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**AN ANALYSIS OF THE SIGNIFICANCE
OF "MOTHERS OF MARTYRS"
IN PALESTINIAN SOCIETY**

by

Suzanne Evans

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Religion

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
10 March 1997

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**AN ANALYSIS OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF "MOTHERS OF MARTYRS"
IN PALESTINIAN SOCIETY**

submitted by Suzanne Evans, B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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10 April 1997

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ABSTRACT

Since the revolt of the Maccabees in 167 BCE stories have been recorded of mothers who have promoted the martyrdom of their children in times of social conflict. This thesis is an investigation of the behaviour and the role of the mothers of martyrs in present day Palestine. The characteristics of mothers of martyrs in the ancient stories of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic religious traditions are compared with those of modern day Palestine in an attempt to understand what the mothers of martyrs give to the resistance and what they receive.

PREFACE

Documentation

I have chosen to use the *author-date* system of documentation commonly employed by physical and social scientists but which is now gaining adherents in the humanities. In a work of this nature which uses many secondary sources, this system of documentation is not only most economical in space but also eases the work of the reader who is not forced to constantly look elsewhere for information. Where I have used footnotes it has been to provide a commentary which is pertinent but not essential to the argument being made in the text.

Transliteration

Standard English spelling has been used for Arabic and Hebrew words.

Abbreviations

<i>Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition</i>	<i>EI</i>
<i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i>	<i>E. Judaica</i>
<i>Encyclopedia of Religion</i>	<i>E.Rel.</i>
<i>Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics</i>	<i>Rel. and Ethics</i>
<i>Jewish Encyclopedia</i>	<i>JE</i>
<i>The Fourth Book of the Maccabees</i>	<i>IV Macc.</i>
<i>Midrash Rabbah on Lamentations</i>	<i>Lam. R.</i>

INTRODUCTION

Mothers of martyrs: women who publicly demonstrate their support for their child's martyrdom with determination and joy.

It sounds fanatical and foreign and incomprehensible. Yet some say it is the ultimate political act because it helps to bind the community together and make its continued existence possible. We can read stories of Palestinian mothers of martyrs in such mainstream media as *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Washington Post*, *Life Magazine* and more. We can hear about their actions on public radio shows such as *All Things Considered*. We can find echoes of their behaviour once a year on Remembrance Day, when the mothers of our dead war heroes are presented along with our political leaders commemorating the heroic deeds of the men who died in the great wars. Palestinian mothers are much more vocal in their enthusiastic support for their child's death than the mothers of our war heroes. Our mothers of heroes are far removed from a tradition shared by Jews, Christians and Muslims which began over two thousand years ago in Palestine and lives on today with equal vigour.

The difficulty we have in understanding the position of the mother of martyrs is in part based on a stereotype which prevails now as much as it did when the first mothers of martyrs were called on for their support. It is believed that a mother's emotional bond with her child is stronger than a father's and may possibly be the strongest of human emotions. This stereotype forces us to ask "How could a mother, of all people, do this?" The amazement which lies behind this question is what makes the role of mother of martyr so striking and, consequently, so easy to dismiss as fanatical.

The accusation of fanaticism is the easiest way to explain the existence of martyrs and their supportive mothers – as long as they are supporting a cause different from one's own. This method of dismissal has been used for as long as there have been martyrs. An early example is the literature developed by the Romans in the second century C.E., defining Christians and their martyrs as insane, "a fanatical species enamoured of death, who ran to the cruellest tortures as to a feast" (*E. Rel.*, s.v. "Martyrdom" by S. Klausner, p. 237).

Yet stories like that of Lawziyyeh, the mother of the first female martyr of the Intifada, hardly fit the picture of a fanatic. Through her words we get an image of a mother trying to cope with her bereavement with the tools her culture and situation provide. This is a mother who had to deal with the practical details of death, of trying to wash her daughter's body on a slab in

the hospital morgue and as she said, being unable to stop the blood flowing from the bullet wounds, as well as having to deal with the public details of death, attending public demonstrations and celebrating the Resistance. She is not fanatical or hysterical, she is merely filling the role her community expects of her.

Although there are stories of Palestinian mothers of martyrs available to us in the English language media as well as in collections of Palestinian women's stories, for example *Portraits of Palestinian Women*, there is very little analysis of their role other than that found in the three works written or co-authored by Julie Peteet, an American social anthropologist who has studied Palestinians living in refugee camps since 1980. Peteet presents the actions of mothers of martyrs as "an indigenous Palestinian Arab form of woman's struggle" (1986, p. 123). She reports that "it was said of them that 'They have the ear of the Resistance' and because of this many played an active political role in camp life as intermediaries" (1986, p. 122).

Peteet sees the actions of women in the role of mothers of martyrs as a means of political resistance within the context of the Palestinian national struggle. By these actions women have created a political place for themselves. But what is the significance of this place? Does it reflect a special role for women within traditional Palestinian society or is it the harbinger of the evolution of a broader role for women in the political arena?

The behaviour of mothers of martyrs is as powerful a tool as many women have for political action in traditional societies. But it is a tool which is conveyed in *the language of the fathers*, not the mothers.¹ While their behaviour may imbue their traditional roles with new respect, it does not challenge the prevailing social structure and therefore is unlikely to give women more choice in the roles they can assume.

The power of the role of mother of martyr is contingent upon the concept of martyrdom. Thus to see how her traditional role developed the first chapter of this thesis will examine the roots of martyrdom and its expressions in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In these three traditions martyrdom has proved to be a very popular expression of faith. Two aspects of the early popularity of the concept will be discussed. The first deals with the fact that all three traditions were able to overcome conceptual difficulties in adapting martyrdom to their theoretical framework. Martyrdom calls for reverence and sanctification of a human being, which, had the concept not held such wide popular support could easily have been interpreted by the intellectual establishment of all three religions, as presenting a challenge to the oneness of God.

¹ I am borrowing this phrase from the author of 2 Maccabees who refers to the mother of the martyrs as using "the language of their fathers" to motivate her seven sons to accept martyrdom.

The second aspect of the popularity of martyrdom which will be discussed is the development of the concept of living martyrs. A concept as useful as martyrdom in binding the community together in its own defence against an external enemy could hardly be forgotten about in times of peace. As the number of martyrs resulting from persecutions and wars decreased the focus of martyrdom changed. The new battle was against the forces of human desire. The heroes battling against the flesh were, like the battlefield martyrs, models for the religious community. The role of a living martyr is similar to that of the mother of martyrs because both are revered for their ability to suffer a living death through the denial of their natures.

The first recorded story of a mother of martyrs is that of the Maccabean mother and her seven martyred sons. Their tale spread throughout Palestine and areas beyond during ancient and medieval times. The influence of this story is exhibited in the great number of written versions of it which are still in existence. Two of these versions will be compared along with the story of the first Islamic mother of martyrs, al-Khansa, to elucidate the classical characteristics of the role of the mother of martyrs.

Chapter Two examines the stories of the Palestinian mothers of martyrs from this century focussing for the most part on those who became mothers of martyrs during the Intifada. The intensity of the fighting and the close

scrutiny of the media has ensured that the majority of stories of mothers of martyrs come from this time period.

Variations of the mother of martyr theme have arisen during the Intifada. The phenomena of replacement children, long known of in the Middle East, reappeared during this time. Although this phenomena is not exclusively connected to the loss of children through martyrdom, mothers of martyrs sometimes adopt the idea that their martyred child should be replaced with another child of the same name. The mothers of replacement children are expected to behave according to a set pattern almost identical to that of mothers of martyrs.

In the cases where the martyrdom is ambiguous the expected behaviour of the parents is less clearly defined. This situation arises with suicide bombers. For some Palestinians the bombers are martyrs and for others they are terrorists. How is the mother of a bomber/martyr to behave? This subject raises the question of the importance of the story teller, the martyrologist. Having control over the telling of the story is essential in the creation of a martyr and that control must be maintained. The stories of the mothers and their martyred children must be repeated and referred to often enough for them to be able to live on in the minds of the people. This role is in part played by some of the major political players, the PLO, Hamas and the UNLU (Unified Leadership of the Uprising). An analysis of a selection of the political

broadcast calls referring to mothers of martyrs of these three groups will show how the image of the mothers is sustained in the political arena. The next section will then look at how support for martyrdom has been institutionalized in the social welfare system in Palestine, through the introduction of the Families of the Martyrs Foundation.

In the stories of the Palestinian mothers of martyrs from this century, women show the same dedication to the cause as their maternal ancestors. This dedication has not been lost on the political leadership which in turn supports the mothers, whom they say "have the ear of the Resistance." Chapter Three will analyse what it means to Palestinian women to "have the ear of the Resistance." It will look at whether or not the words of praise and respect and the public financial remunerations indicate a change in attitude towards women in general and their role in the public domain.

When we see how the mothers are praised and for which reasons – their honour, purity and manly courage – it is evident that little has changed in how they have been viewed throughout their history. Their role as preservers of the culture has cost them dearly since the beginning of the Intifada for they have had to contend with an increased birth rate, a lowered age of marriage and a health record poorer than most men.

Yet it is argued by many that in women's battle for national freedom, they are actively fighting for a change in women's status which will

necessarily come about with the emergence of the state. This argument will be discussed in this final chapter while taking into consideration examples of women's participation in the national liberation movements of Iran and Algeria.

CHAPTER ONE

An Historical Overview of Martyrs and their Mothers in the Abrahamic Traditions

Section 1. The Roots of Martyrdom

The meaning of the Greek term *martyr* is witness. The martyr is a witness to a faith or a religious ideology. In Judaism, the martyr is a witness to the truth of the Law and thereby sanctifies the name of the Lord. In Christianity, a martyr is a witness to the crucified and risen Christ, and in Islam a witness to the way of God. In all these versions the martyr is expected to exhibit both complete dedication to an ideal and stoic indifference to pain. These elements have their roots in Greek thought with its strong respect for both the warrior who battles to the end for his cause and the philosopher who clings to his ethical principles. Although the Stoics may not have been the first of the Greek philosophers to hold that it is worthwhile to do right regardless of the rewards or punishments for the action, this teaching has become associated most particularly with them (as the adjective *stoic* points to).

The importance of clinging to one's principles whatever the cost to oneself is eloquently described in the Platonic dialogues. Moses Hadas in his book *The Third and Fourth Maccabees* believes the Platonic dialogue *Gorgias* to be the philosophical model for IV Maccabees and one might say an inspiration for martyrdom in general. In this dialogue Socrates says, "If it is necessary to either do or suffer wrong, it is better to suffer than to do it" (as cited by Hadas, p. 116). In his own life Socrates chose to "suffer" death rather than lead an ignominious life in exile for what he believed to be false accusations. Another element of the story of martyrdom which has its roots in Greek thought is the idea that the wrong-doer will suffer more in the end. Again from *Gorgias* Socrates says "The wrong-doer is worse off if he is not punished than if he is" (as cited by Hadas, p. 116). And later on he continues on the same theme: "a good man fares well...and is blessed and happy, while the wicked man or evil-doer is wretched" (as cited by Hadas, p. 117).

The Abrahamic faiths extend the idea that the wrong-doer will be wretched, in the belief that the wrong-doer will be punished if not in this world then after death. Just as assuredly as the executioner will be punished, the martyrs will be rewarded for their courageous act of giving themselves up for the divine. Wensinck notes in his article "The Oriental Doctrine of the Martyrs" that the centre of the doctrine of the martyrs "is the close relation between martyrdom and paradise" (p. 148). He explains that this connection

"originated among the Jews during the time when eternal life was still the prerogative of a small group of the faithful" (*Ibid.*, p. 163). A precursor to the idea of the prerogative of the faithful was the commonly held belief that fallen warriors were allotted a special place in the next world. Wensinck gives the example of the Epic of Gilgamesh to illustrate this point (p. 168). In Judaism it was not until the last centuries before the advent of Christianity that the idea of real life after death took hold (*Ibid.*, p. 163). Wensinck finds evidence for the concept in the Second Book of the Maccabees written in the first century BCE. The second son to be killed says to the king: "You wretch, you release us from this present life, but the king of the world will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws" (2 Macc. 7:9). Not only the second son, but also the third and fourth sons and the mother speak of the life to come. Wensinck goes on to say that, when paradise became more commonly attainable, the martyrs took over the highest place in paradise (*Ibid.*).

The delights which await the martyr in Paradise are most colourfully illustrated in the Islamic tradition. In their book *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, Smith and Haddad discuss the traditions which describe the martyrs going into the garden of Paradise to reside in green birds (p. 49) or in the domes in the meadows of the garden (*Ibid.*, p.55) and they will be able to marry 72 houris – the beautiful virgins of Paradise (*El*, s.v."shahid"

by Kohlberg). The other rewards for martyrdom include protection from the torments of the grave, a crown of glory on the head² and, as in Judaism and Christianity, the forgiveness of all the martyr's sins³ and direct passage to paradise bypassing the Judgement process (*Rel. and Ethics*, s.v. "Saints and Martyrs" by Michel Revon; Wensinck, p. 157).

In all three religious traditions it was thought that the martyrs were allowed to intercede on behalf of others (*Rel. and Ethics*, p. 55). Wensinck notes that this point is made in IV Maccabees when Eleazar, who is tortured and killed before the seven boys, speaks to God just at the point of death:

Be merciful unto thy people, and let our punishment be a satisfaction in their behalf. Make my blood their purification, and take my soul to ransom their souls (6:28).

In Oriental Christianity there was the belief that the souls of the martyrs would be standing at the heavenly altar pardoning those who asked for it (Wensinck, p. 158). Islam adopted the belief in the martyr's intercessionary abilities and some traditions give quite specific details on this

² The crown of glory is also mentioned in IV Maccabees, "Piety won the victory and crowned her own contestants" (17:15).

³ Wensinck relates a humorous tradition regarding the forgiveness of a Muslim's sins. A man asks Mohammed if he were killed in Allah's way if his sins would be forgiven. Mohammed says yes, then stops to think, then asks the man to repeat the question. Mohammed's second answer is the same as the first with the amendment that pecuniary debts are not forgiven, "so it was communicated to me by Gabriel" (p. 150)

point. For example, intercession is accepted for up to 70 of the martyr's relations (*El, "shahid"*). As the concept of martyrdom developed so to did its rewards, making it almost appealing. Wensinck notes that the promise of paradise for martyrs

takes away the horror of the two great trials to which a Muslim is submitted after his death: the trial by the angels Munkar and Nakir, and the computation on the day of judgment (p. 149).

Section 2. Conflicts Between Martyrdom and the Abrahamic Religions

There are two basic problems which the religious traditions had to overcome in order to accept the concept of martyrdom: the veneration of someone other than God, and for Judaism and Islam, the association of tombs and worship. That these problems were overcome speaks to the recognition of the importance and usefulness of the concept of martyrdom as a means of inspiring community loyalty.

Judaism and Islam both produced and honoured their martyrs, but not to the extent that Christianity did, for Christians had the example of Jesus to follow. It was this example and "the legacy of the early Church which enabled

the idea of martyrdom to enter the mainstream of Western consciousness" (Weiner, p. 46). Yet even Christianity along with Judaism and Islam had some difficulty with the veneration of martyrs since it bordered on the pagan practices of worshipping more than one god. An example of the attempt to clearly distinguish between the worship of God and the veneration of the martyr is to be found in *The Letter of the Smyrnaens* regarding one of Christianity's earliest martyrs, St. Polycarp (d. 166 C.E.).

This letter conveys the idea that martyrs are revered as models of behaviour because of their imitation of and love for the Lord. It also tells us of the sense of joy and triumph associated with the act of martyrdom. They say

For Him, being the Son of God, we adore, but the martyrs, as disciples and imitators of the Lord, we cherish as they deserve for their matchless affection towards their King and teacher ...[we will] gather ourselves together, as we are able, in gladness and joy and to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom (as cited by Revon, p. 53).

For both the Muslim and Jewish intellectual traditions any association of a place of worship with a tomb was abhorrent (Hadas, p. 105). Christianity did not have this tradition and was thus freer to develop a cult around the celebration of the anniversaries of the deaths of its heroes. As opposed to the Muslims, "the early Christians showed only the slightest hesitation in erecting

large martyria, first at the grave sites and then at the very heart of the city whither they carried the bones of saints and martyrs" (Peters, 1986, p. 19). The cultus began around the mid-third century. It originated with the funeral rites of the Christians, who followed the customs of the pagan society in which they lived by paying respect to their honoured dead. The martyrs had the same kind of burial as the other faithful but the remembrances became more important. Celebrations were held on the 3rd and 30th days and one year after the death with the eucharist (*Rel. and Ethics*, s.v. "Saints and Martyrs")

While the connection between prayer and tomb is opposed within the Muslim intellectual tradition, nonetheless many shrines were developed in the Islamic world. Peters in his book *Jerusalem and Mecca* refers to the twelfth century travelogue of al-Harawi who wrote a guide book to the many pilgrimage sites of the Islamic world. These included shrines of saints, heroes, heroines, local religious notables, and in Mecca the sites connected with the Prophet (p. 18). Although opposed by many Sunni Muslims as examples of heretical devotion, "the cult of the saints in Islam was, as Goldziher remarked, the clearest possible example of the power of a popular consensus over normal orthodox belief" (as cited by Peters, p. 18).

A debate within Christianity on the subject of martyrs also took place between what became the orthodox view and the gnostics. Yet as Pagels

argues in the *Gnostic Gospels*, it was the orthodox view which supported martyrdom and its attendant reverential activities while many of the gnostics rejected it (p. 92).⁴ Although the orthodox intellectual position in Islam may have had little effect on the veneration of the dead, Peters says it inhibited official recognition of the practice. He explains that the shrines of the Shi'ites are exceptions to the Islamic Sunni rule and are memorials of "political as much as religious statements, monuments to sectarianism and to the ethnic and national sentiment" (1986, p. 19).

Hadas' commentary on IV Maccabees argues that, despite the Jewish prohibition against sites of worship being connected with tombs and the attribution of nearly divine qualities to a human being, it would have been difficult at that time in Jewish history to resist "a practice so widespread, so edifying, and so serviceable" (p. 105). It was so serviceable because

the common Greek practice of commemorating people who had served the community must have been attractive to leaders of Hellenized communities who wished to strengthen national pride and cement religious loyalties (*Ibid.*, p. 106).

⁴ Pagels reasons that the orthodox view of martyrdom prevailed because "persecution gave impetus to the formation of the organized church structure that developed by the end of the second century" (p. 98). She considers the options open to present day dissidents facing a powerful political enemy: "The torture and execution of a small group of persons known only to their relatives and friends soon fall into oblivion, but the cases of dissidents who are scientists, writers, Jews or Christian missionaries may arouse the concern of an international community of those who identify with the victims by professional or religious affiliation" (p. 98).

Section 3. Development of Reverence for Living Martyrs

In times of war occasions for creating new martyrs often arise, but not so in times of peace. Yet it would be difficult to loose so useful a tool for binding the community as martyrdom. And it appears it was not lost but developed in new directions following the lead of Judaism.

The real heros of Judaism were still those who had fulfilled the Law to the best of their ability. "Live by them [the Laws] but do not die through them" (*JE*, "Martyrdom"). If the occasion arose, these heros would have died doing their religious duty, but the emphasis was on suffering rather than on armed opposition (Freund, p. 47). There is a strong tradition of righteous suffering in both Judaism and Christianity, although in Christianity the veneration due a religious hero was for a long time dependent on the martyr's act of sealing his testimony with blood.

It was not until after Constantine established Christianity as a state religion that Christians began to respect living martyrs to the same degree as those who had died. It was thought that they had suffered as much in their life in their pursuit of virtue as those who had died in the name of Christ (Peters, 1982, p. 131). Gradually the names of the patriarchs of the church

were remembered annually and the lists of their names were amalgamated with the martyrological lists (*Rel and Ethics*, s.v. "Saints and Martyrs").

There was a similar development in the concept of the martyr in Islam. Although the battlefield martyrs, the martyrs of this world and the next, remained the highest order of martyrdom, a second category of martyrs developed, those of the next world. This category included those who died violently or prematurely. A third category of martyrdom was that of the living martyrs.

Some examples of martyrs in the second category are people who die as victims of epidemics, of drowning, of pleurisy, from diarrhoea, by fire, by being struck by a house or a wall falling into ruins and from death due to childbirth (Wensinck, p. 172). These martyrs did not have special burial rites as did the battlefield martyrs who were buried in their clothes without being washed.⁵ It was assumed that the blood spilled in the act of martyrdom purified them physically and spiritually. It was believed that they would appear on the day of resurrection in their bloody clothes, evidently as a badge of their achievements. While the martyrs of the next world and the living martyrs may not have been purified by their own blood, it was assumed that

⁵ This burial rite was also extended to pilgrims who were buried in their pilgrim's robes and in the Jewish tradition to women who died in childbirth and to the bride who was buried in her wedding apparel.

they were purified by their every day actions as they strove to be good Muslims.

Giffen in her book the *Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs* believes the concept of martyrdom to have grown to incorporate living martyrs. This occurred when *jihad*

'holy war,' literally, 'striving [in the cause of God],' ceased to be the significant activity of Muslims, they began to ask whether the highest reward in Islam belonged only to those who waged war to propagate or defend Islam (p. 102).

Goldziher on the other hand, believes that theologians took an active stance against martyrdom in an attempt to contain "the fanatical mania for rushing upon death which at one time became prevalent" (*Muslim Studies*, Vol. 2, p. 352). An example illustrating the theologians' reaction against martyrdom is their attitude towards the "Kharijites who inspired by the martyrs crown, resisted a government which in their eyes was godless" (*Ibid.*). The theologians let it be known that opposing authority would not help one to lay claim to God's reward.

According to Goldziher's interpretation it was the active work of the theologians against battlefield martyrs which made a place for the living martyrs in Islam. But whatever the origins of the expanded concept of

martyrdom, the true martyr became understood, as Giffen says, as one "who waged war not against infidels but against his own sensual nature, much as the Eastern Church recognized ascetics as martyrs" (*Ibid.*). The mother of martyrs can be viewed as a development of the concept of the living martyrs, for these mothers live through horrific suffering in which they must battle their own maternal natures in order to enact their religious duties.

In this brief view of the history of martyrdom we can see that all three of the Abrahamic traditions have developed the concept according to their own precepts which are at times overlapping and at times distinct from each other. In all of them we have an image of the martyr as one who suffers for an ideal with full belief in an ultimate system of justice which will right all wrongs. All three monotheistic faiths faced conceptual problems in accepting martyrdom into their traditions. The elevation of a human to near divine status posed a definitional problem. In Judaism and Islam the practical problem of connecting a place of worship with a tomb site was an issue which was overcome by the orthodox establishment due to the pressure from popular demand. In the end the concept proved so popular and so useful that all three traditions were able to adapt it to their needs and part of this adaptation was the eventual development of the category of the "living martyr" which provides a background for the reverence of the role of the mother of martyrs.

Section 4. The Maccabean Mother and Her Seven

Martyred Sons

Section 4.1. Their Power and Fame

As we turn now from a theoretical approach to a concrete example, we can see that it is precisely the culture which germinated the concept of martyrdom and handed it on to Judaism which began to feel the ill effects of it. For the Jews made use of the tool of martyrdom in an effort to assert their cultural identity against the oppressive Hellenistic culture.

A very early example of this is the Maccabees. Martyrdom was one of the Israelites' responses to Antiochus Epiphanes' attempts to destroy Judaism. The rebels fighting for religious freedom were prepared to accept death to achieve their cause. "Let us die in our innocence ... heaven and earth witness over us" (I Maccabees 2: 29-38). Weiner believes that these martyrdoms "served the vital interests of the Judaeans nationalists who led the revolt against the Seleucids and the pro-Hellenists" (p.37), for any Judaeans who were ambivalent in their loyalties before the revolt were more than likely to have been swayed by the slaughter of the innocents. The politically persuasive power of these deaths meant that the executioners, the "Seleucids

and the pro-Hellenists handed the Maccabeans a stunning public relations victory" (*Ibid.*, p. 42). An indication of how effective this victory was is the use of our modern-day term "macabre" to describe a particularly horrible death.⁶

Not only is the story of the Maccabees important for what it tells us of early martyrs in the area of Palestine,⁷ but a prominent figure in the stories of the revolt is the mother of the seven martyred sons. In many of the versions of this tale she exhibits the same striking behaviour as do the modern day mothers of martyrs in Palestine. It is unlikely that the similarity in the mothers' behaviour is due to coincidence. Rather the usefulness and poignancy of her role in the famous martyrdoms would have ensured that the image of the Maccabean mother became so widespread as to have had a lasting and pervasive effect on Palestinian culture.

Probably the most striking piece of evidence proving the popularity of the Maccabean martyrs is the fact that the Maccabees hold the unique position

⁶ "Macabre" has come down to us as a corruption of "Maccabaeus", the name of the leader of the rebellion, through the 14th century French expression "danse Macabre". It is also interesting to note, Maccabaeus means "hammer" as does the Spanish word "macho" from which we get the word "machete" (Weekley, p. 874-5).

⁷ There has been much debate over the actual geographical site of the sepulchre of the martyred brothers and their mother, the main contenders being Antioch and Jerusalem. But as Obermann suggests, the problem should rightly be transferred from pragmatical history to religious history. The dedication of a site is independent of chronology and geography, its only prerequisite being that the memory of the saint has sufficiently stirred the imagination, or affected the sentiments, or simply become an endearing pious convention, of the community (p.261).

of being revered martyrs in both the Jewish and Christian traditions (Obermann, p. 250). These traditions have produced many versions of the story and in them the mother of the martyrs has been given a variety of names indicative of the places the story has travelled. In the Jewish tradition the mother is known as Hannah or Miriam daughter of Tanhum (consoler) or Nahtum (baker), in the Greek Christian tradition, Solomone, and in the Syriac, Mart Simouni (Young, p. 67). Sometimes though, as in The Second and Fourth Books of the Maccabees, she is a nameless mother.

Hannah is the name by which she is best known. This came to be through circuitous means. The author of a Spanish version of the Josippon⁸ named the anonymous mother of the Books of the Maccabees "Hannah" because of the similarity to the mother of seven referred to in "Hannah's Prayer", 1 Sam. 2:5 (*E. Judaica*, s.v. "Hannah and her Seven Sons"). She generally became known as Hannah because of the wide spread availability of this Spanish version of Josippon and the medieval *piyyutim* in Hebrew, Arabic and Judeo Persian which are based on it (*Ibid.*).

Doran, in his article, "The Martyr: a Synoptic View of the Mother and Her Seven Sons" compares four of the variations and concludes that they represent "separate tellings of a familiar popular tale" (p. 200).

⁸ The Josippon is an anonymous historical work written in the tenth century in southern Italy. One of the sources of this work was a latin version of the apocrypha from which the author learned of the mother and her seven sons (*E. Judaica*, s.v. "Josippon").

The place of this story in Islamic literature is a little more difficult to pin down, but it was quite likely as popular a tale in Muslim circles as in the Jewish and Christian traditions. Some proof for this lies in the works of R. Nissim ben Jacob Ibn Shahin who, in the eleventh century wrote a book called *Relief After Adversity* which included a version of the story of the Maccabean mother.⁹ His book was modelled after earlier Muslim Consolation Treatises which were very popular forms of literature (Brinner, p. xxv). It was the custom of the authors of these books to borrow stories from earlier works, "as well as relating anecdotes... from contemporaries,... fellow qadis, clerks in government offices, merchants in Baghdad, even Shi`ites or Christians" (*Ibid.*, p. xxv). That this genre of literature was very popular is attested to by the many manuscripts of R. Nissim's book as well as the works of other authors of Consolation Treatises (*Ibid.*, p. xxv). In this atmosphere of free borrowing it is more than likely that a tale as heart rending as that of the mother and her seven sons would have been borrowed by the Muslim authors to add to their collections.

⁹ R. Nissim lived and wrote in Kairouan which maintained a thriving Jewish community within a great Muslim urban centre (Brinner, p. xx). The story of the mother and her seven sons included in his book is missing the martyrdom of the first two sons but then continues on closely following both the Lam. R. and b. Git. versions. Abraham is referred to as "an old man of splendid mien" and is not confronted in the same manner as in Lam. R. At the end the mother commits suicide as in b. Git.

The fact that R. Nissim's book was written in Judeo-Arabic¹⁰ was not a stumbling block to its transferral to the general Arabic-speaking population as Arabic translations of the manuscripts have been found. There is also evidence that the story of the mother of martyrs found in Josippon was translated into Arabic by a Yemenite Jew and was probably in existence by the eleventh century (*El*, s.v. "Josippon").

Although the eleventh century is the first time we can document the existence of the story of Hannah in the Arabic-speaking world, it is very likely that in a predominately oral culture an oral version of the story would have long preceded the written one. The similarities between the story of Hannah and the story of al-Khansa, the first Islamic mother of martyrs who lived in the seventh century, indicates this is likely.

To illustrate the classical characteristics of the mother of martyrs, two versions of the story of the Maccabean mother will be compared to be followed by a discussion of al-Khansa's story. Very briefly, the Maccabean tales describe the capture of a mother and her seven sons. The boys are given the choice of betraying the Jewish Law or death. The executions, which they all choose, are witnessed by the mother before her death.

¹⁰ Although it is most commonly accepted that the book was originally written in Judeo-Arabic, Obermann says that he is "not at all convinced that the Farag-Book was not written originally in Arabic characters" (p. 255, note # 17).

The two versions of the story which give the fullest representation of the mother, IV Maccabees and Midrash Rabbah on Lamentations 1:16, 50 (a version similar to the one found in R. Nissim's book) are quite different in how they present her character and actions. This can in part be explained by the fact that they most likely drew on different sources and that IV Maccabees started as a written document while Lam. R. 1:16 is based on an oral narrative. While these differences in their origins may explain some of the variations in the stories, they are important to us for another reason. They indicate that the story had a broader base and was known by a larger segment of the population. The oral roots of the Midrash on Lamentations pushes these boundaries even further, for most people would be listening and telling stories rather than reading them. It seems clear that the image of a "noble" mother of martyrs was common in the area of Palestine in the early centuries of the first millennium. But what is more significant in understanding their variations is the fact that they were composed at different times when the needs of the community were different. IV Maccabees was originally written in Greek around 40 C.E.¹¹ by a Jewish author and entitled, "On the Sovereignty of Reason." Midrash Rabbah on Lamentations 1.16,50 was

¹¹ Hadas gives the most detailed discussion on the dating of IV Maccabees. He reasons that it was written during the reign of Caligula (37 - 41 CE.). It was during this period that religious persecutions of a nature found in the book were being committed. Two years after he came to power, Caligula decreed that a statue of himself was to be erected in the temple at Jerusalem. The Jews in Antioch were the first to hear this news and Hadas surmises that they met it with protest demonstrations (p. 96).

written in the fourth century CE.¹² Many cultural changes had occurred in the intervening years which Hadas argues are visible in how the stories are told. The earlier version (IV Maccabees) "reflects a conflict of ideologies in one world of which they and their opponents are both members" (p. 134). In this one world the Jews are struggling to maintain the identity of their community and prevent absorption into the dominant Greco-Roman culture.

By the time the Midrash Lamentations version was written, the Jewish community was much more secure in terms of its survival with strong boundaries in place dividing it from the surrounding culture. Therefore, the dominant questions of the time which are reflected in the story are of a different nature. In this case the concerns are theological, dealing with the question of evil in relation with the Jewish community. As Hadas says, "In their separate world the rabbis were not concerned with the motivation of their persecutions, but only with the effects upon themselves" (p. 134).

Arguing on the basis of Hadas' theory, in the rabbinic version the mother is not needed to support an ideology in a contest of world views and thus her words and actions are more like what one might expect from a mother witnessing the murder of all her children. The mother in Lamentations is a more heart-rending figure, with whom any mother at any time could readily identify, whereas it is far more difficult to identify with the

¹² There is some controversy over this date with estimates ranging from the fourth to the seventh century (Freeman, p. viii).

mother of IV Maccabees. Again following Hadas, we can see that the intention of the author of Lam. R. is not to dress this mother in red for her enemies but to tell a compelling tale which would serve to educate people in their own tradition.

Section 4.2. The Fourth Book of the Maccabees

The author of IV Maccabees claims that his aim was to discover "whether religious reason is sovereign over the emotions" (IV Macc., 1:1). To that end he discusses the heroic tales of Eleazer, the seven brothers and their mother, and their confrontation with the tyrant king. In Antiochus' efforts to suppress Judaism, he forced a life or death decision on the Jews. They could show obedience to his law by eating the meat of a swine which had been sacrificed to a pagan idol, or, if they insisted on obeying their own law, they would die. The story of the seven brothers begins with the King trying to dissuade the boys from the madness of choosing death. When the turn of the youngest son comes, the king asks the boy's mother to encourage him to obey the king in order to save his life. Instead, in the Hebrew tongue she urges him on towards martyrdom (12:7). When they had all died she too flung herself into the fire, "so that no one might touch her body" (17:1). The torture of the sons, from the eldest to the youngest, is described in graphic detail. This helps

to highlight the power of pious reason which is strong enough to keep the boys from giving in to their passions and most importantly, strong enough to provide the mother with the stamina to live through this situation.

The character of the king, the villain, has an interesting mix to it. While he is the instigator of horrific tortures, he is presented as being open enough to see the worthiness of the seven boys: "Young men, with right good will do I admire you, each and every one." (p. 161). He is also presented as deserving of some respect for as we are told at the beginning of the book, he is still capable of being won over by arguments of religious reasoning (1:10-11). He offered an argument to Eleazer which as Hadas says "must have weighed heavily with our author's audience who had somehow to adjust themselves to the demands of their environment" (p. 171). This argument is repeated in 8:14 and 8:25. In his effort to get the Jews to eat pork, that "excellent meat ...which nature has freely bestowed upon us" (5:8) the tyrant reasons "that even if there is some power that watches over that religion of yours, it would pardon you for a transgression arising out of extreme compulsion" (5:13). The tyrant presents an image of an enemy who is powerful, smart and a tempter. He brings to light the very real question of the time for the Jews of how much they could accommodate before losing their cultural heritage.

After summing up his argument for pious reason through the proofs of the martyred boys, the author goes on to say "count it not a marvellous thing

that reason prevailed over tortures in the case of those men, when the mind of even a woman despised torments even more manifold" (14:11). The mother's actions are the strongest proof of the supremacy of religious reasoning on two counts. First, she is a woman and it was common knowledge in ancient philosophical circles that the feminine element in the human constitution was weaker and more subject to the emotions than the manly, reasonable element (Young, p. 72). The author of IV Maccabees puts it bluntly, "Mothers are weaker in their being than Fathers" (15:5). Second, this situation set reason against maternal instinct, which the author takes pains to show is the strongest of all emotions and of a lower order connected to the bowels (14:13). Since she can overcome both her feminine element and her maternal instinct, she represents the epitome of religious models.

The author tells us that it would have been understandable had the mother not encouraged her children towards martyrdom and rather had bemoaned their fate. In fact he gives us an example of an argument that she would have been likely to give from that perspective recalling the hard work of pregnancy and nursing and the facts that she will never be called by the title of grandmother, nor will she have children to bury her. If she had taken this position she would have been equated with the weakness of the tyrant, whose strength, as each of the boys said upon facing death, fails a little more

with each martyrdom.¹³ But she does not wail or weep (15:20-21) for "devout reason gave manly courage to her heart" (15:23). In showing her courage like that of "Abraham's fortitude" (15:28) to sacrifice her sons for the Law she has earned her place in the spiritual history of Israel and this allows her the masculine titles of "soldier of God" and "Elder" (16:14). Her birth pangs are now of a spiritual nature as she gives birth to immortal children. The value of her physical parentage is reduced¹⁴ and supplanted by her spiritual one which again likens her to Abraham, "for your childbearing was of our Father Abraham" (17:6).

If there were ever any question of the mother's purity, the author certainly takes pains to quell it. Her voluntary death is attributed to her unwillingness to have her body touched by alien hands. Hadas notes that to be touched by another man would be classed as a violation of chastity, a cardinal sin to which martyrdom was to be preferred (p. 120).

Another attempt to justify the exalted position of the mother may be found at the end of the story. The mother's speech in verse 18 in which she defends her purity as a maiden and honour as a married woman, appears out

¹³ Klausner makes the point regarding the weakness of the enemy and the relative strength of the martyr in his article on "Martyrdom", "The adversary is made impotent by delivering to him dead bodies, the ultimate in noncooperation, and the spiritual strength and authority of the martyr's society is affirmed" (p. 233).

¹⁴ In 2 Maccabees 7 the mother completely relinquishes her role as bearer of these children: "I do not know how you appeared in my womb, for it was not I that gave you life and breath".

of place as it comes after the conclusion of the narrative.¹⁵ It may then have been added or transposed from verse 16 (Hadas, p. 239). Young reasons that this section may have been added to connect her voluntary death with her prior training in virtue and to prove further the mother's purity by including her in a domestic setting (p. 79). Hadas presents an interesting theory on why there is this emphasis on the mother's purity. If the discourse was intended for "a fashionable metropolitan congregation, one can surmise that the extended exhortation to loyalty to the cause of religion and even to chastity by the example of the mother was in fact a necessary *argumentum ad feminas*" (p. 120). In other words, the women of the congregation may have been seen to have been taking on "wayward" heathen ways which threatened the cultural integrity of the community and the control of the male members. Couching the mother's death in the language of purity also prevents accusations of suicide, a forbidden practice.¹⁶

¹⁵ The mother's address to her children: "I was a chaste maiden and did not depart from my father's house; but I kept guard over the rib fashioned into women's body. No seducer of the desert or spoiler in the field corrupted me; nor did the seducing and deceitful serpent defile the sanctity of my chastity. All the period of my maturity I abode with my husband" (18:7-9). Her purity is at first safeguarded by her father and then by her husband. She never left the home and protection of one or other of these men.

¹⁶ In one of the versions of the story, b. Git. 57b, the mother does commit suicide by throwing herself off the roof.

Section 4.3. Midrash Rabbah on Lamentations R. 1:16, 50

The story from Lam. R. 1:16 starts off, not with an exhortation of the primacy of religious reason but by introducing the audience to Miriam, daughter of Nahtum, who was taken captive with her seven sons. The martyrdoms proceed similarly to IV Maccabees with the deaths of the oldest son first and on down to the youngest. The king's role is reduced from that in IV Maccabees to an almost cartoon-like character of the "evil king" who is not capable of much more than repeating the words, "Prostrate yourself before the image" in front of each of the sons. He presents no argument for an alternative way of life, in fact he tells us more about his knowledge of the Law by quoting Lev. 22.28 than about paganism. Alternative ways of living are simply not the issue they were in the previous story.

The author uses the king's questions as a literary device to glorify God by prompting the sons to tell us of His greatness. The king's main question in this version is not about adaptation to the surrounding culture but about why a god who is so great and powerful could allow His people to die.¹⁷

¹⁷ As a commentary on Lam., the Lam. R. is dealing with the subject of "the destruction of Jerusalem and the basis of the hope that repentance and submission could bring an end to the suffering" (E. Judaica, s.v. "Lamentations", p. 1271).

Unlike in IV Maccabees, the mother does not speak any words of encouragement urging her sons on to their deaths, a point which is so greatly admired by the author of IV Maccabees. It is because she speaks those words of encouragement that the author likens her to the patriarchs. In this story she speaks only at the end, requesting that she may hug and kiss the last of her sons. The fact that she then nurses her child tells us he is very young.

In case the audience missed that crushing reference we are told later with great precision that he was only two and a half years and six and a half hours old. She knows he will not be spared so she asks only that she be killed first. Here the cruelty of the king makes itself known, for he taunts her by saying that he cannot kill her for according to the Law, "and whether it be cow or ewe, ye shall not kill it and its young both in one day."

When she voices her exasperation he orders the boy to be killed. Miriam throws herself on her baby who is killed in her arms while she is kissing him. She lives for a few more days before going mad and falling off a roof. In this version of the story Miriam never encouraged her boys to martyr themselves, she pleaded not to witness her baby's martyrdom and she threw herself on him before the soldiers could get to him. Clearly Miriam does not appear as the same model of devotion to the cause as does the mother in IV Maccabees.

The Lam. R. 1:16 version also presents a very different relationship between the mother and Abraham than does the story of IV Maccabees, where the mother's status is heightened by her comparison with Abraham. Miriam has just enough time before her baby is killed to instruct him to

go to the patriarch Abraham and tell him, "Thus said my mother, 'Do not preen yourself (on your righteousness), saying I built an altar and offered up my son, Isaac.' Behold, our mother built seven altars and offered up seven sons in one day. Yours was only a test, but mine was in earnest."

These are angry words from a woman who would not be consoled by a mere comparison of her offerings with those of Abraham. She gave seven times more than he, and his was only a test. Criticising *the* patriarch is not something one would expect of a story designed to win over the enemy, but neither is it a reaction one would expect in a story designed to clarify religious truths. Agus argues that the confusion caused by the mother's words is a result of the intention of the author who "dulls the identification of the mother with Abraham, as that identification is no longer germane to the power of the sermon as a whole" (note 16, p. 258).

One might wonder, if the intent was to "dull" the connection between Abraham and the mother, why is the subject brought up at all? This may be because the sacrifice of the two parents was so similar and had such a history

of comparison that the listeners/readers would have expected the subject to have arisen and would have been confused if it had not. It does appear in what Doran argues is the earlier version of b. Git. 57b, upon which the Lam. 1:16 story is based. But in the former version the mother's words to Abraham, which she instructs her son to convey to the patriarch, are polite and only gently point out that "thou didst bind one altar, but I have bound seven altars." The accusation of pride -- "do not preen yourself" -- with which the mother of Lam. 1:16 prefaces her remarks to Abraham about the number of sons sacrificed, is an addition and thus seems quite intentional.

Why would one draw attention to a comparison which belittles Abraham? The answer can only be that whoever tries to set themselves above the patriarch will suffer in the end. As the king will suffer for setting himself above God's Law, so too will the mother for not submitting in her heart.

The story is focused on a theological issue. Thus there is not the same need to elevate the status of the mother to heroine of the people and preserver of the culture. When the mother is not needed to defend the community, the storyteller presents her attitude and actions very differently. As Doran says, "Perhaps the editors of the Babylonian Talmud did not want to show such prominence to a woman" (p. 200). Since this was not a time of war, the enemy is no longer external but internal. So often it is women who symbolized the

internal weaknesses and evils of the flesh. Thus it would be more difficult to give the mother such praise as was found in IV Maccabees.

She is no longer a reflection of Abraham's virtue nor is she described in the masculine terms she receives in IV Maccabees. Attaining no more the "heights" of the masculine psyche of the patriarchs, maybe we can see her as being left to portray the feminine, maternal voice -- the "true" voice of the maternal instinct. Have her words inscribed in the form of direct speech crept through the lens of the, most likely male, storytellers to tell us what the woman's version of this tale is? If so she is damned for it, for her pride is rendered in terms of blasphemy and she is condemned to silent madness for her sin. Ascribing madness to her may have been an authentic touch, the result of her maternal agony, or maybe it is a description of what happens when one has blasphemy in the heart. Possibly it was just a literary technique to avoid the issue of suicide.

Even if the mother is not needed to be a pillar of the community and thus voice the appropriate gratitude regarding her sons' deaths, there is still written into the scene a remembrance of the joy which is supposed to attend this occasion. It is alluded to at the end with the quote of Psalm 113:9, "A joyful mother of children." As Obermann notes in his article "The Sepulchre of the Maccabean Martyrs", the joyfulness attributed to the mother of seven sons seems rather out of place as it is proclaimed "immediately after the

mother, in boundless despair over the death of her sons, had taken her own life" (p. 260, note 35). Obermann believes that the original version of this story would have quoted the whole of verse 9 – "He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the Lord!" – as it would make more sense.¹⁸ The mother of the martyrs may now be barren on earth but she will go to heaven and will be a joyous mother once again. The explanation found in another of the rabbinic versions of this story, Pesiq. R. 43, is quite clear on this issue. "The Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'I made Miriam the daughter of Tanhum become childless like a barren woman in order to make her rejoice the more in her children in the time-to-come.'"

These explanations are only useful in so far as they provide a theological interpretation for the exhortation to rejoice. The mother of this story has little time for rejoicing though, for in a few days she becomes demented and then dies. Even if her fate were different, we would not expect her to utter words of joy after the way her character has been presented. She is not quite the mother dressed in red for her enemies as is the mother of IV Maccabees, yet the two mothers share a fearlessness in the face of the enemy.

¹⁸ Obermann, who discovered R. Nissim's work, found that the author quotes the whole verse of Psalm 113. Obermann notes that R. Nissim follows the Rabbis' version "with verbal precision" except that it includes the whole of the psalm (p. 254). He therefore reasons that R. Nissim's version represents the original version of the story.

Doran assumes that the verse was connected to the narrative of the mother in the context of a sermon and found its way, sometimes only partially, into other versions (p. 196).

Miriam never urges on her children to martyrdom, but she does stand up to the king at least as his equal, if not his superior. The storyteller of Lam. R. 1:16 could afford to portray Miriam as a less enthusiastic mother of martyrs because his community was secure in its survival. It is when the survival of the community is at stake that women are called upon to be heroes and are dressed with the appropriate titles, praise and status of heroes. This is true not only in the Jewish and Christian traditions but as we shall see in the Islamic tradition as well.

Section 4.4. Al-Khansa

The first Islamic mother of martyrs, al-Khansa, was a poet who lived during the time of the birth of Islam. Before she became a mother of martyrs she suffered the loss of her brothers who were killed in tribal battles. It is the poems she wrote in their memory for which she is best remembered (see Appendix 1).¹⁹ As the story goes, after her brothers' deaths "she proceeded to

¹⁹ Poetry is probably the most sacred literary medium for the Arabs and poets themselves have been held in the highest regard since well before Islam. Female poets of the pre-Islamic period were commonly assigned the task of composing *ritha* (elegies) especially commemorating male relatives (brothers, or fathers, most often). Nicholson in his *Literary History of the Arabs* describes this poetry as "distinctly masculine in character" (p. 126). Although al-Khansa's elegies do not have the swagger about them to which Nicholson is referring, they do follow the typical pattern of the other elegies. These poems are expected to describe the poet's grief, the worthiness of the one who has died, and if it were a violent death, a desire for revenge.

the Prophet, accompanied by a deputation of members of her tribe, and offered her homage" (Mogannam, p. 21).

The sadness of her melancholy reprimand to Death regarding her brothers, "...could you not wait/ a little longer/ a little longer,/ you came too soon", is not present in either her words to her four sons before they left for battle, nor concerning their deaths at Qadisia in the defense of Islam.

Mogannam quotes al-Khansa's speech to her sons as they are preparing to leave to fight:

Oh, my Sons, ye have embraced Islam of your own free will.
You have voluntarily emigrated, You are the offspring of the
same man. I have never betrayed your father, nor cast any
reflection upon your dignity of honour. You know the reward
which God has for Moslems who fight the infidel. Let it be
known to you that the world to come is better than this world.

If you will be still alive by tomorrow morning, go and fight your
enemy, and when the fighting starts, go to it and do your duty,
as by that you will have your reward in paradise (p. 22).

Just as the mother in IV Maccabees, al-Khansa emphasizes the strong faith of the sons and the joys that await them in recompense for this faith. No words of emotion are present in this speech. If al-Khansa had addressed the boys by name instead of "Sons" the only way we would know that it was their mother speaking was by the fact that she, like the mother in IV Maccabees

defended her purity, letting her sons know that their family honour was in tact.

When hearing the news that four of her sons were killed in the battle of Qadisia, she is reported to have said, "I consider it an honour that they died for the sake of Islam. I ask only that God allow me to meet them in Paradise" (Fernea, p.4). This proud face is given a sense of poignancy when we hear that when the troops returned to Medina victorious after the battle, al-Khansa, "in sorrow and bereavement, marched with them leaning on a cane" (*Ibid.*).

Her words echo those spoken by the Maccabean mother in The Second Book of the Maccabees verse 7, who in the language of her forefathers urged her youngest not to let her down but to accept death "that by God's mercy I may receive thee again together with thy brothers."

It is difficult to prove that the story of the Maccabean mother had made its way into the Arabian world of al-Khansa's time through oral traditions. What we do know and what is so interesting about al-Khansa's sentiments is the different attitude she voiced about the death of her brothers and the death of her sons. All that history tells us about what happened to her in the intervening time between the deaths which would explain this change in attitude is that she converted to Islam. Just as the Maccabean mother, she and her sons shared a world view provided by their religion. It served as a unifying social, political, cultural vision which gave them a cause to die for

and a future after death. And in the case of both mothers, al-Khansa and the mother of IV Maccabees, the survival of the community which held this world view was threatened.

After al-Khansa, there are few traces of martyrs in the Middle East until relatively recently. An explanation for the gap between al-Khansa and the 19th and 20th centuries may rest on the fact that for a thousand years the Arab Middle East was relatively secure either as an independent region or under Ottoman protection. This external security was mirrored internally by a sense of confidence in the truth of their own world view and as mentioned with regard to the Kharijites, dissent against authority was suppressed by the theologians.

Martyrs, such as the Martyrs of Denshawī who became symbols of Egyptian nationalism in 1907, and the Palestinian martyrs of the Intifada, began reappearing in the Middle East because of the loss of power in the face of European incursions and the presence of an overwhelmingly powerful opponent. Once again martyrs and mothers of martyrs became powerful weapons in a fight for community survival. It is to these modern mothers of martyrs we shall turn in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER TWO

Twentieth Century Palestinian Mothers of Martyrs

Martyrdom can be viewed as a political act affecting the power relations between two societies. What gives it special power is that it "imbues economic and political conflict with sacred meaning" (Klausner, p. 230). The martyrs become a sacred symbol of the cause for which they die. Their conquest over the fear of death serves as a compelling metaphor for their societies' conquest over the enemy. It serves to bind together and strengthen the faith of the society from which the martyrs come and helps to recruit more martyrs.

A society will only produce a martyr under certain conditions of social conflict. As Klausner states, "The Maccabean Revolt, which offered early and paradigmatic martyrs, was the action of a small community seeking a measure of local cultural independence" (*Ibid.* p. 230). The Palestinians now similarly find themselves seeking independence and cultural autonomy. Given this environment, we would expect the image of the mother of martyrs of modern times to be like Hannah and al-Khansa, both of whom participated in the creation of the martyrologies of their sons. An analysis of the present-

day stories of mothers of martyrs will show that indeed they are very similar to these mothers of the ancient world.

When the mother of martyrs participates in the creation of the martyr's story – the martyrology – she adds a special poignancy beyond what the regular martyrologist has, which makes the tale even more compelling. The author of IV Maccabees was clear about this. The stereotype of the mother then as now is that she has an especially strong relationship with her children. As the author of IV Maccabees says, mothers "are more affectionate in their own feelings toward their children than fathers" (15:4). Therefore, if she can subdue her emotions in the name of the cause she provides the most effective model for the supporters of the cause.

It is difficult to disagree with a mother about the legitimacy of the cause for which her child has died. In this sense she is a good spokesperson to the enemy since her presence adds to the impact of the psychological force of the martyrdom. The fact that it is the story which is most important is not lost on the politicians who, it will be shown, involve themselves in the stories of the mothers of martyrs and help the mothers to create them.

The stories of mothers of martyrs which will be discussed in this section come in large part from American media and texts as well as BBC translations

of Palestinian radio broadcasts.²⁰ Most of these stories are from the time of the Intifada which began in December 1987. The pre-Intifada mothers of martyrs will be mentioned briefly before going on to analyze more recent stories. The image of the mother of martyrs was promoted throughout this century, but the resistance was less concentrated and there were fewer media reporters present to capture the stories.

Section 1. Pre-Intifada

Al-Khansa's sentiments of pride in the martyrdom of her four sons were invoked by the Palestinian, Matiel Mogannam, when she wrote of the early days of the women's movement in Palestine. Her book *The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem* was published in 1937. She prefaced her discussion on the political role of women during the 1920s and 30s with a review of the social contributions of early Muslim women, including al-Khansa. Although a Christian, she drew on the tradition of al-Khansa to give historical validity, context and shape to the political sentiments of the women of her day.²¹

²⁰ It must be noted that as the United States is Israel's closest ally, the American media will tend to present a more negative view of mothers of martyrs. Where this is evident, it will be commented on in the body of the paper.

²¹ Mogannam used her religious background to political effect. Not only did she, a Christian, call on the image of the Muslim poet to inspire the Arab women of the 20th century, but she partook in a woman's demonstration in 1933 in which she gave a speech at the Dome of the Rock and a Muslim woman gave a speech in the Holy Sepulchre. Peteet notes that this conscious mixing of religious traditions creating a non-

One of the major upheavals of Mogannam's time were the riots of 1929 which resulted in the imprisonment of many men at Akka. Many of the prisoners were sentenced to death by hanging. Tuesdays, which became known as "Black Tuesday", were the days the sentences were carried out. Peteet cites Abu Ali²² who refers to this behaviour,

After the 1930 execution of Muhammad Jamjum of Hebron, condemned to death for his participation in the 1929 riots, people gathered at his mother's house to pay condolences. She is reported to have refused to receive them, calling out from her home, 'Why do you cry? I am proud of my son who achieved great honour through martyrdom' (as cited by Peteet, 1991, p. 51)

Not only was the pride of the mothers of martyrs considered to be a model for women's action, but also her refusal to identify her child's body was viewed as a noble act,

for village-level collective punishment was the British Mandatory authorities' response to identification of dead or captured *fida'iyyin* (*Ibid.*).

sectarian image, was a defining characteristic of the history of the women's movement in Palestine (1991, p. 49).

²² *Introduction to Women's Reality and Her Experience in the Palestinian Revolution*, 1975 [Arabic]

A generation later mothers were repeating the same message of pride and honour gained through their children's death on the battlefield. Peteet refers to a number of other statements of mothers of martyrs who lost their sons in the battle of Tal al-Za`ter (1976). Umm Muhammad said, "We Palestinian women, we have a *batin `askari*. [literally: military womb; figuratively: we give birth to fighters]." And finally Peteet quotes the words of one woman who lost her husband and four sons in the battle: "We Palestinian women, we give birth to them, we bring them up, and we bury them for the Revolution" (1991, p. 185).

Section 2. Intifada

As the battle for a recognized homeland for the Palestinians continued, mothers of martyrs continued to make their stand. Philippa Strum in her book *The Women are Marching* writes of the bravery she saw in the refugee camps during the intifada. She tries to capture the image of this in her phrase, "Intifada smile" -- "it's an insistent cheerful grin that looks natural until one realizes that it is maintained even while its wearer is recounting the most horrible experiences" (p. 119).

One of her more memorable stories is of a mother whose fourth son had been shot and killed three months previously. The mother told of how

her son's body was taken from the hospital by his friends and was moved around from house to house within the refugee camp in order to avoid being taken by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). The IDF would normally take possession of the body to ensure a nighttime burial thus avoiding a demonstration at the time of the funeral. The mother told Strum that when the IDF came to her asking for his body, "she laughed and said that her son wasn't dead – he was out throwing stones –" (p. 117). She said she feared that if she let on that she knew he was dead the IDF would beat her other children to find out where the body was. This laughing mother of a martyr was extremely proud of her son who died "what she considers a meaningful death" (*Ibid.*, p. 118). When Strum asked her where she got the strength to carry her through this ordeal, the mother said, "From Allah; from Palestine. They can kill the rest of my children, they can kill me, they can kill my husband; even if there is only one of us left alive, he will fight for the state" (p. 117). These could be the words of the mother of IV Maccabees, even down to the inclusion of her own bravery under the standard of the male pronoun. Like that mother before her, she would urge all of her children on towards martyrdom and show joy in her actions.

Najjar and Warnock in their book *Portraits of Palestinian Women* recorded the story of the first female martyr of the uprising, Haniyyeh (d.

1/3/88).²³ Trying to rescue a young boy who was being beaten, she was shot in the chest. According to the details of her martyrology she had led a good Muslim life, which as was noted in Chapter One became an essential part of the martyr's story. Not only was she killed while in the middle of an altruistic action, she was planning on going on pilgrimage to Mecca the year she died.

As in the stories of the mothers of martyrs of the ancient world, the issue of purity played a significant role in Haniyyeh's story. The difference is that for Hannah and al-Khansa the emphasis is on their purity, whereas in this case it is on the martyr's purity. In a culture where family and male honour has traditionally been dependent on the unquestioned purity of the female members of the family, the purity of a male martyr would not be of issue. Haniyyeh's mother Lawziyyeh stressed the fact that, when Haniyyeh's father left to work in the United States, she pulled Haniyyeh out of school after the fourth grade. "I was afraid for the reputation of my daughters if they walked back and forth to school, what with no father to take care of them" (*Ibid.*, p. 104).

In the hierarchy of purity there is more at stake for a young unmarried girl than there is for her mother. But when the only woman in the family is

²³ The authors make a note that they took care to interview Haniyyeh's mother in colloquial Arabic to remain as true as possible to her exact descriptions.

the mother, it will be her purity which must be defended. For Haniyyeh, the price of her purity was her education. Both al-Khansa and the mother in IV Maccabees defended their honour as married women, insisting that they never betrayed their husbands. This defence was not enough in the case of the mother of IV Maccabees, because we are told that she threw herself into the fire that burned her sons to preserve her purity.

The martyrdom of such a pure and innocent girl as Haniyyeh only makes the sacrifice that much greater and the story that much easier to tell. If the neighbours had all thought that Haniyyeh's virginity was in question, the martyrologists would have had to overcome that knowledge. It is just as Lawziyyeh said, "Everyone around us swore by the good breeding of Haniyyeh" (*Ibid.*, p. 105).

Lawziyyeh tells us that she was not prepared for her daughter's death, but there are stories of people who do prepare themselves psychologically for the death of a relative – just in case. This "preparation" extends all the way down to the little children. *The Washington Post* carried a story on August 5, 1991 of the playtime of 4-year-old children at the Nursery of Flowers in Jabaliya refugee camp. "'Tamar has become a martyr,' shrieks a girl. A small

shrill voice calls for an ambulance. 'Ululate, oh mother of martyrs, all the young men are your children,' the girls break out in a chorus."²⁴

On February 2, 1996 the *Chicago Tribune* carried another story of a 3 year old boy, Eyad, and his mother from the same camp. Fatima, or Um Eyad (mother of Eyad) said she "deliberately conceived Eyad during the intifada to replace a brother of the same name who was killed... a martyr to the cause of Palestine" (*Ibid.*). She continued on to say that, "Before Eyad was killed, I heard about the death of the first martyr in the intifada... and that day I said I would be willing to donate two sons for Palestine and to keep two for myself" (*Ibid.*). Speaking for all mothers, she said, "The mothers of the martyrs are very fertile and fruitful. If you plant one martyr, you will get 500 more" (*Ibid.*).²⁵

Strum tells of another woman who like Um Eyad had lost a child to the intifada and insisted that she would have more children to make up for the loss. But this woman took this method of "resistance" a step further by saying

²⁴ To ululate is to move the tongue to produce a voice or a sound. The journalist, Saud Abu Ramadan referred to this practice in Arab traditions as "a sign of happiness and joy. And when we used to ask [the mother of martyrs], 'Why you are ululating?' she was saying, 'My son is a martyr. My son is going to paradise.'" ("All Things Considered", National Public Radio Mar. 5, 1996)

²⁵ These words are remarkably like those of one of the Christian patriarchs, Tertullian (160-225 A.D.) who said to his Roman prosecutor "The oftener we are mown down by you, the more we grow in numbers: the blood of the Christians is seed" (as cited by Pagels, p. 100).

that she wanted her husband to marry another wife so they could make more Palestinians (p. 121).

For a Western audience which stresses individuality, it may seem almost perverse to name your child after his dead brother. But Eickelman in his book *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach* notes that it is a common tradition in parts of the Middle East for a later child to be given the same name as a dead sibling, or a name indicating that he is a replacement for the earlier child (p. 184).

Section 3. History of Replacement Children – A Way of Remembering

Stories of "replacement" children go back to the Hebrew Bible (Gen 4:25, Sam 12: 24)²⁶ and are also to be found in the Muslim consolation treatises of the 14th and 15th centuries. These treatises are compilations of older stories. They advised bereaved parents on how to behave by providing examples to follow. In most of the stories it is the father who is most often mentioned, but the treatises of Ahmad ibn Abi Hajalah of Egypt and

²⁶ Gen. 4:25, "And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said 'God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, for Cain slew him'"; 2 Sam. 12:24, "Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba [on the death of their first son] and lay with her; and she bore a son and called his name Solomon."

Muhammad ibn Nasir al-Din al-Qaysi of Damascus include a story about a mother from the first generation of Muslims who is a model of reserved emotional behaviour (Gil`adi, 1989, p. 35). It is worth noting this story in some detail, because, although the child who dies is not a martyr, the expected emotional response of the mother – patience, steadfastness and control of one's emotions – is the same as that of the mother of martyrs.

This model of mothers is Umm Sulaym. She kept the news of the death of her son from her husband. She perfumed and prepared herself for him and slept with him in order to conceive again. In the morning she asked her husband the seemingly hypothetical question, "Would you return something that you had borrowed?" He said "Yes", and she responded, "Your son was a loan borrowed from God, and God took his soul back" (*Ibid.*, p. 40).

Throughout the story the mother never showed any sign of emotion and for this she is praised. But in many of the versions it is the husband who is praised for his steadfastness because this strength was thought to be more in keeping with the nature of men.²⁷

These treatises also contain a very similar story of a Jewish woman, Beruryah, who had two sons who died while her husband was entertaining

²⁷ In some of the earlier versions the husband says to his wife, "By God, you will not get the upper hand over me in steadfastness" (Gil`adi, p. 40). According to a Late Consolation Treatise the mother showed steadfastness and patience but everyone who has been hurt, "should know that men are more fit for deeds like that and for steadfastness than women" (*Ibid.*, p. 41).

guests. She kept the news from him and slept with him so as to conceive another child to replace the lost ones. Gil`adi notes that,

The appearance of these two heroines in Muslim consolation treatises from the late Middle Ages indicates the existence of a similar pattern of narratives in both Jewish and Muslim medieval cultures (*Ibid.*, p. 35).

These narratives show that both traditions provided the same range of expression which was considered acceptable behaviour for women. And if women did follow these guidelines of patience and steadfastness they would be revered as brave.

One of the Jewish sources of the story of Beruryah is R. Nissim ben Jacob Ibn Shahin's *Relief After Adversity* (11th century) which also contained the story of the Maccabean mother and her seven sons. Gil`adi presumes that R. Nissim's version of the story of Beruryah is probably very close to the popular Jewish version of the narrative which was well known in the Middle East and which was the source used by the later Muslim consolation treatises. It is likely then that stories of mothers of martyrs, as included in R. Nissim's book, were at least as well known in the Middle East as the story of Beruryah.

Not only did these treatises explain how parents should react to their child's death, they also explained what a mother should not do. Al-Sakhawi's

(d. 1497) compilation of consolation stories explains which type of behaviour of bereaved mothers was not acceptable and should be eradicated through the educational application of his work. The pre-Islamic mourning behaviour which he was against "included vehement cries and screams, moaning, wailing... tearing off garments, slapping scratching, and otherwise wounding the face, shaving the head, and cutting or tangling the hair" (Gil`adi, 1993, p. 377). The implication of this behaviour was a protest against divine will.

Lawziyyeh's description of her reaction to her daughter's death sounds remarkably like the pre-Islamic customs these treatises were trying to eradicate. "I beat my face, tore my clothes, and took the scarf off my head. Since that unlucky day, my tears have not dried" (Najjar and Warnock, p. 103). This is not a typical stoic mother of martyr response, but it is the words which come next which are more surprising:

Haniyyeh is not a myth; she is just one of many in a long procession. But it is hard. I lie in bed at night, my eyes gazing straight up to heaven, and my tears fall from the side of my face to the pillow (*Ibid.* p. 103).

When she says that her daughter "is just one of many in a long procession" there is no pride in her voice. She seems resigned to the uselessness of her daughter's death.

Section 4. Exceptions: Suicide or Martyrdom

Although Lawziyyeh may question the value of her daughter's death she does not question whether or not it is a martyrdom as do the parents of the suicide bombers of 1996. At first these parents cling to the title of martyr for their sons, but for example, under the questioning of *Life* reporter Majeda El-Batsh, they express their doubts over the actions of their sons as can be seen in the article "Shadow World of the Suicide Bombers":

Ask a suicide bomber's parents if their late son was a martyr, and the answer will likely be a pious "Yes, thank God." But after a few more questions, the picture often changes. Mariam Sarahne sits by her tent in the West Bank's Al Fawwar refugee camp, clutching a photo of her son. "He was my dearest boy," she says, "but what he did is haram"—a sin. Ibrahim, 23, blew himself up in Ashkelon on February 25, killing a soldier and wounding 34 bystanders. "If I had known," Mariam says, "I would have tied him to a tree." Other parents echo her. "My son was brainwashed," says Abu Majdi Warda, father of Majdi, 20, whose bomb gutted a bus in Jerusalem that same day. "My son killed himself, and us with him," says Abdul Karim Shagnobi, whose son Raed, 23, destroyed a second bus on March 3. "If my husband had sent my son to do this, I would have killed my husband to stop it," says Sadya Obed, mother of Ramez, 21, who carried out the March 4 bombing in Tel Aviv (July 1996).

The apparent confusion about whether or not these bomber/martyrs represent suicides or martyrs has to do with both theological interpretations and political interests.

The cases of the bombers do not fit easily into the martyr category as it is understood theologically. These bombers are giving up their lives for the birth of a new nation in which they hope Islam will be a ruling force, and from this perspective they are martyrs. On the other hand, deliberately seeking one's death, as must be the bomber's intention, is clearly suicide, which is commonly known to be forbidden in Islam.²⁸ As would be expected, some religious leaders are ambivalent about these martyrdoms or deny them outright.²⁹ Regardless of the degree of the parents' religiosity, their expression of doubt about their son's martyrdom could well be showing their fear for his soul as well as for their own standing in the community. One of the main issues at stake in the topic of suicide, today as in the past, is "whether the funeral prayers may or may not be accorded to suicides" (*EI*, s.v. "*intihar*"). If there were conflicting opinions in the community over the giving

²⁸ According to a number of the hadiths, suicide victims will be punished in hell by being eternally condemned to repeat the act through which they killed themselves (*EI*, s.v. "*intihar*").

²⁹ Deborah Horan of *Inter Press Service* comments that a negative view of the bombers is becoming more prevalent in Palestine "as religious leaders begin to characterize the bombings as suicides, something forbidden in Islam, rather than acts of martyrdom" (Mar. 28, 1996).

of prayers, this conflict would be reflected on the family of the suicide victim, just as the respect from a martyr is reflected on their family.

The parents may also be expressing doubt about their son's death in order to extricate themselves from the shadow of a minority political group for fear of being condemned by the majority. The bombers are carefully trained by members of the military cells of Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, or the even more militant Islamic Holy War (MacFarquhar, *New York Times*, Mar. 18, 1996). Although these religiously conservative groups would be highly conscious of the distinction between martyrdom and suicide, it is politically expedient for them to train these young men to focus on the glory of dying in the way of God. These politically marginalized groups of the society are against the peace process and are political opponents of the PLO. Their actions are intended to damage the progress of the peace process, to hurt the PLO's image in the international community and consequently, they make Arafat's job of balancing the different political interests in the society very difficult. A *Jerusalem Post* article of January 19, 1996 gives Arafat a rather back-handed compliment regarding his balancing act in terms of how he names the bomber/martyrs:

He described as 'criminal' and 'terrorist' the last four suicide-bomb attacks to placate Israel and then eulogized their assassinated chief perpetrator as 'a holy martyr' to placate

Hamas. He became all things to all men. Those who call him a two-faced jester can at least appreciate his skills as a juggler.

When an action can be described as horrific or holy it gives an indication of how much power the storyteller, the martyrologist, has over the martyrdom.

Section 5. The Importance of the Martyrology in the Making of the Martyr

In the ancient stories of Hannah we saw how her character and actions differed according to the telling. What the real Hannah, or Miriam, did, thought or felt is lost to history but this does not detract from the persuasive power of her story. In fact the historical truth of her actions is a secondary issue, it is the story which is most important.³⁰ "To understand martyrdom is essentially to understand a story, and to explain it one must grapple with the text" (Weiner, p. 15).

In modern times in Palestine stories of martyrs

³⁰ George Bernard Shaw's character, Spintho provides us with an amusing example of just how important the martyrology is to a martyr. Spintho is lined up alongside other early Christians awaiting their fate in the lion's jaws. He has a change of heart and decides to escape. Unfortunately he chooses the wrong door and runs right into the arena. He is post-humously celebrated as a great martyr. As the Weiners say, "he remains an everlasting witness to the importance of both hungry lions and good story tellers when it comes to the creation of martyrs" (p. 13).

appear as popular legends that spring up right after the event of martyrdom, as oral folklore repeated from generation to generation, as elegies published in newspapers or magazines (Najjar, 1996, p. 503).

In the article "The Editorial family of al-Kateb bows in respect", Najjar gives a number of examples of stories which sprang up right after an event and were moulded according to Islamic religious criteria. Two of these stories were originally cited by Joel Greenberg of the *Jerusalem Post* (1989: 9). Jamal al-Shamlawi was shot while carrying a Palestinian flag, "At the spot where he fell, it is said, two white doves flew up to the sky, indicating that his soul had gone to Paradise" (as cited by Najjar, 1996, p. 520).³¹ Greenberg was told of another martyr, Muhammad al-Koni, who dug a grave for a dead friend and then dug one for himself. He then raised a Palestinian flag and was shot twice in the chest. "He was promptly buried in the grave he had dug" (as cited by Najjar, *Ibid.*). But the Palestinian magazine *al-Kateb* revealed that he was wounded on 16 December and buried 17 December. The story of the prompt burial makes it more like the tradition of burying martyrs unwashed and therefore it confirms the martyrdom.

³¹ This ties the death to the Islamic belief mentioned in Chapter One of the souls of martyrs living in green birds in paradise. Najjar also notes that "many Palestinian towns and villages breed pigeons" (1996, p. 527).

With these tales we are party to the making of a legend and the elevation of the status of those related to the legend as we shall see in the following examples.

As in the earliest examples of martyrdom, there is a reflected glow that comes from a martyr. Nora Boustany of the *Washington Post* quotes Mary Khass who runs the pre-school Early Child Resource Centre in Jabaliya and says that

In those camps, everyone is poor; almost everybody is nobody, until there is a martyr in the family. With martyrdom comes importance and a kind of status that goes beyond death," she said. She recalled being stopped by a 7 year-old girl in an alley once, who tugged her by the skirt. "Are you coming to see us too? It was my brother who became a shaheed [martyr]; everyone is coming to see us," the girl boasted (Aug. 5, 1991).

Most of the descriptions of the mothers of martyrs include a reference to the centrality of her position immediately after the death. Family, friends and neighbours will support the mother and show they agree with her acceptance of the martyrdom. This was clearly stated in the *New York Times* article of Mar. 18, 1996 on the suicide bombers. After Mrs. Abu Warda said "we have to accept that he is a martyr and thank God", the "women encircling her murmured their approval. 'Thanks be to God,' they echoed."

According to Peteet, the mothers are always visited by mass workers and leaders on religious and national commemoration days out of respect for their sacrifice.³² They also get invited to attend Resistance celebrations with the leadership (1991, p. 185). Lawziyyeh tells of how she received this public show of respect:

As the mother of the first female martyr of the uprising, I was invited to cut the ribbon for the exhibit featuring paintings and drawings of the martyrs... Our unified leadership has called one of the streets near our house 'Martyr Haniyyeh Street'. That was the best present (Najjar and Warnock, p. 104).

We can tell from the following quote of Um Eyad that she made use of her change in status in a more active way. Speaking of herself in the third person she says, "All women say Um Eyad is the one with the strongest will. All women respect me. I'm like an adviser and leader of the mothers of martyrs and I don't regret it. It is my duty" (*Chicago Tribune*, Feb.2, 1996).

Lawziyyeh may never have been politically active and maybe she never will take a leadership role as it appears Um Eyad may, but with the death of her child she enters the public world. Her maternal sacrifice is extolled as a

³² Call # 80 issued by the UNLU broadcast over Voice of Palestine Mar.3, 1992 provides an example of this in their call to the people to mark March 21 as the "anniversary of the battle of dignity and Mother's Day." This is to be done by "visiting mothers of martyrs, prisoners and the injured sons of the people" (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, Mar. 5, 1992).

supreme political act. We can see this clearly by analyzing a selection of broadcasts issued by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Unified Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) and Hamas which illustrate how the leadership of the different groups link the maternal sacrifice with the national resistance thereby politicizing it.

Section 6. Political Broadcast Calls to the Mother of Martyrs

Call #12, the "Call for Continued Struggle", was issued by the PLO and addressed to, "O masses of our generous people, O mothers of martyrs, detainees and wounded, O all mothers of Palestine" (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*. Apr. 1, 1988).³³ They continue on to say that these people are an "inexhaustible source" of "generosity" for they are used to making "sacrifices" for the homeland. "More generosity means the breaking of the dawn of freedom forging its way in the darkness of coercion and heralding the independent Palestinian state" (*Ibid.*). The equation between the "sacrifices" of blood of the mothers and the "freedom" of the state is very clearly expressed here.

³³ The word order in this call is similar to the word order in the Martyrological lists published in *al-Katab*. Najjar makes a comment about the lists which also applies here. By extending condolences to the Palestinian people first and the families of the martyrs second, the deaths are constructed as political rather than personal and are appropriated as public events belonging to all Palestinians (1996, p. 519).

The same theme is reiterated two years later in Call #53, March 7, 1990 issued by the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising and broadcast on Voice of Palestine. This call was referred to as "The Woman's Call" (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, Mar. 9, 1990). While the UNLU congratulates our Palestinian mothers on Mother's Day, it bows to the mothers of our martyrs - men and women - who have sacrificed their blood for the sake of the homeland, and considers their sufferings and pain the source of our strength and determination (*Ibid.*).

Although the UNLU is bowing to the mothers of martyrs the way the comment is expressed the emphasis is on the martyr rather than the mother. Thus the sacrifice can be read as being from either party. Either way the relationship between the sacrifice of the mothers or martyrs and the strength of the UNLU appears almost parasitic in this example. The source of the UNLU's strength is the blood of the sacrificed. This image is softened by the initial reference to bowing to the mothers of martyrs. As a way of showing respect, "bowing conceptualizes the respected person as being up/high in the metaphor of respect, where the respector's lowering results in the respected person's relative gain in height" (Najjar, *Ibid.*, p. 519).

The image of the leadership bowing to the mothers comes up a number of times. On Dec. 2, 1982 PLO central radio broadcast Arafat's address to the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian

People: "I address my salute... to all those heroes who are languishing in the Israeli houses of detention and prisons. I also bow in respect to all those wives and mothers of our martyrs as well as the children and parents." In this speech Arafat uses a military symbol to show respect to the heroes – the salute – and uses a symbol associated with the family, the bow, to those who are mentioned in relation to the heroes – their wives, their mothers, their children and their parents. Although these satellites of the heroes, the traditionally weaker elements of the society, are accorded respect by the political leader, that respect is confined by the parameters of the home. The filial bow is made to the family members.

One of the clearest connections between the mother of martyrs and the state was made in the Call # 29 issued November 21, 1988 by the Unified Leadership of the Uprising, the "Call of Celebration of the Independent State" (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, Nov. 24, 1988).³⁴

Congratulations to the mother of the martyr and her long drawn ululation. She has only made such a joyful sound twice, the day when her son was martyred and the day when the Palestinian state was proclaimed (*ibid.*).

³⁴ According to Giacaman, this communique from the UNLU was exceptional in that it did refer to women. In the other communiques women are barely mentioned, although there are "repeated appeals and commendations to other sectors of society - merchants, prisoners, workers, students" (p. 140).

The joy associated with the image of the mother of martyrs is the same joy that has been a part of the image since the Maccabees. Here that joy is equated with national political joy.

The PLO and the UNLU are not alone in making use of the image of the mother of martyrs. Hamas Call # 40 broadcast from al-Quds Palestinian Arab Radio Apr. 18, 1989 (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, Apr. 20, 1989), calls on Palestinians to defend the "Sanctity of Holy Places."

Let us demonstrate sympathy to the orphans, the sons of martyrs and the sons of detainees. Let us show solidarity with the wounded. Let us honour on this day the mothers of martyrs, detained and their families.

Section 7. Martyrdom and Social Welfare Programs

Up to this point we have seen the mainly symbolic forms of respect and support given to the mothers, but with the development by Fateh of the first social welfare project in the Palestinian National Movement came more tangible signs of respect. In 1965 a committee of three was set up in Amman with Intissar Al-Wazir as the executive director.³⁵ "The idea was to distribute

³⁵ Intissar al-Wazir goes by the name of Um Jihad. It is a common Arab custom for parents to be called by Um (mother of) and Abu (father of) and then the name of their eldest son. Those involved in the Palestinian National Movement also sometimes used a nom de guerre. Um Jihad, presently the Minister of Social Affairs for the Palestinian Authority, has been in the leadership of Fateh for over three decades. According to

allowances (from then rather meagre funds) to the families of men killed in commando raids on Israel" (Kawar, p. 41). Umm Jihad described the importance of this system of support:

Beside the financial, social, health, and educational care, it was very important that the family of the martyr, when it loses its father or son, doesn't break the spiritual connection. The most important issue is the symbolic one: to connect families of the martyrs with the Revolution (as cited by Kawar, *Ibid.*).

Umm Jihad states clearly that it is after losing the men in the family that the "spiritual connection" to the revolution can become tenuous. Thus the primary concern was to garner support for the revolution. This budding social welfare system was then primarily geared towards the women in the family. The executive decided to distribute the money through women, thus breaking with Arab tradition. "We refused this condition and supported the tie of the mother to her children" (as cited by Kawar, *Ibid.*, p. 42).

Kawar, author of *Daughters of Palestine*, this was "by virtue of her political status as wife of Abu Jihad, one of the founders of the faction" (p. ix). Soon after Abu Jihad was killed in 1988 in his home by Israeli commandos, Um Jihad "was elected as the only woman in Fateh's highest Central Committee (p. x).

It is often the case that women enter politics through the family in Middle Eastern countries. This is even true in conservative Islamic countries which are traditionally against women participating in politics, from former heads of state like Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan and Khaleda Zia of Bangladesh to less well-known leaders such as Zaynab al-Ghazali, "Mother" of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

Umm Jihad proudly says of her program that it "was a first of its kind in world revolutions" (as cited by Kavar, *Ibid.*). Delegates from Iran came to learn from them during the Iranian revolution. Her program became known as the Families of the Martyrs Foundation. In the mid 1980s their headquarters moved from Damascus to Amman and by 1990 had the largest budget in the PLO, over \$US 100 million.

Although Umm Jihad had originated the policy of family support her interest in empowering women through economic means was shared by Umm Nassar who was responsible for the development of Samed (acronym for Palestine Martyrs Works Society meaning steadfast). Samed evolved into the PLO's economic arm and provided vocational training for women. Both of these organizations have now been subsumed under the Finance Department of the Palestinian National Council.

Umm Eyad receives \$80.00 US per month in social assistance for a martyred child and \$85.00 a month for a son handicapped in the fighting as well as food rations from the UN (*Chicago Tribune*, Feb.2, 1996).³⁶

In a social situation where the sons would be expected to assist in the economy of the family, choosing to tie social assistance to martyred children is

³⁶ The *New York Times* on March 18, 1996 reported a different amount for this subsidy. Their source was an Israeli Army officer who said that "the stipends handed out by Hamas included \$800.00 a month to the families of activists, plus things like scholarships for their siblings and subsidized rice". We are told that another added incentive is if the families house is knocked down by the Israeli Army in retaliation, Hamas will pay for a new one to be built.

very pragmatic. It eases some of the physical burden of losing a son, while at the same time giving recognition to the sacrifice of the family. The work of the Foundation binds the sacrifice to the political institutions, thereby enhancing the image of those institutions. For the support they receive, the family and especially the mother is expected to live up to the models of steadfastness and patience of the mothers of martyrs of the past. In this way she enhances the martyrology which in turn supports the cause.

CHAPTER THREE

The Examination of the Political Space of Mothers of Martyrs

Chapter Two has shown us that the actions of women in the role of mothers of martyrs are widely accepted as a means of resistance within the context of the Palestinian national struggle. By these actions women have created a political space for themselves. The question on which Chapter Three will now focus is whether this phenomenon reflects a special role for women within traditional Palestinian society or whether it is the harbinger of the evolution of a broader role for women in the political arena. To answer this question, I will examine three key areas: the development of the role of mothers of martyrs through the ages, the nationalist origins of the women's movement in Palestine and how mothers of martyrs fit into it, and finally, women's role in other comparable nationalist movements.

A comparative analysis of the images of mothers of martyrs discussed in Chapters One and Two will clarify if there has been any change in the role through the years. If there has been no significant change it is unlikely that the role could be seen as opening up new possibilities for women.

The logic of the nationalist argument takes as its central goal the development of an independent state. Nationalists will reject any movement which could be viewed as taking the focus away from that goal or creating any divisiveness among the community. I will argue that although the role of mother of martyr falls within the resistance movement designed to liberate the state, it does not further the liberation of women for as Najjar states in her essay "Between Nationalism and Feminism", "The involvement of women in nationalist politics is a necessary but not sufficient condition for women's emancipation at a later stage" (1992, p. 158).

The experience of other, often compared, modern independence movements, such as those in Algeria and Iran, show that despite women's participation within the movements, once the aims of the movements were achieved, the political space women had occupied during the wars was reclaimed by men in times of peace.

Section 1. Mothers of Martyrs - A Time Honoured and Static Role

In comparing the images of mothers of martyrs as presented in Chapter One with those from Chapter Two it is clear that although there are some differences between them they do not illustrate a change in woman's status in

the community, nor a change in the characteristics for which she is valued.

Purity and manly bravery were the qualities respected in mothers of martyrs in the earliest days, and these qualities are still focused on in the present.

The mother of martyrs in IV Maccabees for example, earned the respect of others because she behaved like a man in spite of being a woman. She had "manly courage" like that of a "soldier of God" or an "Elder." Even her distinctly female ability to physically reproduce is not being honoured. Rather it is her spiritual parentage, like that of Abraham which is respected. And this woman like any other woman must give a defence of her purity.

The author of IV Maccabees spends more time praising his mother of martyrs than do the other ancient writers, albeit for her masculine characteristics. The shorter version of M. Lam. 1:16 to which IV Maccabees was compared spends much less time developing the character of the mother.

Her image gets rather tarnished by the confrontational stance she takes with Abraham. But as argued in Chapter One, the social and political circumstances at the time of the writing of the Lamentations version did not require her to be the admirable person required of the mother in IV Maccabees. There was no battle for the survival of Miriam's community for which the historic image of the mother of martyrs was needed as a banner to follow. Consequently, her character more clearly represented the image of the feminine character of the times. She was a woman who wept in the face of

adversity and showed her emotional instability by going mad. Although the mother in IV Maccabees avoids this show of emotion, we can tell from the description of the mother's qualities which were praised, that the opposite characteristics were the ones thought to usually belong to women at that time. She was praised because she was unusual for a woman and did not succumb to maternal emotions.

The only bit of information concerning women that we find out about from al-Khansa's speech is the emphasis on honour. She assures her sons that she is sexually pure; she never betrayed their father and thus she says to them that she will not "cast any reflection on your dignity." It is as if a mother of martyrs must prove her sexual purity before she may be allowed to step into the role.

The Consolation Treatises tell us that although women do fill the role of the steadfast and patient parent in the case of the loss of a child, it is usually men who are expected to exhibit these characteristics.

The masculine traits which were praised in IV Maccabees appear once again in a modern setting in the words of one of the mothers of martyrs from the battle of Tal al-Za`ter who describes mothers of martyrs as having "military wombs." The military being as traditional a bastion of male dominance as one can find.

Umm Eyad sees herself not in masculine terms but as transformed in the eyes of other women into a leader of mothers of martyrs.³⁷ In the ancient stories there are no mothers of martyrs voicing intentions to be leaders among mothers of martyrs. Yet the idea of being a role model for other mothers and those committed to the cause is strongly embedded in the stories. The image of the mother of martyrs was recognized early on as being a compelling one and that is certainly why it has come up again and again in the literature. Part of that image is the mothers' willingness to stand up and show her faith for all to follow.

Al-Khansa never announced her intention to be a leader of mothers of martyrs but she did join in the parade celebrating the victory of the forces of Islam although she had lost her four sons in the battle. Lawziyyeh never strove for leadership but she too wanted to tell her story and stand up in public. The public role has always been a necessary part of the image of the mother of martyrs. Klausner says, "martyrologies reveal no martyrs who sought social concealment" (p. 231) and we can certainly add that in the stories of the mothers of martyrs, the mothers have the same attitude as their

³⁷ As mentioned in Chapter Two, often in modern stories the mother of martyrs is described as being surrounded by women at the time of the funeral, who are empathizing with her, supporting and respecting her. The men are not a part of this picture for they are usually celebrating the martyrdom in a different room. Thus the mother has achieved a leading voice in this exclusive environment of women without needing to announce her intention to be a leader.

children. Peteet comments that the women she spoke to in the refugee camps in Lebanon took their "job" as political spokesperson very seriously:

It was difficult to illicit anything other than historical-political information from them, as women tended to perceive their role in speaking with outsiders as one of conveying the misery of exile and the sacrifices and glory of national resistance (1993, p. 54)

When Umm Eyad's words are put into this context they no longer seem so unique. Women in the role of mother of martyr have always sacrificed their private time for grief to take a public stand.

Mothers of martyrs are often described as "having the ear of the Resistance." Thus if they themselves have not broadened the scope for women's participation in the leadership role, then maybe we should see them as having increased women's power of influence. Yet in the stories examined in this paper the prominent public image of the mother of martyrs does not translate into any significant power in the public arena. When the PLO, the UNLU and Hamas publicly refer to mothers of martyrs there is no indication that they are relying on these women for anything other than their sacrifices of blood.

A very telling example of the UNLU's attitude towards women is found in their Call # 53, the "Women's Call" issued on March 7, 1990 (*BBC Summary*

of World Broadcasts, Mar. 9, 1990) in which they praise mothers of martyrs. At the very end of the Call came the first reference to women in the text and the information that this was the woman's call because it was celebrating International Women's Day. They said that "Progressive nations celebrate International Women's Day on 8th March as a day of struggle for the world's women's masses." The Call continues on to say that the UNLU celebrates this day "in the name of all the sons of our people", thus invoking the male authority or name to legitimize Woman's Day.

As mentioned in Chapter Two these three political groups make use of an age-old sign of filial respect, the deferential bow, to honour the mothers. To place the mothers on a public pedestal is reminiscent of what the Catholic Church has done to Mary. A large part of the myth of Mary and the reason she stands as a model for women, is her purity which is defended with fervour by the Church. Just as Mary's "high" position did not increase her voice or that of other women in the Church, it is unlikely that the bow of the leadership to the mothers of martyrs in modern Palestine is significant of any increase in power.

Returning to the phrase "she has the ear of the Resistance", Peteet and Sayigh made an interesting comment with regard to women's access to community leaders. According to Peteet and Sayigh, the demonstration of the women at Akka in defence of their male relatives who were in prison "has

ancient Semitic roots and is accepted as a legitimate extension of their natural role. It is precisely as women that they have right of access to the powerful and the task of moving them to compassion" (1986, p. 133). So maybe the "ear of the Resistance" is something women, and not necessarily just mothers of martyrs, have had all along.

To sum up, the image of the mother of martyr is of one who is strong and pure in heart and body and nobly presents her sacrifice now as she always did. For this she is greatly respected, as she always was, by both the community and the leadership. Yet to date there is no significant change in attitude towards mothers of martyrs when we consider how they are referred to by the different political factions, and there is no consequent increase in her power.

Section 2. The Nationalist Roots of the Women's Movement in Palestine

Instead of concentrating on liberation and equality in a male-dominated society, Palestinian women recognize that their emancipation and integration into development can only come about with the liberation of the whole Palestinian people from Israeli rule and the achievement of Palestinian dignity and freedom in the context of independent statehood (Dajani, p. 102).

It is commonly argued by many that if Palestinian women fight for the political liberation of their country, they are at the same time fighting for their own freedom. Rosemary Sayigh states in her essay "Palestinian Women and Politics in Lebanon," that this argument held sway for much of the history of the Palestinian women's movement in Lebanon: "the predominant outlook concerning women was that women's liberation would come through their participation in national struggle" (p. 177). Since it has been shown that mothers of martyrs are actively engaged in fighting for the liberation of their land, according to the above reasoning, it could be argued that they are fighting for the liberation of women and the creation of a new political role for themselves.

Mona Rishmawi, a lawyer and the head of al-Haq,³⁸ speaks to the premise of this argument in a very down-to-earth and persuasive manner when she discusses some of the details of living a life under occupation. Having a husband or son in jail and living in a camp under curfew, means that a woman has to cope with food shortages and children out of school. "No one can tell such a woman that occupation does not add to her burden. When a woman's husband, son, or daughter is shot by the Israeli army, nothing else matters but the occupation" (*Portraits*, p. 174).

³⁸ Al-Haq is a Palestinian human rights organization, a West Bank affiliate of the International Commission of Jurists, Geneva.

Rishmawi further argues, "If you ignore the occupation and concentrate only on gender issues, you are encouraging women to fight their main supporters without offering women other means of support" (*Ibid.*). This approach, it is argued, will divide men and women at a time when they need to cooperate in the resistance movement.

It is easy to see from Rishmawi's descriptions how the occupation has added to women's burden. Therefore the mother of martyrs in fighting against the occupation is fighting to lessen the burden and give greater freedom to women. The limitation with this thinking is as Dajani says,

Palestinian women still confront the traditional sexist attitudes toward women that predate the occupation. These include the traditional Arab view of the role of women as housewives and mothers and the restrictions placed on their participation in public life and productive work outside the home (Dajani, p. 106).

Keeping this in mind, she more specifically pinpoints how women's liberation can come through national liberation. According to Dajani, there have been two reactions to the Israeli occupation with regard to the status of women. One is the breaking away from old values in order to fight the enemy together. Dajani chooses to concentrate on this area, because with this breaking away "we can make sense of the perspective of Palestinian women

with regard to the interdependence of women's issues and national concerns" (p. 106). The role of mother of martyr cannot be seen as falling into this category because mothers of martyrs do not break away from or challenge the prevailing values.

The second reaction described by Dajani is the reinforcement of the traditional role of women as inferior to men, a stance commonly taken as a refuge in reaction to alien rule. Does the role of mother of martyrs fit this description? It might be useful to compare it with an issue concerning women which does fit, and which has come under intense scrutiny – the reinstitution of the use of the veil under revolutionary circumstances. Both the veil and the mother of martyr are symbols of traditional values: female modesty and motherhood. During revolutionary times these symbols have been transformed into images of resistance.

Algeria and Iran provide some recent examples of the use of the veil in revolutions. The modest dress of the female activists in Algeria was used to smuggle weapons (Moghadam, p. 83). In Iran the veil was voluntarily taken up by women as a symbol of the revolution and as a rejection of the Westernized rule of the Shah. Veiled female revolutionaries have been featured on postage stamps, which as Eickelman suggests "depict the official ideology toward women" (p. 197). One stamp was issued in 1985 in remembrance of "Woman's Day", celebrated on the anniversary of the birth of

Fatima Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet and mother of the famous martyr Husayn. It shows a veiled militant woman urging on a crowd of similarly dressed women. After the revolution, of course, the use of the veil was enforced promoting a segregated society (Moghadam, p. 164). A stamp issued a year later, again in celebration of Woman's Day, shows a "woman holding a child with a headband already designating him as a future martyr" (Eickelman, *Ibid.*). Thus it seems that a veiled and hence modest woman and a mother of a martyr are two officially recognized modes of resistance behaviour open to women.

The veil also gained political significance in Gaza when during the spring and summer of 1988 the Hamas graffiti mandated a return to modest dress and the veil as a national duty. As Kawar puts it, "This religious fundamentalist call was couched with nationalist rhetoric, telling women to veil and wear less colourful clothes to honour the martyrs of the Intifada" (p. 115). The irony here is that the joy which the mothers of martyrs are supposed to show over the martyrdom of their children is expected to carry over onto their clothing. Nora Boustany of the *Washington Post*, Aug. 5, 1991 writes of a Gaza woman who says, "If you see me in a colourful robe, it is not worn with sincerity," just as the old Palestinian proverb says, "I am in black

within myself, but I always wear red for my enemy." Women were attacked in Gaza for not heeding this call for modest dress.³⁹

The women's committees did not protest this situation. According to Kawar, Umm Nassar, head of the General Union of Palestinian Women, "was unenthusiastic about battling Hamas because it would derail energies from the primary question of the occupation" (p. 116).⁴⁰ This is a clear example of an issue affecting women which took a back seat to political interests for fear of diverting energies away from the national agenda.

Women are called upon to fill the traditional role as mothers of martyrs at a time of crisis. Just as the veil, which is a symbol of the religion and culture, gained political value, so too the reproductive capabilities of the mother, important at all times as the method of maintaining culture, acquire value as a national act for the mother of martyrs. Where modest dress is enforced, women's public movements are restricted in the name of preserving female purity and in turn the morality of the state. But the cost to a woman

³⁹ Nalha Abdo interviewed women in Gaza regarding the imposition of the veil and found that it was the lower class women out on the streets, working in the fields and in public work who were being harassed. The upper class women were not bothered for as one woman said, "They hide in their big cars and no one attacks them or throws stones at them" (as cited by Moghadam, p. 164).

⁴⁰ Um Nasser (Najla Yassin) was a member of Fateh's Revolutionary Council and the Palestine National Council and former head of Yasser Arafat's office. At the time the PLO needed the support of Hamas and was unwilling to challenge them over the issue. It was not until a year later, August 1989, that the UNLU issued Call # 43 condemning an attack on women who were unveiled but wear the keffiyeh, symbolic of the Palestinian movement. (Kawar, p. 117).

who is encouraged to freely give her child to the revolution is far greater than any restriction of movement. Given the enormous emotional investment in bearing, nursing and raising a child, many mothers would consider it easier to die for a cause than to give their child to that cause. Yet the camp women are expected to give their children to a revolutionary battle over which they have very little control. Thus it would seem that the role of mother of martyrs is a reinforcement of a traditional role which places the mothers at a disadvantage.

Section 3. The Price of the Role of Mothers of Martyrs to Women

When women's primary role is as the mainstay of the family and the vessel of Palestinian culture, one can see that as Sayigh says "loss of children is socially more painful for mothers than for fathers" (1993, p. 189). On top of this the physical cost on the body of raising children and of trying to produce more children for the revolution takes its toll on women. According to Peteet, Palestinian women's traditionally high fertility assumed a political urgency during the Intifada. Beforehand the birthrate was actually decreasing among Palestinians in Lebanon as a result of a higher standard of living, higher female literacy and employment rates, a later age of marriage, and a desire for

smaller families (1991, p. 185). All of this changed during the Intifada, according to the research of Najah Manasrah a nurse, teacher and researcher who was interviewed in *Portraits of Palestinian Women*. Her data showed that people in villages and camps married off their daughters earlier than they did before the Intifada. There were several reasons given: the schools were often closed so girls could no longer postpone the time of marriage until after they had finished school, their parents feared that they might be disfigured during the fighting and subsequently have a difficult time finding a husband, there was also the fear of sexual violence in the prisons if the girls were detained, which again would greatly reduce their chances of getting married (p, 60).

For those who support the traditional view of the mother of martyrs, an early marriage means more time to produce children who may become martyrs or replace other children who have already become martyrs. In their conclusion to *Portraits of Palestinian Women*, Warnock and Najjar remember that "even PLO Chairman Arafat exhorted women to have no less than twelve children each when he talked to gatherings in places like Abu Dhabi" (p. 258). They note that to assist in this child "production", "Fateh, the largest constituent group of the PLO, for instance, insisted on keeping identity cards for its commandos with space for more than one wife who could claim benefits" (p. 255). Hamas is not to be left out of the production line here, for in their covenant, article 18 they have described women as the "factories of men."

It has not only been politicians who have promoted large families. Samiha Salameh Khalil, who worked as a Nationalist activist and was jailed many times for her efforts said, "I also encourage women to have more children. I once advertised that the society will give away 200 prizes to people with the most number of children. I realize that having many children constitutes a burden on women, but we are in a battle for survival..." (Najjar and Warnock, p. 47).⁴¹

Rishmawi argues that this burden for women will solve itself when the battle for a secure homeland is over, because women will stop having so many children when they believe that those that they do have are safe (*Ibid.*, p. 177). In this way women will no longer suffer the stress on their health from repeated pregnancies. It appears from what Peteet said above that Rishmawi's argument has been proven. For in the relatively more peaceful time before the Intifada the birthrates were lower.

Yet it was found that in the Occupied Territories during the Intifada women's health generally suffered more than men's. Although both sexes suffer from the poverty, women not only have to deal with the stresses of childbearing, but as a doctor from one of the medical committees' mobile

⁴¹ According to the CIA 1995 World Fact Book on the West Bank the total fertility rate (children born/woman) is 5.34, the infant mortality rate (deaths/1000 live births) is, 29.7 deaths/1000 live births. On the Gaza Strip these figures are respectively, 7.74 and 30.6. For the purposes of comparison, in Canada these figures are, 1.83 and 6.8 and in Israel, 2.81 and 8.4.

clinics said, men are much healthier than women - "For the women there is no leisure, none at all" (Bennis, p. 36). The domestic labour of the household is aggravated by war and poverty but the division of labour in the household has hardly changed (Sayigh, 1993, p. 189).

Mothers of martyrs like Umm Eyad who speak of their duty to produce martyrs for the revolution are creating more domestic work for women and cutting down on the time they have available to be involved in political activities. Since they are working within the confines of a traditional role they are not affecting any change in attitudes either. Yet Najjar argues in the essay "Between Nationalism and Feminism" that, instead of trying to increase women's activities in the public political sphere, women should be given respect for the things they already do. To do so is to politicize the private, domestic world and give recognition to it as the underpinnings of the state, for as she says, "Preserving the cohesiveness of a society is the ultimate political act" (1992, p. 146). This argument may be valid for other activities in which women are involved, but mothers of martyrs already get a great deal of respect from the whole community and still this has not broadened their sphere of influence.

Section 4. The Involvement of Women in the National Liberation Movements

Chapter Two has shown that mothers of martyrs receive attention and referrals in both the Palestinian and international media. It was mentioned that, when foreign visitors come to the refugee camps, they are led straight away to the home of the martyrs. The mothers of martyrs are portrayed as the "true sufferers" of the resistance. Like the living martyrs these women are assigned the task of representing the suffering and sacrifices of their society. Along with the women activists, the "true strugglers" are intended to "represent the active refusal of a people to adopt a passive stance and disappear from the political and historical scene" (Peteet, 1993, p. 58).

The activists come mainly from a middle-class background and are not likely to be mothers of martyrs. Peteet describes an interesting example of the reaction of a middle class urban mother of martyr whose only son, a university student, was killed in battle. At his funeral she publicly called out, "Why take my son, take someone else's! What do we have to do with this resistance movement!" (*Ibid.*, p. 57). Peteet says: "One's attention is drawn to the class disparities in upholding and exemplifying the more violent and sacrificial aspects of the national movement" (*Ibid.*). The job of carrying the

heaviest sacrificial burden of the resistance goes to the women of the lowest class.

It is mainly the middle-class women who are holding the power, limited though it may be. Thus it is important not to assume that, because some of these women are in the public spotlight at international conferences or in press interviews, this means a widened public role for women in general. And although the women in the spotlight may have more political clout than the mothers of martyrs, one must be wary of assuming too much even in this area, just as one activist quoted by Peteet said, "Be careful of the official line. The Resistance is aware that foreigners judge it by its ideas and programs on women. So they put on a good face about women when foreigners come" (*Ibid.*, p. 59).⁴² Najjar quotes another activist who confirms this attitude with an added cynicism about the existence of a women's movement at all. At the conference of the Higher Council of Women, one woman asked, "Do we have a real women's movement? I say no – our women's movement is really a

⁴² Sherna Berger Gluck in her essay "Palestinian Women: Gender Politics and Nationalism" tells a very interesting story about women's inclusion into the PLO leadership. During the peace process as the authority was gradually transferred from the grass-roots activists, many among them women, to the mainly male politicians and bureaucrats, women saw their hard won powers disappearing. After the Madrid conference a number of technical committees were formed for which 300 appointees were selected, four of them women. When the leadership of the women's movement objected and took action, the effect was that women's representation increased – particularly on the media committee (p. 11).

nationalist movement... and they [the nationalist leadership] use us as a media front" (1992, p. 160).

Thus women in general may appear more influential than they really are. Sayigh has shown that resistance organizations recruiting women favour unmarried adolescent girls over housewives, the group to which mothers of martyrs belong. Girls at this age tend to be the most enthusiastic about politics, they are better educated, easier to discipline and most importantly, they have more time to spend on political activities (1993, p. 185). It is usual however, that the girls get married and with the mothers of martyrs and others encouraging them to have children for the revolution, it is uncommon for them to continue with their political work.

This pattern of the women's involvement in the Palestinian resistance fits within traditional gender relations in two ways. Political activity was most common during the years between puberty and marriage. Once married a woman was said to have "graduated" and the time she devoted to political work was at best substantially decreased (Sayigh and Peteet, p.116). The essential role of wife and mother was not challenged by this activism. As well women's political participation increased during times of crises and resided once the threat was lessened (*Ibid.*). As a result of this cyclical nature, it was difficult to develop an organizational expertise among the women. Therefore management had to be left to the men.

Speaking in general terms concerning revolutions, Najjar makes the comment that the women's movements which incorporate the rights of women into the nationalist struggle before liberation are more likely to succeed than those which depend on the progressiveness of male revolutionaries (1992, p. 158). A telling example is what happened to women in Algeria. Although the post-independence constitution guaranteed equality between the sexes⁴³ and granted women the right to vote, women saw their social gains dissolve in the aftermath of the revolution. Their future status was contained by

the imperative needs of the male revolutionaries to restore Arabic as the primary language, Islam as the religion of the state, Algeria as a fully free and independent nation, and themselves as sovereigns of the family (Peter Knauss as cited by V.M. Moghadam, p. 85).

The 'Algerian problem' is encapsulated in a story related by Naila Minai in her book *Women in Islam*. She tells her readers of a meeting between Algerian revolutionary leaders Ahmed Ben Bella and Mohammad Khider⁴⁴ to discuss the fate of Djamila Boupacha and other imprisoned Algerian women resistance fighters. Djamila asked,

⁴³ As a point of comparison in Arafat's Call issued November 15, 1988 declaring an independent state of Palestine, women and men were declared equal by law.

⁴⁴ Ahmed Ben Bella became president in the new republic and Mohammad Khider, the general secretary.

"And how about us women? Our status must change now that —"
Khider interrupted the young woman, who had been raped and tortured by the French for her role in the war: "Women after independence? Why, you will return to your couscous, of course" (p. 76).

If this is what happened to the resistance fighters, how much more likely is it that the mothers of martyrs, who never challenged any traditional values relating to women, will be returned to their couscous?

In upholding the family as her means of contributing to the national struggle, the mother of martyrs is upholding an institution which "with its strong sense of obligation, has helped Palestinians withstand repeated onslaughts, refugee status, and poverty" (Najjar, 1992, p.159). She is doing no more or less than fulfilling a role which has been available to women for over 2000 years. She is still respected for her purity, emotional restraint and reproductive abilities and she accomplishes her role without challenging the traditional view of women's place in the home.

EPILOGUE

Through a consideration of a variety of stories of mothers of martyrs beginning with those from the earliest times of the Maccabean Revolt to those of the Intifada, we have seen that these mothers continue to be highly praised and valued members of Palestinian resistance society.

This study has concentrated on the theoretical side of a subject which has just barely come to light. It would be most interesting to follow up this research with a series of interviews with refugee camp mothers of martyrs to see how the nascent peace accord affects them. It is rather telling that in a series of polls taken in late 1995 in the West Bank and Gaza just before the elections, women showed considerable apathy and distrust towards both the peace process and the elections (Palestine Report, 29 Dec., 1995). When asked if they supported "the need for qualified women to be entitled to equal opportunities to participate actively in public responsibilities in society", 23.2% of women said no. The reason given for this answer by a majority of those women was that "Women are not as capable as men to handle those kinds of tasks" (*Ibid.*).

Certainly the praise and renewed respect that women are often said to be getting has not yet boosted their confidence levels. It is very interesting that in these polls men are almost always shown to be more enthusiastic about

women's participation in public life than the women are themselves. Maybe this is in part because women are getting a conflicting message about their place in society. For mothers of martyrs this is exemplified in the following lines:

O Mother of the martyr, rejoice,
For all youth are your children.

This chorus quoted by Peteet (1986, p. 123) is sung at funerals. Through these words one has a picture of the mother of the martyr as the great maternal source of all life. She is further connected to traditions of the past in these words as they are so similar to the ones quoted in the stories of the mother and her seven martyred sons and in turn those stories borrowed the lines from psalm 113, "He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children."

Yet on the other hand the women are also exposed to images like the ones conveyed in this popular folk song:

We are the ones who defend the nation
And kiss its wound.
And the echo comes back:
Sell your mother and buy a rifle.
The rifle is better than your mother.
On the day of the revolution, it will dispel your worries.

This song is addressed to a male audience and seems to imply that "motherhood, the primary life-giving act, is useless. Compared with the masculine political act, it might as well be eliminated" (Fedwa Malti-Douglas, p. 175). It is clear that the mother of martyrs has effected no new freedoms or choices for herself or women in general through this role.

APPENDIX 1

Lament for a Brother by Al-Khansa (590? - 644?)

What have we done to you, death
that you treat us so,
with always another catch
one day a warrior
the next a head of state;
charmed by the loyal
you choose the best.
Iniquitous, unequaling death
I would not complain
if you were just
but you take the worthy
leaving fools for us.

Fifty years among us
upholding rights
annulling wrongs,
impatient death
could you not wait a little longer
He still would be here
and mine, a brother
without a flaw. Peace
be upon him and Spring
rains water his tomb but
could you not wait
 a little longer
 a little longer,
you came too soon.

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