

HAMAS

PROMOTING MARTYRDOM

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"We are a mujahid nation, a nation that makes sacrifices, a nation of jihad. Our cries are of jihad for the sake of Allah. This is a nation of martyrdom and martyrdom-seeking, a nation of jihad for the sake of Allah. The people make a great sacrifice. They sacrifice their children, their sons, for the sake of Palestine, and for the sake of the land of Islam and the Muslims. The might of the nation of jihad is revealed on the land of Palestine, as well as in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sudan, and in all the fronts of confrontation with the enemies of Allah. This is a nation whose beating heart knows no feebleness or confusion. Its beating heart is Palestine and the Palestinian people. It is the nation of martyrdom and sacrifice." - Ismail Haniyeh, senior political leader of Hamas and disputed Prime Minister of the Palestinian National Authority in Gaza.¹

¹ Ismail Haniyeh on Al-Aqsa TV in Gaza, 15-11-2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WhEITYPlE1k> (02-05-2011)

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INTRODUCTION

"In Islamic terminology, there is a word which has a special sanctity. When anyone familiar with the Islamic modes of expression hears this word, he feels it to be invested with a special glory. This word is shahid." - Ayatollah Murtada Mutahhari.²

In December 2008 I visited the Palestinian Territories, in a study trip organised by IKV Pax Christi. Over the course of ten days, we stayed with a host family, followed workshops and attended lectures in different cities on the West Bank. Walking through the streets of Bethlehem and Hebron, I was fascinated by the many posters that were stuck to the walls. On them pictures of men, dressed in what looked like military clothes, carrying big guns. Dark-haired, bearded, defiantly looking straight into the camera. Triumphant, almost. It didn't take long before I understood that these men were 'martyrs'. Islamic militants, the ones you heard about in the evening news, blowing themselves up in buses or at checkpoints. These posters were *everywhere*. Apparently, this was considered 'normal', since none of the Palestinian people passing them by really paid attention to them. And I wondered, what does this say about Palestinian society? The warm-hearted people I met everywhere were used to them. Admired them, even, since those people actually gave up their lives to support the 'Palestinian cause'. Those people *fought* for their country. I subtly inspected every poster I passed. Even without understanding Arabic the pictures seemed to tell enough of a story. It wasn't long before I stood in front of a poster with a boy on it. Judging from his looks, he couldn't be any older than twelve. This boy was killed by Israeli soldiers, my host father told me. He didn't blow himself up, he didn't carry a gun, but he had been killed, whether on purpose or by accident. How it happened didn't matter, this boy now was a hero, a martyr, a *shahid*. Palestinians that get killed by Israeli soldiers die for their country, and go to Paradise. Long after I returned home I thought about this. And I thought about the Palestinian children. If children pass posters like that everyday, and hear about how those people are heroes - how does that influence society? How can we ever expect to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict if people are encouraged to fight from the moment they are born? Those people don't know any better, and it is hard to blame them, especially given the circumstances a lot of them live in. To use the words of Mohammed Hafez: *"The Palestinians have been driven to a state of hopelessness and despair, the kind of despair that comes from a situation that keeps getting worse, a despair where living becomes no different from dying. Desperation is a very powerful force- it is not only negative, but it can propel people to actions or solutions that would have previously been unthinkable."*³ Throughout this thesis, I hope to find an answer to the question that occupies my mind:

How does Hamas promote suicide missions by portraying martyrs, and how does this influence the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?

To answer this question, it is important to first obtain a clear understanding of the history and position of the martyr in Islam. Today's actions are undoubtedly influenced and inspired by events in the past, and that is why the first chapter of this paper will focus entirely on that topic. In the second chapter, I will look at how Hamas relates itself to the concept of martyrdom. How does Hamas use this ancient phenomenon in a contemporary conflict? What are Hamas' objectives, and are suicide bombings only a strategy to reach them, or is there a more spiritual reason for them? In the third and final chapter I will focus on how Hamas influences Palestinian society in order to maintain a 'culture of martyrdom'. Which means do they use to influence the Palestinian people, from childhood on, into supporting martyrdom operations?

² M. Taleqani, M. Mutahhari & A. Shari'ati, *Jihad and shahadat*, Houston: The Institute for Research and Islamic Studies, 1986, 3.

³ M. M. Hafez, *Manufacturing human bombs*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2006.

My main objective while writing this paper is to provide a more complete understanding of how an entire society can be influenced by propaganda, and what the consequences are when it comes to solving a conflict. I will, however, solely focus on the Palestinian side of the story. I am interested in how Palestinian society 'works', and how it is affected by this longterm conflict and occupation. And even though I think it is very important to study the role of both parties in this conflict, the Israeli side is beyond the scope of this paper, due to a lack of time and space. Furthermore, the same goes for the detailed structure and implementation of politics and their objectives in the Palestinian Territories.

MARTYRDOM IN ISLAM

"And do not think those who have been killed in the way of Allah as dead; they are rather living with their Lord, well-provided for. Rejoicing in what their Lord has given them of His bounty, and they rejoice for those who stay behind and did not join them, knowing that they have nothing to fear and that they shall not grieve." [Qur'an 3:169-70]

2.1 Martyrdom

Before we look at the history and role of martyrdom in Islam, it is necessary to get a clear definition of what martyrdom exactly *is*. The word 'martyr' itself derives from the Greek word *martyrion*, which has 'witness' as its essential meaning.⁴ A martyr is considered a person that bears witness to one's faith, steadfast, even if this results in death. In most cases, this is not only regarded as a testimony to the degree of one's commitment, but also as a performance of a religious act, specifically an act of self-sacrifice. The idea of martyrdom has a long tradition within many religious traditions.⁵ Judaism has a rich history of being persecuted, and the Christian faith is derived from one of the most well-known martyrs ever, Jesus Christ. Islam forms no exception to this rule.

The literal translation for martyrdom, as found in the Qur'an, is *shahadat*. Abedi and Legenhausen explain that, like *martyr*, the root of *shahadat* signifies witnessing. This etymological point is hidden in English by the fact that *martyr* and *witness* do not share the same root, but in Arabic the connection is obvious. The root letters *S H H D* are used to form the verb *shahida*, witnessing or giving testimony. One described as a *shahid* can be a witness or a martyr, depending on the context.⁶ Cook notes that the idea of Muslims being witnesses 'against' other groups is fairly common throughout the Qur'an. Whether active, in this life, or passive, at the Day of Judgment.⁷

Cook notes a certain 'collective Muslim memory of martyrdom'. According to him, this does not derive from suras in the Qur'an, but from historic events. Muhammad was amongst powerful, albeit non-Muslim, members of his tribe. Muslim slaves in Meccan society, however, did not have any protection and were expected not to offend their pagan masters' beliefs. The pagan pantheon accepted diverse deities, whereas Islam has only one God, all other gods are considered satanic or demonic. It is this exclusive monotheism, Cook states, that created the pre-conditions for the first Muslim martyrdom experiences. Mecca was a society that was consensus-driven, but Muhammad and his fellow Muslim were unwilling to fit in. Therefore, from the very beginning, there had to be conflict.⁸ He also mentions the first martyr in Islam, the slave Bilal. His master tortured him to make him deny his belief in Muhammad. Eventually, he was freed from slavery, and although he did not die, he became one of the paradigmatic first martyrs because of his suffering for the sake of Islam.⁹ Apart from Bilal, there are no examples of living martyrs to be found.

Koshrokhavar mentions two types martyrdom in Islam: defensive martyrdom and offensive martyrdom. The first type has as its main goal to bear witness, even if this would lead to death. Oppressors are opposed by adopting a non-violent attitude of defiance. The second type is characterized by its active nature, it is a struggle against those the believer regards as oppressors.¹⁰ David Cook puts this in a historic context, and adds a third type. He considers the first type as martyrs that suffered passively, but specifically because they were Muslims. The sole reason for their suffering was their adhesion to Islamic beliefs and their refusal to compromise those beliefs upon

⁴ F. Koshrokhavar, *Suicide bombers: Allah's new martyrs*, London: Pluto Press, 2005, 6.

⁵ M. Juergensmeyer, 'Martyrdom and sacrifice in a time of terror', *Social Research* 75: 2 (2008), 417.

⁶ Taleqani, Mutahhari & Shari'ati, *Jihad and shahadat*, 3.

⁷ D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, Cambridge: University Press, 2007, 16.

⁸ Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 13.

⁹ Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 14.

¹⁰ Koshrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 5-6.

command.¹¹ The second type is one who is tortured or killed because of his or her identification with the Muslim community, but not specifically because of his or her beliefs.¹² The third type is the fighting martyr, a type that is exclusively found in Islam. Cook mentions that other religions like Christianity and Buddhism have certain aggressive parts in their narratives of martyrdom, like active persuasions to convert people, but the image of a 'fighting martyr' is absent. The fact that the fighting martyr is a common phenomenon in Islam might be due to the fact that the Prophet Muhammad played a big role as a religious, political and military leader after the *hijra*.¹³ He participated in numerous battles, and therefore adds a central element of actively seeking out martyrdom on part of the believer.

However, according to Cook, much of the *jihad* teaching in the Qur'an deals with the fact that the Muslim community was reluctant to fight. They had to be encouraged, and this was done by ensuring them of God's complete support for their cause, and rewards afterwards.¹⁴

Cook stresses that the classical Muslim framework of martyrology is different from that of other faiths. There has been relatively little violence against Muslims for their beliefs throughout history, Islam has been rather 'successful'. Perhaps because of that, Islam had to seek other conceptions of martyrdom than merely the passive kind. The Muslim ideal for a martyr became a person, usually a man, that actively sought out a violent situation with pure intentions, and got killed as a result. An action like this expressed courage and defiance of the enemy, loyalty towards Islam, and the pure intention to please Allah. This does not involve an extensive process of dying, unlike in Christian martyrologies. The Muslim martyr was required to speak out about his death, with his dying words to be his immortal contribution to Islam.¹⁵

2.2 Sacrifice

Whether passive or aggressive, all forms of martyrdom share one similarity: there has to be a martyr, and one can only become a martyr when one suffers, and eventually dies. Juergensmeyer notes that this dimension links it to the activity that some scholars see as the most fundamental form of religiosity: sacrifice, a rite of 'destruction', as he puts it. This process is found in virtually every religious tradition in the world, from Aztecs sacrificing their enemies in temples to Jews that kill a goat and smear the blood on their doorposts. The word 'sacrifice' is derived from the Latin *sacrificium*, 'to make holy'. This suggests that this process of religious destruction has a spiritual and ennobling meaning, in which the chosen person or animal is elevated to a divine status. The negative aspect of killing is transformed into something positive because of its religious context. The same goes for martyrdom in the case of dying, or getting killed, for one's faith. Like all religious images of sacrifice, martyrdom provides symbols of a violence that is conquered -or put in its place- by the larger framework that is provided by religious language.¹⁶

When it comes to the actual practice of sacrifice, Juergensmeyer mentions the book of Leviticus. This part of the Hebrew Bible, which in itself is sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, gives a very detailed guide for preparing animals for sacrificial slaughter. The ritual of sacrifice plays a central role in religious services like the Eucharist. The reason for this, he states, has to do with several factors. First off, the function of 'purification' is brought forward. René Girard described this function as "*to trick violence into spending itself on victims whose death will provoke no reprisals*". This 'scapegoating' can have positive effects on communities; it creates a greater social cohesion. Especially with groups that suffer from a shared enemy, there is a certain desire to imitate a rival, 'mimetic desire', and sacrificial rituals provide a vent for those violent impulses. A theory that has been invented by Freud.¹⁷ However, Juergensmeyer also takes into account the aspect of 'cosmic war'. Religious warfare, with sacrificing members of the enemy's side and offering up martyrs on

¹¹ Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 21.

¹² *Ibid.*, 21.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁶ Juergensmeyer, 'Martyrdom and sacrifice', 418.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 419.

one's own is one part, but it is this 'cosmic' element that contains ideas of intimate and ultimate tension, the distinction between the sacred and the profane, order versus chaos, good versus evil and truth versus falsehood. War captures this dividing antinomy, this creation of 'us' versus 'them', rather than sacrifice.¹⁸ This also provides motives for persecution, conquest and the hope of redemption and liberation. It is this context of cosmic war that gives an act of sacrifice its meaning.

A red thread through all narratives of sacrifice is that the object sacrificed, whether it's an animal or a human being, is 'out of place', and therefore a symbol of disorder. Juergensmeyer mentions that these objects are (almost) granted a divine or godly status, which also applies to the deaths of Jesus Christ and Hussein.¹⁹ It was not just the sacrifice that made them divine. Rather, the almost unhuman holiness that tradition already accredited to them, was what made them the ideal candidate for slaughter. Acts of religious terrorism that have been perpetrated in recent years are consistent with this theme, as will be shown in chapter 2. But the act of sacrifice is not solely carried out for religious goals, it also has a social aspect to it.²⁰ In the case of martyrdom operations committed by militants, martyrs give their lives for the community, the *umma*. According to Christianity, Jesus Christ allowed himself to be captured and crucified to take away the sins of mankind, and therefore 'saving' them. Religion is what lies at the base, but 'the greater good', a community, is necessary for a person to step, or be put forward in order to be 'sacrificed'. This also adds a sense of rationality, perhaps strategy to the act, to which I will return later.

2.3 Jihad

Islamic martyrdom operations are placed in a context of *jihad*. The contemporary use of this word often implicates a 'holy war' against non-Muslims. Azam Tamimi states, however, that there is nothing in the Islamic sources that describes the war as 'holy'. Rendering the word in this way has more to do with the history of Christianity in Europe, than with the tradition, teachings or history of Islam. The term is a European Christian invention, he adds, dating back to around AD 1096, when Rome started preaching its 'Holy Crusade' for the city of Jerusalem.²¹ The exact definition, therefore, is not entirely unambiguous. According to Abedi and Legenhausen, the literal translation is struggle, exertion, or expenditure of effort. Translating it as 'crusade' or 'holy war', words that more directly refer to violence, would be incorrect, even though it often has military connotations.

Abedi and Legenhausen deconstruct the word jihad into its root letters, 'J H D', from which a number of related words can be formed. In the Qur'an, the verb *jahada* and the verbal noun *jihad* are often followed by the phrase *fi sabil Allah*, 'in the path/way of God'. A person practicing this jihad is called a *mujahid*. One of two similar words they mention, that are not mentioned in the Qur'an, is *ijtihad*, the struggle of a scholar to determine the correct ruling on a point of shari'ah, religious law. The other is *mujtahid*, one who has the ability to make independent assessments of points of law. They stress that, even though the word 'jihad', like the word 'struggle', can be used with reference to fighting, the Qur'an has a number of other terms which are used specifically for military endeavours.²²

On a theoretic level, jihad is an everyday living concept. Post and Ali distinguish two different kinds; a greater and a lesser jihad. The greater jihad embodies the struggle to lead a life free of evil. This consists of the jihad of the heart, that strives for a heart free of evil thoughts and desires. The jihad of the tongue refers to living a pious life, in rule with the words of the prophet Muhammad. The jihad of the deed asks for believers to carry out deeds to assist those members of the *umma*, the Muslim community, that are suffering. The lesser jihad, Post and Ali state, refers to the obligation to

¹⁸ Juergensmeyer, 'Martyrdom and sacrifice', 420.

¹⁹ Hussein ibn Ali was a direct descendant of the Prophet, and was killed at the battle of Karbala in 680 A.D. Husayn and his Shi'ite partisans marched to death against the troops of the Sunni caliph, this is considered to be the first act of martyrdom in Islam. Today, Shias still reenact this battle on the Day of Ashura.

F. Ali & J. Post, 'The history and evolution of martyrdom in the service of defensive jihad: an analysis of suicide bombers in current conflicts', *Social Research* 75: 2 (2008), 616.

²⁰ T. Asad, *On suicide bombing*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, 43.

²¹ M. Al-Rasheed & M. Shterin, *Dying for faith - religiously motivated violence in the contemporary world*, London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009, 97.

²² Taleqani, Mutahhari & Shari'ati, *Jihad and shahadat*, 2.

defend the umma by sword. They stress that this lesser jihad is strictly defensive; it can only be carried out when the sword is taken up against believers.²³

Sayyid Qutb, who was the Egyptian Muslim Brothers' chief spokesman after 1954, however, made strong statements against Muslim thinkers that would limit jihad to the sole explanation of 'defense'. According to Abedi and Legenhausen, he enunciates the traditional position that jihad is not for the sake of conversion, but to make *shari'ah* the law of the land, and thereby to abolish oppressive political systems. This position is very similar to that of many medieval authors. Jihad may be justified not only for defense of the Islamic state, but for attack against any oppressor.²⁴ Qutb explicitly condemns forcible conversion, but has no tolerance for any government which does not enforce the shari'ah, either.²⁵

It is the 'jihad of the sword' that extremists use to justify their violence, and hostile rhetoric against the West. In their opinion, moderate and non-violent groups are also amongst the 'non-believers', since they misinterpret the true meaning of jihad. According to Post & Ali, however, it is impossible for martyrdom to exist without jihad. The reverse is very well possible.²⁶

2.4 Qital

The concept of *qital* deserves to be briefly mentioned on its own, next to that of jihad. Until the Prophet and his followers migrated from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE, the hijra, there was a ban on fighting for believers in Islam. After the migration there was an increased need for self-defense against external threats, which resulted in a permission to use force against enemies in battle. This permission, however, has its limits. Muslims are only allowed to take up arms when they are attacked themselves. Tamimi quotes Qur'an 2:190: "*And fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but transgress not the limits. Truly, Allah likes not the transgressors.*" When in Islamic literature on hadith and *fiqh*, Islamic jurisprudence, the word *jihad* is mentioned without further designation, it usually refers to *qital*.²⁷ Qital is the part of jihad that exclusively refers to actual violence, and is best translated as 'fighting' or 'combat'.²⁸

2.5 Suicide, or: self-chosen martyrdom

Whereas the exact stance concerning jihad in Islam is not completely unambiguous, there is a clear statement against suicide that leaves little room for multiple interpretations. In the authoritative Sunni hadith 7:670, the Prophet is quoted: "*Whoever purposely throws himself from a mountain and kills himself, will be in the (Hell) Fire falling down into it and abiding therein perpetually forever; and whoever drinks poison and kills himself with it, he will be carrying his poison in his hand and drinking it in the (Hell) Fire wherein he will abide eternally forever; and whoever kills himself with an iron weapon, will be carrying that weapon in his hand and stabbing his abdomen with it in the (Hell) Fire wherein he will abide eternally forever.*"

Muslims scholars quite unanimously condemn the sole act of suicide (*'intihar*) on theological grounds. The Qur'an also forbids the killing of innocent civilians. It is quite remarkable, for that reason, that there is so much support for seemingly 'un-Islamic' actions, martyrdom operations.

Muslim scholars and clerics play a big part in legitimizing bombing actions. The former Lebanese Shi'a Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah († 2010), spiritual mentor of Hizballah, was one of the most prominent Muslim scholars that openly supported suicide bombings. In an interview with the British newspaper The Telegraph, he answered, when asked about his opinion on the matter: "*I was not the one who launched the idea of so-called suicide bombings, but I have*

²³ Ali & Post, 'The history and evolution of martyrdom', 620.

²⁴ Taleqani, Mutahhari & Shari'ati, *Jihad and shahadat*, 14.

²⁵ Ibid., 15.

²⁶ Ali & Post, 'The history and evolution of martyrdom', 618.

²⁷ Al-Rasheed & Shterin, *Dying for faith*, 97.

²⁸ Ibid., 96.

certainly argued in favour of them. I do, though, make a distinction between them and attacks that target people in a state of peace - which was why I opposed what happened on September 11." In the specific case of Palestine, he stated: *"The situation of the Palestinians is quite different, because they are in a state of war with Israel. They are not aiming to kill civilians but, in war, civilians do get killed. Don't forget, the Palestinians are living under mountains of pressure. [...] They have had their land stolen, their families killed, their homes destroyed, and the Israelis are using weapons, such as the F16 aircraft, which are meant only for major wars. There is no other way for the Palestinians to push back those mountains, apart from martyrdom operations."*²⁹

Ali and Post mention that Fadlallah also equated death as a suicide bomber with soldiers entering a battle in which they know they are about to die. He argued that there's no moral distinction; the only difference is the time of death.³⁰ The word 'suicide', however, is not used by Muslim clerics that legitimize the use of such operations. The Egyptian Shaykh Yusuf Qaradawi is mentioned, stating that the word 'suicide' is a Western term, and does not apply to a Muslim context. He instead speaks of 'heroic operations of martyrdom'. He stresses, though, that it is only allowed when enemies seize Muslim territories.³¹ By saying this, he lends his support to Palestinian suicide bombers, as their territories are clearly seized.

Muslim scholars, however, disagree on whether or not suicide missions are justified. In the Qur'anic verse Al Maeda, one can read: *"He who kills anyone not in retaliation for murder or to spread mischief in the land, it would be as if he killed all of mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people."*³² Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani adds to this that in Islamic jurisprudence, one entire volume is devoted to jihad. *"If someone grabbed a sword and set off to fight the unbelievers without the intention of doing so for the pleasure of God, he would not be rewarded. If he were killed, he would not be considered a martyr. His act would be wasted as if he had committed suicide."*³³

Adding to this, Tamimi clarifies that, in the old days, Muslims that went into war were wishing for either victory or martyrdom. Either of them was seen as a desirable outcome. However, it was uncertain which of those two wishes would be fulfilled. Today, the Muslims that go into jihad, the jihad of the sword, are almost certain that they will not reach victory. At least, not during their lives. The choice for martyrdom is made in a rational way. On the one hand, Tamimi states, they know that the balance of power is not in their favor, and therefore it is unlikely they will 'win'. On the other hand, they are certain about death since they step into the 'battlefield' strapped with dynamite. When pressing the button, the martyrs' fate is predetermined. Rather than to be killed by the enemy, he killed himself.³⁴ This certainty of death is reason for some scholars from Saudi Arabia and Egypt to declare martyrdom operations illegitimate, they see it as suicide. Hamas, however, actively promotes 'martyrdom operations', and their redemptive function. Weinberg and Pedahzur make an interesting point about this. Belief in immortality, as they state, is central to all religions. For most individuals however, it is kept at the margins for most of their lives. It only becomes central when death moves into close proximity, and becomes a real possibility for the individual.³⁵ This might explain the different stances that are kept on the topic by different Muslim scholars.

²⁹ Fadlallah in an interview with Graham Turner, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/lebanon/1400406/We-could-provide-a-million-suicide-bombers-in-24-hours.html> (31-07-2011)

³⁰ Ali & Post, 'The history and evolution of martyrdom', 624.

³¹ Ibid., 627.

³² Ali & Post, 'The history and evolution of martyrdom', 630.

³³ Taleqani, Mutahhari & Shari'ati, *Jihad and shahadat*, 50.

³⁴ Al-Rasheed & Shterin, *Dying for faith*, p. 99

³⁵ L. Weinberg & A. Pedahzur, *Religious fundamentalism and political extremism*, p. 24

HAMAS AND MARTYRDOM

"They were trying not to avoid life, but to fulfill it in what they considered to be an act of both personal and social redemption. In this way they were connecting a contemporary political strategy to a sacred history of martyrdom and sacrifice."³⁶

3.1 Hamas, a history of suicide bombing

Hamas emerged in 1987, as the Palestinian branch of the Egypt-based Muslim Brotherhood. Apart from the translations 'zeal' or 'enthusiasm', the name 'Hamas' is an acronym for the Arabic *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya*, 'Islamic Resistance Movement'. According to Levitt, its main goal was, and is, eliminating the state of Israel and establishing an Islamic state with sharia law. It was founded by sjeik Ahmad Yassin as its religious ideologist, and dr. Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, its political leader. Sharing somewhat similar life stories, both Yassin and al-Rantisi came from families that were driven out of their hometowns when Israel was founded. They grew up in different refugee camps on the Gaza strip. For both men, their studies at Egyptian universities meant a first encounter with Arab nationalism. This eventually inspired them to establish a Palestinian equivalent to the Muslim Brotherhood, to resist the occupation and offer an alternative to Arafat's secular PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation). Hamas is outspoken against the secularisation and westernisation of Arab society, and in its charter, they mention their strategies as follows: *"Allah is its target, the Prophet is its model, the Koran its constitution: Jihad is its path and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of its wishes."*³⁷ To achieve the establishment of this Islamic Palestinian state on 'their' land, Hamas employs a strategy consisting of three elements. First, the building of strong grassroots support by, for example, constructing a system of social welfare. Second, they practise political activity that aims on competing with the PLO and the PA (Palestinian Authority). Third, they use a strategy of systematically attacking Israeli soldiers and civilians in bombing attacks, such as suicide attacks and the firing of Qassam rockets.

From the moment Hamas was established, incidental attacks like kidnappings took place against Israeli soldiers, but no attacks on a greater scale. In a reorganisation in 1991 however, next to the already existing political and religious wings, the *Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades* was founded. This branch incorporated earlier 'security branches' into a bigger military organisation.³⁸ Its first attack against an Israeli civilian was carried out in 1991, killing an inhabitant of the Kfar Darom settlement in Gaza. Before, attacks were usually only carried out on territories inhabited by Palestinians, but this time militants purposely entered a settlement. This is seen as a turning point in Hamas' modus operandi. The first Palestinian suicide attack within the borders of Israel took place on the 16th of April, 1993. Tamam Nabulsi blew up his car next to an Israeli bus, near the settlement of Mehola, killing two people and wounding five. Hamas claimed the attack. Not many expected that this would mark a new era of terror in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.³⁹

Hamas' history in suicide attacks can be divided into two separate parts. There is a clear distinction to be made between the period of the first bombings until right before the second intifada, and the period during and after the second intifada until now. Overall, Levitt states, Hamas carried out at least twenty-seven attacks in the eleven years period between February 1989 and March 2000. In these attacks, twelve of which suicide bombings, 185 people were killed and 1200 people were left wounded. According to Hafez, during the Oslo peace process years from 1993 to 2000, most Palestinian civilians did not approve of suicide attacks against Israeli citizens. From the second intifada in September 2000 on, however, the use of suicide attacks became more frequent. Both

³⁶ Juergensmeyer, 'Martyrdom and sacrifice in a time of terror', 417.

³⁷ M. Levitt, *Hamas - politics, charity and terrorism in the service of jihad*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2006, 8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁹ S. Kimhi & S. Even, 'Who are the Palestinian suicide bombers?', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16: 4 (2004), 824.

secular factions and religious ones like Hamas discovered 'martyrdom operations' to be very effective.⁴⁰ Kimhi and Even also note this dividing line. Between April 1993 and September 2000, sixty one suicide attacks were carried out, and only by Islamic organizations. Forty one by Hamas, the other ones by Islamic Jihad. Only 70 percent, however, managed to actually blow themselves up. Between the beginning of the second Intifada and May 2004, 274 suicide bombings were planned, of which 52 percent succeeded. Although secular organizations now also made use of this tactic, the majority was still carried out by Hamas.⁴¹ This made Hamas responsible for 288 deaths in about two years time, a number existing next to the 377 people that were killed in 425 other attacks, like 'regular' shootings and the firing of Qassam rockets. In this period, Kimhi and Even note, the first female suicide bombers started to carry out attacks as well. The general popular support for suicide attacks also increased greatly. Hafez mentions the results of a poll carried out by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research. According to this poll, in 1996 only 21.1 percent of Palestinians living in Gaza or on the West Bank expressed support for suicide attacks. In 2003 this increased to 74.5 percent.⁴² More and more people considered it to be a legitimate action against Israeli terror.

3.2 Suicide bombing as a military strategy

When it comes to the conditions that allow some societies to support the phenomenon of suicide bombing, Palestine makes an ideal candidate. According to Ami Pedahzur, "[...] a survey of areas in the world where suicide terrorism has emerged and is perceived a virtue by large parts of the population underscores the factor of a longlasting conflict with a powerful enemy that has inflicted much pain on society. This predicament generates frustration and results in dehumanization of the other side."⁴³

But why did Hamas, suddenly, as it seems, resort to a strategy of suicide bombings? Hafez makes some interesting points about Hamas' militant strategies. The act of self-sacrifice in times of war, in itself, is not new to history. Jim Winkates mentions the *Sicari*, an extremist Jewish sect that committed mass suicide in 73 (CE) when the Romans occupied Palestine. They chose death over occupation. The Shi'ite *Assasins* (or Hashashins, for their reported use of hashish), performed acts of suicide to spread Islam throughout Persia between the 11th and 13th century. They assassinated government officials, and allowed themselves to be caught and killed for Allah.⁴⁴ Also often mentioned by scholars are the Japanese kamikaze pilots in 1944, that not only killed their American enemies, but themselves as well, when crashing their planes into them.

The act of killing enemies with a bomb attached to ones body however, and thus killing oneself, is relatively new. In the 1980's, the Lebanese Hezbollah first carried out suicide bombings against Western forces and Israel. This turned out to be a rather effective tactic. With very little means, a great effect of terror was reached. In 1992, 415 Palestinian Islamic militants from Gaza and the West Bank were deported by Israeli Prime Minister Rabin to the desolate Lebanese hillside, as a retribution for the killing of five Israeli policemen. They were not taken in by the Lebanese government, nor did Israel allow them to go back. Hezbollah, not entirely free of self-interest as they could use an ally against Israel, seized the opportunity to provide them with material, strategies and tactics for resistance.⁴⁵ The extremists that returned during the Oslo peace talks were determined not to let their desire for a reunited, Islamic Palestine be turned down by the peace process. Even before the final Agreement between Israel and the PLO was signed in September 1993, the attack mentioned above took place. After the signing of the Agreement, Hamas, and the much smaller organisation Islamic Jihad, faced a dilemma. The two extremist groups were marginalised by the Agreement, and joining the Palestinian Authority (PA) was not an option since it supported a two-

⁴⁰ Levitt, *Hamas - politics, charity and terrorism in the service of jihad*, 11.

⁴¹ Kimhi & Even, 'Who are the Palestinian suicide bombers?', 817.

⁴² M. M. Hafez, *Manufacturing human bombs*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2006, 19.

⁴³ A. Pedahzur, *Suicide terrorism*, Cambridge: Polity, 2005, 159.

⁴⁴ J. Winkates, 'Suicide terrorism: martyrdom for organizational objectives', *Journal of Third World Studies* XXIII: 1 (2006), 90.

⁴⁵ Hafez, *Manufacturing human bombs*, 18.

state solution. This was incompatible with their Islamist outlook. So, Hafez mentions, engaging in suicide bombings would mean risking repression by the PA, which was obliged to fight anti-Israeli terror. To outwit this, both Hamas and Islamic Jihad linked their attacks to 'provocative' actions by Israel, as a justification. Hafez mentions two well-known examples, Baruch Goldstein's murder on 29 Muslim worshippers caused Hamas to avenge this deed by sending two suicide bombers, killing 13 people. In 1996, Israeli intelligence assassinated Hamas' chief bomb maker Yahya Ayyash, 'The Engineer', which sparked a series of suicide attacks by Hamas, killing 57 Israelis. By doing so, they could derail the ongoing peace process, while seemingly they were only 'defending' their own people. This made it hard for the PA to take measures against them.⁴⁶ Dr. Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, who got killed by an Israeli air raid in 2004, pointed out that the official religious legitimacy for the acts of self-martyrdom came from a religious decree, a *fatwa*, issued by a mufti in the Gulf emirates.⁴⁷

However, the reasons why exactly Hamas carries out suicide attacks, and not just fires rockets without killing one of their own people, are not completely unambiguous. As mentioned earlier, Hamas strives for the establishment of an Islamic Palestinian state, and therefore, they need 'their' land back, as it was before the Israelis divided it by drawing new borders in 1967. Attacking Israelis and blowing up civilians therefore is an effective means, because it installs a deep fear in the Israeli community. The suicide bomber that goes into enemy territory is not afraid to die. When he takes people with him as he kills himself (or: dies when he kills other people), it has a much deeper psychological effect than just shooting rockets at settlements from a distance. By carrying out these attacks, Hafez states, Hamas puts the Israeli people to a choice: if the Israeli people choose to end the occupation, they'll live, if they continue the occupation, they might die. But also, after many years of occupation, repression and a strong sense of humiliation installed in the Palestinian people, attacks are also carried out solely for revenge. An eye for an eye, so to say. The aspiring suicide bombers don't all have the establishment of an Islamic state as their highest goal, sometimes they are just desperate to avenge themselves for a killed family member. But as mentioned before, as Levitt stated, Hamas needs its grassroots support. And according to Juergensmeyer, the popular support for Hamas increases greatly when they carry out successful attacks in times of severe repression. This, in its turn, generates new volunteers for suicide missions, and completes the deadly circle.

Kimhi and Even add to the above mentioned strategic psychological effects that, apart from being relatively low-cost, a human body used as a 'walking bomb' is also more efficient, it chooses its time and place to detonate, and can change this last-minute, unlike for example a bomb on a time switch. Some even refer to the phenomenon of suicide bombing as 'the smart bomb of the poor'.⁴⁸ When opposed to a military power that is much stronger, the so-called 'asymmetrical warfare', it makes a very effective weapon. Or, as Hafez puts it: "*Asymmetrism compels the weak to innovate.*"⁴⁹ Also, a suicide attack is easier to prepare, since the bomber doesn't need to work out an escape plan. And when discovered by security forces, suicide bombs can self-destruct. Because they're not supposed to survive their attack, there's little chance they'll give away information about their organization, when investigated.⁵⁰ Hafez, however, strongly opposes scholars that state that organizations like Hamas use the tactic of suicide bombing solely for strategic reasons. The element of religion should not be singled out, for organizations don't necessarily have the same motivations as individuals.⁵¹ While for Hamas suicide bombing might be the most convenient way to fight for the establishment of an Islamic Palestinian state, a simple means to reach a greater goal, for the person carrying out the attack it might be nothing less than a religious calling.

⁴⁶ Hafez, *Manufacturing human bombs*, 18-19.

⁴⁷ M. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the mind of God - the global rise of religious violence*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California, 2003, 78.

⁴⁸ Kimhi & Even, 'Who are the Palestinian suicide bombers?', 817.

⁴⁹ Hafez, *Manufacturing human bombs*, 7.

⁵⁰ Kimhi & Even, 'Who are the Palestinian suicide bombers?', 815-816.

⁵¹ Hafez, *Manufacturing human bombs*, 32.

3.3 The person behind the bomb

To keep the previously mentioned circle of violence going -attacks generate support, which generates more 'martyrdom volunteers', which increases attacks, which increases support-, and to facilitate suicide attacks, of course, Hamas needs individuals that are willing to push the button or pull the string. Moghadam strongly stresses the importance of looking at two sides of the story, not just at the organizational motives for suicide bombing, but also at why an individual chooses to sacrifice ones life in these acts of destruction.⁵² He offers a framework that suggests that suicide bombing is both an individual and an organizational act. He even goes as far as to say that both of these aspects are completely intertwined and necessary, meaning, without one of them, no attacks would take place. For, as he states, an individual Palestinian who wants to become a suicide bomber is likely to lack resources, information and organizational capacity when he (or she) is alone. Organizations are necessary to cater for these needs. But, Moghadam states, organizations hardly ever supply suicide bombers from within their own ranks. Usually individuals from outside the organization are recruited. They need men (and women) with a willingness to sacrifice themselves, so they don't have to put their own, or relatives' lives at risk, Moghadam claims.⁵³

An individual that chooses to sacrifice oneself must have a certain reason to do so. These reasons can vary. Kimhi and Even distinguish four general prototypes of suicide bombers. The first type are those with religious motives, that perpetrate suicide attacks because they strongly believe in the necessity of jihad, and believe that they will earn a place in paradise. This category is seen as the most frequent one, and profits greatly from the glorification of martyrs in Palestinian society. Usually they are young, single, pious men that belong to Islamic organizations like Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and are easy to recruit on religious grounds. The second type Kimhi and Even mention are those that are exploited, candidates that are recruited by organizations that put them in a position that makes it impossible for them to refuse. Judith Miller mentions the story of Wafa al-Biss, a 23-year old Gazan woman that grew up in a poor family, in a refugee camp. After she got engaged, a cooking accident left her hands and face partially burned which caused her fiancé to leave her. She then was recruited by Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade, telling her that martyring herself would be the only way in which her life would still have meaning. However, due to a technical malfunction her attack failed, and Wafa's now imprisoned in Israel.⁵⁴ Minors are sometimes recruited as well, which is also seen as 'exploitation' by Kimhi and Even. The third type of bomber are those that act out of a desire for revenge, a retribution for suffering. This can be on a personal level, for a family member or a friend, or on general, against Israel and its oppression of the Palestinian people. Hanadi Jaradat detonated a bomb, strapped to her belly, as if she were pregnant, in a restaurant in Haifa. She killed herself, and 19 Israelis - four months after Israeli forces killed her brother. The last type Kimhi and Even mention, and those that have social-nationalist motives. Individuals with certain motives are usually very outspoken about their desire for national liberation. In testimonies recorded, they mention the failing of the peace process, the Israeli occupation and the struggle for a Palestinian state.⁵⁵ Often however, it is hard to put a suicide bomber in just one of these four categories. A person can act out of revenge, but be deeply religious as well. And it is usually hard in the case of Palestine to single religion out when it comes to social-nationalist motives, since many strive for the earlier mentioned Islamic Palestinian state.

Placed next to this, Jessica Sterns theory of grievances is very elucidating. Stern distinguishes five grievances that can trigger a person in deciding to sacrifice ones life in a suicide mission. These are alienation, humiliation, demographics, history and territory. Clearly, all of these grievances play a certain part in the lives of the Palestinian people, but Stern mentions the aspect of humiliation contributes greatly to the rise of suicide bombing as a strategy in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Palestinians are confronted with the Israeli occupation on a daily basis, whether it's direct personal confrontation at checkpoints, for example, or a more indirect one like poverty, because one is unemployed and is denied a work permit for Israel. Many aspects of Palestinian everyday life are to

⁵² Moghadam, *Palestinian Suicide Bombers*, 68.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵⁴ J. Miller, 'The bomb under the abaya', *Policy Review* 143 (2007), 48.

⁵⁵ Kimhi & Even, 'Who are the Palestinian suicide bombers?', 824-828.

controlled by Israel, and this damages feelings of freedom and independence of the Palestinian people. All this is even more frustrating since it happens on what they feel is *their* land. When this feeling takes over, there is a need to channel all these feelings of humiliation and deprivation, and to inflict the same grievances on Israel. This is where the need to take revenge comes into being.⁵⁶

3.4 Recruiting martyrs

As previously mentioned, the recruitment of volunteers plays a big part in the actual process of suicide bombing. Pedahzur mentions three types of recruitment. The first is when an individual voluntarily approaches an organization. The second is characterized by the grass-roots mobilization of a group of people that are that committed to a certain cause that they want to die for it. The third method is active recruitment, organizations like Hamas have 'enlistment officers' that are sent to actively scout potential suicide bombers. According to Pedahzur, this type of recruitment is the most common in societies where suicide bombing occurs. The first type, in which individuals seek to become suicide bombers, is most common in societies with what Pedahzur calls a 'culture of death', like Palestine. The idea of martyrdom is deeply rooted in society, and sacrificing oneself is seen as a virtue.⁵⁷ Interestingly enough, both the second and the third type also seem to apply to the case of Palestine. In the second type, an entire society is being 'manipulated' top-down by an organization, into embracing a culture of martyrdom. The promotion of martyrdom makes people want to sacrifice themselves. The third type is being actively practiced by Hamas. Hafez mentions five criteria that recruiters use for selecting potential suicide bombers: they must be pious Muslims, they must be able to pass as Israelis, they must be over 18 (although sometimes younger people are recruited), they must not have a record of criminal or suspicious activities and they must not be their parents' only child.⁵⁸ As for the places where recruiters look for volunteers, Hafez mentions religious study groups and local mosques as places where youngsters are often observed and approached. Pedahzur adds Israeli jails, Hamas' own social clubs and schools to this list.⁵⁹ Usually, recruiters first inquire about political inclinations and emotional composure, and do not ask them right away if they are willing to go on a suicide mission. After this follows a period of psychological preparation and indoctrination by political and religious discussions, that can last up to several weeks. This also includes watching tapes of earlier bombers, and reciting the Qur'an. The days that lead up to the operation are spent in isolation, only accompanied by members of the organization's preparation cell that provide support and motivation. The future bomber, now considered a 'living martyr', prepares his will and videotapes his personal statement concerning his martyrdom operation. Hafez calls this last step 'bridge burning', if one changes his mind beyond this point, this would be considered a failure to meet one's commitment to the cause, to God, and the nation.⁶⁰

In the second intifada, the public support for suicide missions increased, which also influenced the process of recruitment. Many young people approached Hamas and PIJ themselves, willing to sacrifice their lives without being recruited by one of the organizations officers. This type of volunteer is usually influenced by direct relatives, friends or extended family that have ties to radical groups. Hafez quotes organizations as proudly saying "there are more volunteers than there are explosive belts".⁶¹ As Jerrold Post puts it: "*These hate-mongering leaders have an ability to connect with alienated, frustrated youth in such a manner that their individuality becomes subordinated to the collective identity, and they develop a willingness to sacrifice their individual lives if it serves their collective cause.*"⁶² This, of course, didn't happen overnight. In the next chapter, I will further elaborate on how Hamas managed to install a culture of martyrdom in Palestine, and how this influences the willingness of Palestinians to martyr themselves.

⁵⁶ J. Stern, *Terror in the name of God*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2003, 38

⁵⁷ Pedahzur, *Suicide terrorism*, 165.

⁵⁸ Hafez, *Manufacturing human bombs*, 21.

⁵⁹ Pedahzur, *Suicide terrorism*, 169.

⁶⁰ Hafez, *Manufacturing human bombs*, 24.

⁶¹ Hafez, *Manufacturing human bombs*, 21.

⁶² J. Post in: Hafez, *Manufacturing human bombs*, XI.

HAMAS PROMOTING MARTYRDOM

"The idea of martyrdom has become so ingrained in Palestinian culture that it is a major theme in religious practice, television broadcasting, posters, pre-suicide eulogies, summer camps, children's trading cards, movies, music, and games."⁶³

4.1 A culture of martyrdom

Kimhi and Even mention three necessary conditions that have to be met for a suicide attack to take place. First, there has to be an individual with a motive and a willingness to commit the act. Second, a technically based system is needed to enable the preparation and the execution of the attack. Third, a leading political figure has to approve of suicide terrorism. Supporting factors to this can be a sympathetic public atmosphere that praises sacrifice, media encouragement, spiritual leadership that praises martyrs and financial support for the family of the deceased bomber.⁶⁴ The more of these prerequisites are met, the stronger a culture of martyrdom will be embedded in society. All of these prerequisites and supporting factors are very manufacturable, and easily influenced by organizations.

An important element that Kimhi and Even add to the list of supporting factors mentioned above is education. Hamas goes to great lengths promoting the 'heroic acts of martyrdom', in which the education of children plays a big part. As I will further elaborate on later in this chapter, Palestinian children are taught at a very young age that Jews are bad and martyrdom is good. Daphne Burdman, in her article on the indoctrination of Palestinian children, mentions schoolbooks contain sentences like: *"Mankind has suffered from this evil both in ancient as well as modern times, for indeed Satan has, in the eyes of many people, made their evil actions appear beautiful... Such a people are the Jews..."* (In: Islamic Education for Eighth Grade, p.95) and *"Why must we fight the Jews and drive them out of our land? [...] Know my son, that Palestine is your country... that its pure soil is drenched with the blood of martyrs..."* (In: Our Arabic Language for Fifth Grade, pp.64–66).⁶⁵

Martyrdom in this case involves any death that is caused by the oppressors, whether its getting killed by Israeli soldiers while throwing stones, or blowing yourself up to kill them. Unlike in Christianity, where martyrdom can be acquired in a passive way, Islam requires a person to have an active commitment to the Islamic cause in order to become a martyr. But, as mentioned before, suicide is forbidden in Islam, so this self-chosen death has to be reframed from sinful, to an redemptive, sacrificial act. As seen in the previous chapter, martyrdom operations are widely supported by the Palestinian people from the second intifada on. Martyrdom is reframed as something positive, which resonates in the entire society.

Pedahzur has an interesting observation. The 'culture of martyrdom', and the support for suicide terrorism that's found in the Palestinian territories, is very rarely a grass-roots phenomenon. It's not something that's already 'installed' in a society; on the contrary, it is highly calculated and top-down. The organization that adopts this strategy, he mentions, is greatly concerned with its public image and the level of public support. The organization has a great interest in trying to mobilize support, and one of the most prominent ways of doing this, especially among societies which are oppressed and feel weak and hopeless, is by supplying heroes and hope.⁶⁶

When Hamas started to carry out its first suicide attacks, as mentioned in the previous chapter, support for these missions was low. Many Palestinians hoped that the Oslo Accords would change their situation for the better, and were not really eager to embrace acts of violence, for that

⁶³ J. R. Weiner & N. Weissman, 'Hamas' determination to perpetuate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the critical role of hate indoctrination', *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs* August (2006).

⁶⁴ Kimhi & Even, 'Who are the Palestinian suicide bombers?', 824.

⁶⁵ D. Burdman, 'Education, indoctrination, and incitement: Palestinian children on their way to martyrdom', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15: 1 (2003), 99.

⁶⁶ Pedahzur, *Suicide terrorism*, 159.

might damage their future chances of having their own state. After a while, however, little seemed to change in their situation, and the initial hope was replaced by despair.⁶⁷ This was much to the advantage of Hamas, since people were in need of heroes and hope, and Hamas was willing to provide. At first, Pedahzur mentions, posters of shahids were posted in the streets. After the second intifada, walls slowly got covered with graffiti that praised shahids. After this came the songs of praise on the radio and the internet sites. Jihad was presented as a virtue that not only influenced adults and adolescents, but children as well. Young children reportedly played 'shahid' on the streets, imitating suicide attacks. Organizations like Hamas and PIJ were highly successful in cultivating this mindset.⁶⁸ This resulted in a big supply of volunteers, willing to martyr themselves for nationalistic, altruistic and/or religious reasons, as mentioned in the previous chapter. The point Pedahzur makes here, as he compares the Palestinian case to other cases of Islamic suicide terrorism, is that all organizations that initiated such missions also cultivated the surrounding culture. Suicide terrorism did not just arise in these societies by itself, he states, and religion and culture are not the direct cause of their occurrence. It's the organizations that initially promoted it, and since a strong rhetoric helps doing that, religious and nationalistic arguments are very useful.⁶⁹

4.2 Indoctrinating the children

If you tell children from early age on that martyrdom is something that has to be pursued, this will influence society for years to come. Ali and Post mention Jack Kelleys comment on incarcerated Palestinian bombers. In interviews, almost all of them indicated that the first time they heard the stories of how their family's property had been taken by the Israelis, was in the mosque. They were usually made familiar with the concepts of martyrdom and bombing operations early in their lives. Reportedly, Hamas-run kindergartens have signs painted on the walls, saying things like: "*The children in kindergarten are the shahids of tomorrow.*"⁷⁰ This active promotion of martyrdom continues throughout children's schooltime, as well as the delegitimization of the state of Israel. Schoolbooks play an important role in this.

From the early 1950's on, Palestinian schools used Jordanian and Egyptian schoolbooks. Those were strictly controlled and censored by the Israeli military governor that was in charge of Palestinian education, between 1967 and 1993. Sami Adwan mentions that in that period, whole sections of textbooks were being deleted, and that sometimes even entire books were banned from schools if they contained critical information about the Israeli state.⁷¹ From 1993 however, after the signing of the Oslo Accords, the old, unchanged textbooks were gradually reinstated by the Arafat administration.⁷²

In 2000, the PA launched a schoolbook publication process that provided new books to two grades every year. This process was completed in 2006, with the publishing of the books for grade 12. During the process some political changes took place. Yasir Arafat, founder and chairman of the PA, died in 2004, and Mahmoud Abbas was elected in his stead. Free parliamentary elections brought Hamas to power in Gaza in 2006, which until that time had been an opposition movement. Because of this, the books for grades 1-10 were published under Arafat, the books for grade 11 under Abbas, and the books for grade 12 under the Hamas government.⁷³ In that light, it is not very surprising that there is a mentality shift towards extremism to be noted when one looks at the contents. According to Arnon Groiss, overall, most Palestinian textbooks lack even the most basic information about Israel. For example, the Holocaust is not mentioned anywhere.⁷⁴ The delineation of maps also poses a serious problem. Some maps included in textbooks, that represent Palestine, point to the

⁶⁷ Pedahzur, *Suicide terrorism*, 162.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁶⁹ Pedahzur, *Suicide terrorism*, 164.

⁷⁰ Ali & Post, 'The history and evolution of martyrdom', 639.

⁷¹ S. Adwan, 'Schoolbooks in the making: from conflict to peace', *Palestine-Israel Journal* VIII: 2 (2001), 57.

⁷² Burdman, 'Education, indoctrination, and incitement', 98.

⁷³ A. Groiss, 'Palestinian textbooks: from Arafat to Abbas and Hamas', *Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace & The American Jewish Committee* 2008, 1.

⁷⁴ Groiss, 'Palestinian textbooks', 6.

boundaries of the Palestinian national territories as those of 1967.⁷⁵ Only the books under Abbas include a very basic map in which the name 'Israel' appears, even though it is still not seen as a sovereign state.⁷⁶ Books published under his leadership are considered to have a fairly milder tone with regard to the state of Israel, but the books before and after them portray Israel in a more negative way. Weiner and Weissman state that one of the biggest problems with these textbooks is the fact that there is no mention of the historical link between the Jewish people and their holy land, and by this, efforts toward peace and understanding are absent. Children are encouraged to 'reconquer' Israel, and martyr themselves for Allah by doing so.⁷⁷

Concerning the pre-2004 period, under Arafat, Daphne Burdman mentions the use of teacher's guides, next to the textbooks. *"The textbooks have been 'sanitized' to comply with anti-incitement funding requirements by certain European donor nations,"* she states, *'by avoiding specific mention of the words 'Jews' and 'Israel' in the textbooks. However, the anti-Israeli message is now delivered by verbal inputs of the teacher, without any improprieties appearing in print in the textbooks.'* Examples she gives are of children that are asked to give reasons why the world hates Jews, and why Europe persecuted them.⁷⁸ Adwan states that the average Palestinian often has not yet experienced the fruits of a peace process; especially in Gaza regular shellings by the Israeli army take place, and house demolitions are quite common.⁷⁹ In the textbooks, there is much emphasis on the Palestinians as victims of the Zionist ideology. The Palestinians themselves are portrayed as very religious, pious people. Where *jihad* is mentioned, it encourages pupils to love and defend their country. However, fighting is only allowed to defense oneself, and should most certainly not be used for monetary gain or fame.⁸⁰ When it comes to the phenomenon of martyrdom, Adwan states, everyone that sacrificed their life for the sake of the land and people are considered heroes. While there is no direct support of terror, pupils are asked to learn about martyrs, who they are, and what they did throughout Arab history. One assignment, for example, was to write a letter about the feelings of a martyr's mother. However, he mentions, *"in both Palestinian and Israeli textbooks, the heroes of the other side are considered monsters, terrorists and the 'bad guys'."*⁸¹ In the textbooks, refugee camps are not considered the original place of residence of Palestinians, but a *"temporary place I am forced to live in, and all Palestinians wait for the moment that each Palestinian would be able to return to his/her city or town from which s/he was forced to flee."*⁸² As Adwan states: *"Textbooks have to reflect the realities of a society - past, present and future. If textbooks alienate children from their daily life, they will lose their legitimacy and the interest of the children."* It is not uncommon that in conflict situations, textbooks are used to present the opponent from a negative perspective. The own national ideology is legitimized, to uphold the claim that the 'self' is always right, and 'they' are wrong.⁸³ Especially in the case of Palestine, where people have been living under foreign rule for a very long time, textbooks are used to challenge this by reinforcing the own national identity. They represent a 'war culture', not a 'peace culture'.⁸⁴

According to Groiss, anti-Israel incitement has increased in the last couple of books, that are published under Hamas. Mahmoud al-Zahar, one of the co-founders of Hamas and member of the Hamas leadership in Gaza, is very outspoken about the key role of education. Weiner and Weissman quote him as saying in 2006: *"We will turn every facet of life into resistance. Education will deal with the culture of resistance. We will not tell them [the children] that Palestine is a state that runs from Rafah to Khan Yunis [the limits of the Gaza Strip]. We will tell them it runs from Rafah in the south to Ras al-Nukra [the Israel-Lebanon border] in the north, and that Palestine's western border is the [Mediterranean] sea and the eastern border the [Jordan] river [thus encompassing all of Israel]."*⁸⁵

⁷⁵ Adwan, 'Schoolbooks in the making', 65.

⁷⁶ Groiss, 'Palestinian textbooks', 13.

⁷⁷ Weiner & Weissman, 'Hamas' determination to perpetuate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict'.

⁷⁸ Burdman, 'Education, indoctrination, and incitement', 102.

⁷⁹ Adwan, 'Schoolbooks in the making', 58.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 63.

⁸¹ Ibid., 63.

⁸² Ibid., 66.

⁸³ Adwan, 'Schoolbooks in the making', 59.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁸⁵ Weiner & Weissman, 'Hamas' determination to perpetuate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict'.

But it's not only schoolbooks that greatly influence the way Palestinian children develop their identity within a culture of martyrdom, also entertaining media like television and internet are used for this goal. The Hamas-run television channel Al-Aqsa TV, for example, has been broadcasting the children's show *Tomorrow's Pioneers* on a weekly basis since 2007. This show has been highly criticized by Israeli media-watch organizations, since it is very outspoken in promoting violence against Israel and promoting the virtues of martyrdom. It has a Sesame Street-like format, hosted by a young girl in hijab and a costumed animal that accompanies her. Several of those animals -bearing strong resemblance to well-known Western icons like Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny- have died 'martyr's deaths', and were replaced by a new one. The children are told that these deaths are caused by Israeli violence, or Israeli deprivation of health care, and are encouraged to take revenge for all the injustice that is done to them by 'the Jews'. The makers of the show defend this by stating that they only show the children the reality of living in Palestine, and that they don't show them things they don't know already.⁸⁶ Apart from this show, Al-Aqsa TV broadcasts videos in which martyrs are praised, and music videos that promote this message. The videotapes that are recorded by 'living martyrs' before they carry out their attacks are also sometimes aired on television, and widely available in many shops.⁸⁷ Not only are martyrs idolized by this, and are to Palestinian youth what rockstars are to us, but it also serve as a 'wake-up call', as Hafez puts it. Youngsters see those videos and get the feeling they should make similar sacrifices.⁸⁸

In August 2010, the Jordanian children's group *Birds of Paradise* was invited by Hamas to perform at an Islamic music festival in Gaza. In Palestine, the group is well known for their hit single 'When we die as martyrs', which features lyrics like: *'When we die as martyrs, we will go to heaven. [...] Even if they give us the entire world, it won't make us forget her. My country and my blood are for her sake. Without Palestine, what meaning is there to childhood?'*⁸⁹ In its music video, which was broadcasted by Al-Aqsa TV, but can also be found on YouTube, children dressed up as Israeli soldiers 'massacre' Palestinian children.⁹⁰

Apart from this, one can find posters of martyrs on every street corner. Not only grown men are portrayed as soldiers, carrying guns and explosives, but also pictures of children -usually killed by Israeli soldiers, sometimes accidentally- are being decorated with images of guns. Martyrdom is promoted literally everywhere, and martyrs are always portrayed as fearless, and willing to die for their country. It is no wonder that this appeals to people, and that they are seen as national heroes. The fact that Hamas glorifies martyrdom by honoring dead suicide bombers with ceremonies and banners, and hands out big financial rewards to their families, only adds to the 'glamour' and appeal of the martyr. The appeal of martyrdom, as Hafez puts it, is that it offers victims of psychological trauma a heroic way out of their powerlessness.⁹¹

4.3 Palestinian identity

According to Robert Pape, a group's identity is comprised by the distinct set of attributes that a body of individuals has in common. This does not only include common objective elements like history, language, customs and institutions, but also people's subjective self-identification. The bigger the difference a local community experiences compared to the identity of a foreign occupier -the fewer prominent attributes they share- the more the local community is likely to view the occupier as 'alien'. This results in an increasing fear that the occupation will lead to radical and permanent transformation of its national characteristics, and a willingness to end the occupation at almost any price.⁹² As Pape puts it: *"Even when many or most members of the local community were not*

⁸⁶ S. Erlanger, 'In Gaza, Hamas's Insults to Jews Complicate Peace', *New York Times*,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/01/world/middleeast/01hamas.html?pagewanted=3&ref=middleeast> (31-07-2011)

⁸⁷ A. Schbley, 'Defining religious terrorism: a causal and anthological profile', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26 (2003), 128.

⁸⁸ Hafez, *Manufacturing human bombs*, 12.

⁸⁹ Birds of Paradise, 'When we die as martyrs', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iilF1vt5g1Q> (31-07-2011)

⁹⁰ 'Gaza City blown away by Little Birds of Paradise troupe', *The Daily Star*, Lebanon, 06-08-2010 <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Arts/Aug/06/Gaza-City-blown-away-by-Little-Birds-of-Paradise-troupe.ashx#axzz1TithQK3T> (31-07-2011)

⁹¹ Hafez, *Manufacturing human bombs*, 11.

⁹² R. A. Pape, *Dying to win*, New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks (2006), 86.

*especially a nationalist before, foreign occupation commonly unifies them by creating a sense of shared threat.*⁹³

Pape stresses that national identities are constructed in relation to other nations. If there was no boundary based on purported differences between 'us' and 'them', he states, nationalism could not exist. Without 'them', there is no 'us'. Therefore, a national identity can only be fully defined in relation to a particular other nation. He also notes that, when one country is in political control of another, national identities of both communities are more negative.⁹⁴ Furthermore, he mentions the influence of religion. Religious difference is one of the most important attributes that separates the identity of the local community from the foreign rulers. Religion has a certain 'exclusivity' in its membership rules. One can learn someones language, even participate in social practises, but never have two religions at the same time, Pape argues. Under conditions of occupation, it is religion that becomes the principal defining boundary between occupier and local community.⁹⁵

Obviously, indoctrinating children from an early age on by promoting and praising martyrdom, greatly influences society. The history taught to Palestinian children is often very selective, and they grow up with the idea that great injustice is done to their community, and therefore, to them. These children grow up with a great sense of collective identity, since they hear and see everyday that 'they', the Palestinians, are being oppressed. The very *being* of Palestinian identity, as a group, is formed in contrast to the Israeli oppression. Most children only get to see 'the other' depicted as a one dimensional, collective entity, which is only reinforced by the reality of daily life. As Adwan states: *"For Palestinian children, Israelis are, so far, seen only as soldiers, settlers and bulldozer operators."*⁹⁶ Organizations like Hamas, on the other and, puts a lot of effort into winning the hearts and minds of the Palestinian people, especially in Gaza. This forms a stark contrast to the 'evil occupiers'.

Hamas is deeply embedded in the entire surrounding society, since it maintains an extensive network of more than forty welfare organizations. Charitable institutions provide financial subsidies, food, clothing and shelter. Education, libraries, sports clubs and medical relief like hospitals are taken care of by Hamas' service institutions. Many families receive financial assistance from Hamas throughout the years, and such organizations make up as many as 40 percent of all the social welfare institutions in Gaza. Orphans, schoolchildren, widows and families headed by women whose husbands are in jail or disabled benefit from these institutions, but also families that have members that participated in martyrdom operations.⁹⁷ Partly, this is financed by *zakat*, charitable giving, which is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, the five duties a Muslim must observe. But also (Palestinian) Muslims abroad play a big part in the support of Hamas' structure of welfare organizations.⁹⁸ The collective identity that Muslims experience, the *umma*, apparently is strong enough to all join forces to fight the state of Israel.

Among Palestinians, this network of social service organizations plays an essential part in the legitimization of suicide bombing. By providing collective goods that are otherwise unavailable Hamas sends a credible signal that the sacrifices it demands of its members actually benefit the community as a whole. The willingness of individuals who want to sacrifice themselves for the community is increased by this.⁹⁹ As Pape puts it: *"Hamas' discourse on martyrdom strongly reinforces the altruistic purpose of the group. [...] the main argument is that martyrdom is justified by its instrumental value in protecting the local community from a foreign occupation and not as an end in itself."*¹⁰⁰

⁹³ Pape, *Dying to win*, 85.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁹⁶ Adwan, 'Schoolbooks in the making', 68.

⁹⁷ Pape, *Dying to win*, 192.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 192.

CONCLUSION

When severe oppression and humiliation is part of daily life, people tend to look for something to hold on to. Something that reinforces their identity as a group, something that gives them hope for a better future. A hero provides just that. In the case of Palestine, martyrs have become the national heroes that people look up to, the 'rock stars' that children dream of becoming, and Hamas actively promotes this image. The so-called 'culture of martyrdom' in Palestine is not a grassroots phenomenon, but something that's being actively installed and controlled top down. Martyrs are portrayed as soldierly, fearless men - and sometimes women. More often than not they are pictured holding guns, ready to fight. Palestinian martyrs are not submissive individuals that passively profess their faith, on the contrary, they actively seek confrontation with their oppressors. This image is being actively spread throughout society. Posters on walls all over Palestinian towns honor martyrs. Ceremonies that are held for those that committed successful martyrdom operations are often festive and joyous, because the martyr has reached a place in heaven. Families of martyrs receive a large sum of money as a 'reward', and are being praised for their contribution to Palestinian society. Popular television shows and music videos glorify those who die while killing the Israeli oppressor. Children are educated in school about the virtues of martyrdom, whereas 'the Jews' are being demonized, as elements that have to be gotten rid of. The framing of suicide bombing as a martyrdom operation, an act of sacrifice, is very important in this case since suicide is forbidden in Islam.

For this promotion of martyrdom, Hamas cleverly appeals to a historic Islamic -and more specifically, Palestinian- notion of the phenomenon. In the past, martyrs in Islam were willing to die for their beliefs. Nowadays, not only does the martyr provide hope for the 'liberation' of Palestine, but as a heroic symbol shared among the Palestinian people, it also reinforces national identity. The image of the martyr is being used in both a religious as a nationalistic context, and the latter seems to prevail. The martyr appeals to a shared memory of struggle, and symbolizes victory. It distinguishes Palestinians from Israelis, and broadens the gap between 'us' and 'them'. For organizations like Hamas, this is very useful for strategic goals. If more successful martyrdom operations are carried out, the support for Hamas among the Palestinian public increases. And the greater the support, the easier it gets to recruit willing volunteers for new missions. This circle repeats itself. For individuals, more personal motivations lie at the base of their support for this phenomenon.

However, it is quite evident that this active promotion of martyrdom does not make it seem very probable that there will be a peace agreement anywhere soon. As long as militant organizations like Hamas keep mobilizing people -for their organizational political goals, the foundation of an independent Islamic Palestine- by promoting martyrdom as a glorious way out of despair and humiliation, individuals will continue to sacrifice their lives. They might have their own motivations, like rewards in heaven, or as a moral duty to their community and country, but this doesn't change anything about the consequences of their actions. The fact that children are being indoctrinated from an early age on makes a peaceful future seem even more unlikely. They grow up thinking of martyrdom as the highest attainable goal in life, and when martyring oneself, one brings Palestine closer to liberation. Combined with a daily reality of deprivation and humiliation by the Israeli army, it seems rather impossible for children to objectively view the situation, and to ever get out of this mindset.

In short, Hamas promotes martyrdom operations by portraying martyrs as heroes. In a society where many of the people see themselves as refugees and suffer from occupation, belief in Islam, a shared history and the admiration of martyrs are all components of the glue that holds Palestinian society together, and defines it as one people: national identity.

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