: the intersections of neo-Orientalism, gender and Islam in the Chechen struggle." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 4, no 2 (2011): 147. https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1080/17539153.2011.586202.

[111] Berko, *The Path to Paradise,* 292*;* Victor, *Army of Roses,* 139.

for centuries, as articulated in Edward Said's seminal *Orientalism* thesis.[112] Within Western feminist discourses, neo-Orientalist tendencies remain present: as Nahla Abdo argues, "Arab/ Muslim women continue to be presented as the imagined objects rather than the real subjects."[113] The deployment of Orientalist strategies within supposedly emancipatory movements such as feminist mobilizations, theory, and writings provides yet another externally imposed barrier against which Palestinian women must struggle to present themselves as Palestinian nationalists.

As Caron Gentry and Kathryn Whitmore assert, Western assumptions of Middle Eastern nationalism are too often totalized with perceptions of Islam.[114] Muslim women are perceived as oppressed as a totality, and therefore lacking all agency to be nationalistic themselves.[115] Therefore, Orientalist perceptions of gender and religion are working together to create a Western view of Middle Eastern, and therefore Palestinian, nationalism that sees women as weak and subjugated, and men as overly oppressive and dangerous in their connections to potential terrorist acts.[116] Western perceptions elevate these ideas to their ideas of Palestinian nationalism, and in fact produce a framing of Palestinian nationalism very similar to the masculine version outlined by Islamists within Palestine, where men are framed (although negatively in this context) as armed, and women as childbearing.[117] Expressions of violent Palestinian nationalism by women are therefore poorly understood by Western observers based on their Orientalist

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[112] Edward Said, *Orientalism,* Toronto: Random House of Canada Limited (1978): 15.

[113] Nahla Abdo, quoted in Jacoby, "Feminism, nationalism, and difference," 512.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Gentry and Whitworth, "The discourse of desperation," 146.

[117] Jacoby, "Feminism, nationalism, and difference," 512.

preconceptions. Together, both the Palestinian and Western understandings of masculine nationalism help to explain why Palestinian nationalism was never accepted or advanced as a central framework to explain the suicide bombing attacks of the women.

In fact, female expressions of Palestinian nationalism have been present for over a century.[118] Middle Eastern feminist theory seeks to challenge "the hegemony of Western agendas by rejecting the construction of women as a unitary, global category with uniform interests."[119] By embracing nationalism as an emancipatory framework, Middle Eastern feminists have consolidated around "the politicization of women in anti colonial and national liberation movements."[120] One must be clear that during the First Palestinian Intifada, women fully joined within organizational structures, and sought to advance both Palestinian nationalism, as well as women's position within Palestinian nationalistic movements and structures.[121] The nationalistic sentiments and organizational power displayed by women during the First Intifada managed to considerably augment women's participation within groups and structures, and paved the way for further involvement during the Second Intifada.[122] Nonetheless, in seeking to be understood as Palestinian nationalists in their own right, Palestinian women must struggle against colonial, religious, and gendered subjugations, which compound upon one another, and which are propagated by various groups.

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[118] Jacoby, "Feminism, nationalism, and difference," 513.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Joost R. Hiltermann, *Behind the Intifada: Labor and Women's Movements in the Occupied Territories,* Princeton: Princeton University Press (1991): 126, 163-172.

[122] Ibid., 163-164.

**Palestinian Martyrs**

Expressions of Palestinian nationalism are present within the recorded video testimonials of the suicide bombing women of the Second Intifada. Of all three frameworks examined throughout this study, it is the only one that is present in every collected video testimonial. Given the brief script of most of the testimonials, our discussion of the explicit centering of Palestinian nationalism returns us to many of the same phrases used in the previous sections. Palestinian nationalism is expressed through denouncements and shaming of non-Palestinian Arab leaders, who have failed to defend Palestinians from occupation and suffering at the hands of the Israeli government.[123] It is expressed most frequently using the language of Zionism in derogatory terms, as women clearly frame their actions as being first and foremost to hurt and kill Zionists. Dareen Abu Aisheh's testimonial, for example, promises "to give of myself in the path of God to be the bombs that scorch the Zionists" and that "the role of the Palestinian woman will no longer be limited to grieving… we will transform our bodies into human bombs that spread here and there to demolish the illusion of security for the Israeli people."[124] Throughout, both God and Aisheh's femininity are called upon, but only as complements to her identity as Palestinian, and to her hatred of Zionists.

Hanadi Jaradat and Reem al-Riyashi's testimonials are similar in their composition. Jaradat exclaims that "In His (God's) greatness, I decided to be the sixth female martyr who would turn her body intro shrapnel to pierce the hearts of each Zionist colonialist in my country, and every settler or Zionist who has tried to sow death in my country."[125] Similar to Aisheh's testimonial,

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[123] Ayat al-Akhras, "Video Testimony, 29 March 2002."

[124] Dareen Abu Aisheh, "Video Testimony, 27 February 2002."

[125] Hanadi Jaradat, "Video Testimony, 18 May 2002."

Jaradat ties religion and her femininity, as well as the line of female bombers before her, into her narrative before centering it on her ultimate goal. Jaradat's testimonial is the most frank of all the women—it explicitly rejects the Israeli state as a colonialist imposition, and calls the land "my country," showing the Palestinian nationalist motivations that drove her to commit violent suicide.[126] al-Riyashi, the only mother to commit a suicide bombing attack during the intifada, does the same when she claims that she "hoped that the shredded limbs of my body would be shrapnel, tearing Zionists to pieces, knocking on heaven's door with the skulls of Zionists."[127] Later in her testimonial she mentions her love for her children, which is superseded by her desire to be a suicide bomber and a martyr.[128]

A clear expression of Palestinian nationalism that distinguishes the women from associations of pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism is the pointed antagonism directed towards non-Palestinian Arabs within the recorded testimonies. al-Akhras articulates her anger as a feeling of betrayal, due to the failure of the Arab leaders "to fulfill Palestine's duty."[129] Andaleeb Takatkeh, who filmed her testimonial video and committed her suicide attack only two weeks after al-Akhras, echoed this sentiment, saying "I've chosen to say with my body what Arab leaders have failed to say… My body is a barrel of gunpowder that burns the enemy."[130] These sentiments are also outward expressions of Palestinian nationalism, but instead of being directed against

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[126] Hanadi Jaradat, "Video Testimony, 18 May 2002."

[127] Reem al-Riyashi, "Video Testimony, 14 January 2004."

[128] Ibid.

[129] Ayat al-Akhras, "Video Testimony, 29 March 2002."

[130] Andaleeb Takatkeh, "Video Testimony, 13 April 2002."

Zionists, they are directed against other Arab leaders and armies that have failed to help Palestinians achieve a national homeland.[131]

Several of the families of the women also identified Palestinian nationalism as the driving force behind their suicide acts. Wafa Idris' mother said of her: "She was a Muslim, which made her fearless, but it was the injustice of the Jews that made her act."[132] An aunt described her as "a fighter with a strong sense of patriotism. She was destined to become a martyr."[133] This framing acknowledges Idris' religion as one of the motivating forces for her suicide bombing attack, but centres Palestinian nationalism as the main reason, and the trigger for her death "act". Hanadi Jaradat's cousin Sami, who filmed her testimonial video, discussed the agency Jaradat was given in deciding where she wanted to perform her suicide, and what she wanted to target—she decided upon Haifa, and sought a military base to harm active agents of the Israeli government.[134] Reem al-Riyashi's husband described his deceased wife as "an honourable woman who sacrificed her life for the sake of Islam and Palestine."[135] Hiba Daraghmeh's grandmother believed that her primary motivation was hatred of Jews, saying "She was very angry. She was full of hatred against Jews. I believe this is the motivation for what she has done."[136] All of these close relatives of the women articulate Palestinian nationalism, often

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[131] Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity,* 11-12.

[132] Wafa Idris' mother, quoted in Rajan, *Women Suicide Bombers*, 235

[133] Wafa Idris' aunt, quoted in Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 139.

[134] Hanadi Jaradat's cousin Sami, quoted in Rajan, *Women Suicide Bombers*, 158.

[135] Reem al-Riyashi's husband, quoted in VanderKaay, "Girls Interrupted," 21.

[136] Hiba Daraghmeh's grandmother, quoted in ibid.

expressed through hatred of Zionists, as a driving force behind their loved ones' decisions to become suicide bombers.

# CONCLUSION

The martyrdom of Wafa Idris, Andaleeb Takatkeh, Dareen Abu Aisheh and the other Palestinian women who committed suicide bombing attacks during the Second Palestinian Intifada occurred on the basis of motivations seemingly in tension with their stated desires in recorded "martyrdom", or testimonial videos. The narratives of Palestinian female martyrdom stemming from suicide bombing attacks were tied up with, and viewed through perceptions of their female bodies, and their relationship to Islam. This study has sought to use the recorded testimonial videos to examine the accuracy of narratives of femininity and Islamism in the women's own stated motivations and desires.

The women present themselves as Palestinian martyrs first and foremost. Their varying relationships to Islam, and to their female bodies are present and evident throughout the testimonials. In contrast, both popular Palestinian and Western representations of the women, and their motivations and desires, focused on and elevated only those two frameworks, dismissing Palestinian nationalism as a core motivation for the women's suicide bombing attacks. As discussed, this centering was deliberate from within Palestinian groups, as female motivations of Palestinian nationalism called into question the male authority that underlines it and many other anti-colonial movements. The focus on Islamist framing can also be seen as a question of male authority, as it allowed groups like Hamas to issue their own self-interested proclamations about how women were allowed to become suicide bombers, provided they were accompanied by a man as they were doing so. Western framings of the women in terms of femininity and Islam were perhaps less deliberate, but rather show that Western notions of majority-Muslim societies are constrained by their perceived understandings of Islam that impose Orientalist Western ideas

of femininity, as well as anxieties about Muslim-sponsored terrorism onto discussions about the women's motivations.

However, as evidenced in the women's recorded video testimonials, as well as interviews with family and friends in the wake of their suicide attacks, the women were intimately motivated by Palestinian nationalist desires. Removing Palestinian nationalism as a legitimate framework for their actions has diminished the agency of the women themselves in narratives about their own death and martyrdom. Throughout this study, which has aimed at centering the words of the women themselves, it has become clear that the eight Palestinian women who became suicide bombers during the Second Palestinian Intifada fought against intersections of colonized histories, gendered subjugations, and religious assumptions of their role in the nation in order to present themselves as Palestinian nationalists in their final acts.

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## APPENDIX A

### Transcribed Testimonials of Suicide Bombers

| Date | Name of Bomber | Group | Testimonial |
|---|---|---|---|
| 27/02/2002 | Dareen Abu Aisheh | al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade | "In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, Most Merciful,<br><br>Blessings and peace upon the leader of the holy fighters, our Prophet Muhammad, God's blessing and peace upon him:<br><br>The Almighty Says: So their Lord accepted their prayer, saying: I will not suffer the work of any worker among you to be lost whether male or female, the one of you being from the other. So those who fled and were driven forth from their homes and persecuted in My way and who fought and were slain, I shall truly remove their evil and make them enter the Gardens wherein flow rivers—a reward from Allah. And with Allah is the best reward.<br><br>Because the role of the Muslim Palestinian woman is no less important than the role of our fighting brothers, I have decided to be the second female martyr to continue in the path that was forged by the female martyr Wafa al-Idris. I give my humble self in the path of God to avenge the limbs of our martyred brothers and in revenge for the sanctity of our religion and mosques, and in revenge for the sanctity of the al-Aqsa mosque and all of God's places of worship which have been turned into [alcohol] bars in which all that has been forbidden by God is pursued in order to spite our religion and to insult the message of our Prophet.<br><br>Because the body and soul are the only things we possess, I give of myself in the path of God to be the bombs that scorch the Zionists, and destroy the myth of God's chosen people. Because the Muslim Palestinian woman was and continues to take the lead in the procession of jihad against injustice, I call upon my sisters to continue on this path, for this is the path of all those who are free and honourable.<br><br>I call upon all who still hold to an ounce of decency and honour to continue on this road, to make clear to all the Zionist tyrants that they amount to nothing in the face of our determination and our jihad. Let Sharon the coward know that every Palestinian woman will give both to an army of living martyrs, even if he tries to kill them in the wombs of their mothers at the checkpoints of death. The role of the Palestinian woman will no longer be limited to grieving over the death of their husbands, brothers, and fathers; we will transform our bodies into human bombs that spread here and there to demolish the illusion of security for the Israeli people.<br><br>In conclusion, I say to every Muslim and determined fighter that loves freedom and martyrdom to stay on this honourable path, the way of martyrdom and liberation.<br><br>Your daughter the living martyr, Dareen Abu Aisheh." |

| Date | Name of Bomber | Group | Testimonial |
|---|---|---|---|
| 29/03/2002 | Ayat al-Akhras | al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade | "I, living martyr Ayat al-Akhras execute my mission purely for the sake of God. To the Arab rulers I say enough sleeping, betrayal, and failure to fulfill Palestine's duty. Shame on the Arab armies who are sitting and watching the girls of Palestine fighting while they are asleep.<br><br>Let this be intifada until victory!" |
| 12/04/2002 | Andaleeb Takatkeh | al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade | "When you want to carry out such an attack, whether you are a man or a woman, you don't think about the explosive belt or about your body being ripped into pieces. We are suffering. We are dying while we are still alive.<br><br>I've chosen to say with my body what Arab leaders have failed to say… My body is a barrel of gunpowder that burns the enemy." |
| 18/05/2003 | Hiba Daraghmeh | al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and Islamic Jihad | Recorded a testimonial video. Transcript not accessible. |
| 04/10/2003 | Hanadi Jaradat | Islamic Jihad | "God will reward us with a special place in heaven. God is all-seeing, all-knowing. In his greatness I decided to be the sixth female martyr who would turn her body into shrapnel to pierce the hearts of each Zionist colonialists in my country, and every settler or Zionist who has tried to sow death in my country. We are not the only ones who must sow and reap." |
| 14/01/2004 | Reem al-Riyashi | Hamas | "I am the Martyr Reem Saleh Riyashi, I hoped that the shredded limbs of my body would be shrapnel, tearing Zionists to pieces, knocking on heaven's door with the skulls of Zionists. How often I spoke to my soul: "Oh soul, if you loathe the Zionists, enemies of my religion, my blood shall be my path to heaven."<br><br>I have two children and love them very much. But my love to see God was stronger than my love for my children, I'm sure that God will take care of them if I become a martyr.<br><br>Since 8th grade I have striven, seeking people daily to guide [me], listen, and help me. How often I desired to carry out a Martyrdom-seeking [suicide] operation inside Israel, and with perseverance, and with Allah's grace, my wish has been fulfilled." |
| 23/09/2004 | Zainab Abu Salem | al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade | Recorded a testimonial video. Transcript not accessible. |