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# The Bereavement of Martyred Palestinian Children

Gendered, Religious and  
National Perspectives

Maram Masarwi

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*She turns to me with a question.*

*Why are you crying?*

*When shall I cry?*

*Why shouldn't we all cry? All of us, my daughter, all at once, from one end of Gaza to another. Why are we not crying?*

*Must we rejoice loudly all the time because our children have been martyred?*

*They are our children every day, every hour, every minute.*

*I'm forever preparing for the moment when someone will knock on the door and bring me the bitterest news of all.*

*This fear for them, all this fear...*

*And in the end, I'm also supposed to shout for joy.*

*Do you know why the mothers grieve for their children all the time?*

*Because they have to rejoice once and not be ashamed of that shout of joy that the world demands of them.*

*Every one of us mourns all the time, because she knows that it will come, that moment: the moment when she has to betray her sorrow, betray her grief.*

*And do you know who really forces us to rejoice? Not our families, not our kin and not our neighbors. At the funerals of the martyrs, it is their killers who are forcing us to shout for joy.*

*We rejoice aloud so as not to give them, for even one moment, the illusion of victory. If we live to see it, I'll remind you that we'll still be crying long after liberation: mourning the ones at whose funerals we were rejoicing.*

*We'll mourn as we wish, and we'll be happy as we wish. Not by the calendar  
or on a schedule fixed for us by those who shot them and are shooting  
at us now.*

*We're not heroes. Heroes we are not. I've thought about it at length.  
We're not a heroic people, but heroes we have been forced to become.*

From *Safe Weddings*, Ibrahim Nasr-Allah, 2009.

*In memory of Adam and Ahmad, my beloved son and husband.  
You were part of my life for such a short time. I will remember you always.*



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Parenting loss has always been a central preoccupation in the lives of nations and communities.

The story of the Abrahamic sacrifice has also become one of the central stories in the past and it still preoccupies intellectuals, scholars and religious people, as it reflects the tension that prevails within the world of believers.

In many places, the experience of faith described the tension between loyalty and obedience to God or metaphorically any ideology, and the place of parental emotion and human morality. The situation of the sacrifice places these two great values in a tragic conflict.

Yet, the good ending of this story as it appears in the religious texts softens the tension and the contrast, and creates a sort of compromise between the two. But it seems that anyone who observes the divine command, until that moment when the angel appears, can feel a tension that can be very tough and painful. We can present different models in order to discuss the relation between the divine discussion and the moral discussion. Some may argue that morality and religion overlap in part or in full, or that they are separate systems.

This tension still exists in human reality. The story of the sacrifice raises one of the basic questions dealing with the issue of parental sacrifice. In the story of Abraham, he shows an absolute willingness to sacrifice the most precious to him, while standing up to the test and fulfilling the commandment of God, but who demands the sacrifice and places Abraham in an attempt to be God and not the representative of the

nations of the world. Abraham is not required to desecrate the sanctity of God, but to prove in the first place his obedience to god.

So he is not required to raise himself to the burnt offering, but his only son.

The story of the sacrifice and its experience can bring up the parallel lines of the later acts of martyrology versus the story of the sacrifice. In both, one must sacrifice the most precious of all for ideology, whether it is a heavenly or earthly ideology. What is the source of this closeness, and why a person is willing to sacrifice the most precious to him in the sake of any ideology?

In 1996, I watched the Irish movie "Some Mother's Son," the movie based on the true story of the 1981 hunger strike in a British prison, in which IRA prisoner Bobby Sands led a protest against the treatment of IRA prisoners as criminals rather than as prisoners of war. The film focuses on the mothers of two of the strikers, and their struggle to save the lives of their sons. In the movie, one mother decides to keep her son alive, while the other one chooses to let her son die.

I remember myself thinking of the unbearable choice of the mother who decided to sacrifice her son. Her choice echoed to me endless Palestinian stories of sacrifice during the First Intifada. I can remember myself as a young mother, watching video images of those bereaved Palestinian women, mothers of martyrs, at funerals and memorials where they appeared to be cheering and shouting in apparent joy and sometimes distributing sweets, as if they are celebrating the death of their son.

These scenes reminded me of the well-known story of the hybrid poet Al-Khansa, who lived two periods of time, the pre-Islamic period and the Islamic period. Her story is remarkable as it teaches us about loss and bereavement and it is considered as one of the most interesting stories in the history of Islam. Al-Khansa, adopted different and even contradictory ways of coping with loss and bereavement during the pre-Islamic period in which she lost her brother, Sakhir, and then her four sons in one day during the Islamic time. Al-Khansa became well-known and famous for her poems of lamentation as she cried over her brother for years, and wrote a lot of poetry in which she described her sorrow and grieving for his great loss. This poetry was preserved and became a symbol of bereavement and loss in the Arabic culture. This response was a contradiction to Khansa's response few years later when Al-Khansa adopted the Islamic religion, and her four sons went out to fight for the spread of the Islamic religion and all died in one battle.

When al-Khansa heard that all her four sons died, she remarked:

“I consider it an honour that they died for the sake of Islam, and I ask God only to allow me meet them in paradise. My sons I bore you with pain and brought you up with care; you have fallen today for the cause of Islam. Who says you are dead; you are very much alive, and alive with honour. I feel proud to be the mother of martyrs.”

I found myself wondering: How does a mother in this case or a couple of parents decide to sacrifice their son on the altar of ideology? What makes an Irish mother in this case to sacrifice her son and what causes these Palestinian women to start cheerful celebrations throughout the Palestinian national struggle.

How is it possible? I wondered. How could a mother who gave life rejoice at the death of her child? Was there any truth at all in a mother's celebrating this way on camera, or had the role been imposed on her? Why were the cameras always trained on the mothers, seeming to portray them as strong, tough and ecstatic in the act of celebrating the death of their children?

What makes a poet like al-Khansa cry over her brother for years, mourn him publicly and write poetry that will become one of the pillars of the poetry of lamentation in Arab culture, and settle a brief and restrained response to the loss of four sons in one battle? Was the faith-ideology here a reason? Did Al-Khansa become a symbol and imitation model for women in the Arab world in general and in Palestine in particular? “Khanasawat Filastin-Khanasa's of Palestine”—the name given to the group of mothers who lost more than two sons during the two intifadas, The First and Second Intifadas. What connects Al-Khansa of the time to the present Khansawat?

What about the decision of the Irish mother in the film to let her son go to his death? Is there any common link between the poets who lived in the seventh century and those Irish and Palestinian mothers dealing with the same issues hundreds of years later?

These questions had been of concern to me some years ago, in the background, as it were; and then one morning, after a suicide bombing had occurred the night before, a Palestinian woman of my acquaintance, Um Faraj 'Abla, brought the matter suddenly into sharper focus, saying: “That's it! Enough of this bloodshed! My heart goes out to those mothers who lost their children.

Aren't we all pregnant for nine months? Don't we feel pain giving birth?”

Umm Faraj's outburst made a powerful impression on me. This was my first and thus far only experience of a clear voice of maternal solidarity rising above the strident discourse of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict that has raged for so many years. Why—I asked myself—is this womanly solidarity not manifest in our political reality as two peoples? How can Palestinian and Israeli women, and mothers, live with this emotional dissonance?

I had had these questions in mind for many years. When the time came for me to decide on a topic for my doctoral research, it was clear to me that I was going to investigate this. The research challenged aspects of my worldview on several levels. I rapidly realized that although bereavement is an individual process influenced by our character and personality, by the degree of resilience with which our lives equip us, and by the way we deploy our defense mechanisms, how we grieve is also shaped within and influenced by a given reality and is inextricably entangled with social, religious, gender and national perceptions. These perceptions are significant components of the way people cope with loss and their influence shapes the behavior of bereaved parents and helps to shape and construct their subjective experience of bereavement and their way of grieving.

The Palestinian parents in this study lost their children to the violence of the Israeli military occupation, as part of a political struggle. That kind of bereavement typically involves a blurring of boundaries between the individual and the collective realms and the appropriation of individual loss by and for the collective mourning. Bereavement with a political context is glorified as compared with bereavement lacking a political backdrop.

What I had come to view as the hierarchy of Palestinian bereavement continued to preoccupy me and then, three years after my doctorate was published, the irony of fate showed me that life's own script can outdo even the epitome of cinematic creation. As the lives of characters in a film undergo dramatic upheaval on the screen, so too was my life drastically altered in an instant. My younger son and my husband were killed under tragic circumstances in an automobile accident in which I was injured, in Zanzibar, East Africa. As I entered the world of my own loss and bereavement, the transition from the arena of academic research to the reality of what was ostensibly already so familiar to me opened up another dimension in the realm of bereavement and mourning. Indeed, as a bereaved mother, I found myself intensely immersed in a process

that encompassed themes and perceptions already familiar to me—and also new ones. The knowledge we already have and our rational processing of that knowledge cannot shorten the process of grieving, nor change it. Moreover, the lens of a researcher, through which I had been looking as I studied, analyzed and criticized the phenomena of bereavement, did not greatly help me in the process of coping with my own loss. On the contrary, I often felt that it made the process harder and more burdensome and complicated, with all that professional knowledge, criticism, analysis and synthesis. Reality has different layers to it; and in that overarching, layered realm, personal experience and academic knowledge are scattered across the landscape of mourning like fallen leaves cast adrift.

Maram Masarwi

# INTRODUCTION

In 1967, Israel conquered and occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Ever since then, Palestinians have been engaged in a political struggle to regain control of their land and their fate.

Over the years, two *Intifadas*, or uprisings, have erupted. The first Intifada<sup>1</sup> lasted from 1987 through 1991, at which time there was a drop in the level of violence. Subsequently, in the wake of frustrations with the disappointing political process of the 1990s, a second uprising, or the al-Aqsa Intifada,<sup>2</sup> broke out in September of 2000. Over the

<sup>1</sup>The First Intifada, *Al Intifada al falastiniya* or the Intifada of the Stones, *Thaurat alhajar*, referring to the late twentieth-century Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, erupted in December 1987 and ended with the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1991. During that uprising, Palestinians conducted a determined struggle against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, aiming to achieve independence and sovereignty over those territories.

<sup>2</sup>The al-Aqsa Intifada, or the Second Intifada, erupted in September 2000 after the Oslo process had run its course without bring the Palestinian people any closer to a political or diplomatic resolution of its situation. The immediate trigger was the visit by Ariel Sharon, at the time head of the opposition in Israel's Knesset (legislature), to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in the company of various far-right figures including Knesset colleagues. This brought Palestinian into the streets to protest *en masse*. The response by the occupation authorities in the West Bank and Gaza was brutal and violent. The Second Intifada brought an increase in the level of violent resistance, with thousands of casualties, mainly on the Palestinian side although also on the Israeli side.

ensuing months and years, thousands of Palestinian parents in the West Bank and Gaza were struck by tragedy, suddenly becoming bereaved mothers and fathers. Their bereavement and mourning took on a unique character, reflecting how the mourning process in Palestinian society had been profoundly affected by the political context of their children's deaths.

The loss of these children due to political violence has given both a personal and a collective dimension to trauma in Palestinian society. This has given rise to a dual dynamic, as Palestinian parents have been turned into traumatized parents at the same time that the general Palestinian society has been transformed into a traumatized one.

A society experiencing ongoing traumas over a long period of time must find ways to make sense of its people's suffering. This need to process and assimilate traumatic events is the primary factor driving such a society to develop an ethos that addresses death and sanctification. The collective awareness needed can replay, process, assimilate and reconstruct the harrowing events experienced by both individual members of the group and by the collective. A society accomplishes this by evolving a special worldview about death, with its own concepts and representations. To create this unique collective ethos and memory, a society must embrace individual memories and incorporate them into a collective memory.

Death becomes something forever active and dynamic, outside of time. This new perspective challenges the sharp boundaries between life and death by, in effect, resurrecting those who have passed away and reinvesting them with life. The dead play a crucial role in shaping the present and the future in Palestinian society, as they do in any society.<sup>3</sup> However, in Palestinian society, living parents share that role with their dead children.<sup>4</sup>

Palestinian mothers and fathers who have lost their loved ones in politically tinged acts of violence have come to find themselves in a reality where the boundary between the individual and the group tends to blur. This blurring of boundaries is a product of the societal appropriation of individual bereavement. A highly complex process, it invariably succeeds in placing the national interest before the private lives of

<sup>3</sup>Zartal (2002 [Hebrew]).

<sup>4</sup>Zartal (2002 [Hebrew]).

individuals. Arguably, the need of the nation or the collective in creating a national memory and a national ethos compels appropriation of the individual's story for the benefit of all.<sup>5</sup> Palestinian parents are also used in the production of this ethos of death and fortitude, and they have a part in the Palestinian and also the global public discourse, appearing on media platforms to voice their distress and to influence the local and global reality. The way that Palestinian parents processed the loss of their children during both Intifadas was greatly affected by the needs of the larger society and the demands of the media, both local and global. Many people remember the images of Palestinian parents at "bereavement celebrations" after a child has been killed, with the women joyfully shouting aloud and the men handing out sweets. These scenes, however, stand in stark contrast to the deep pain accompanying the parents' loss. The research findings on which my book is based reveal that Palestinian fathers have a very hard time expressing and articulating their feelings, while traditional behavioral patterns and norms of bereavement among Palestinian mothers contradict what is portrayed in the professional literature about the "celebration" of their bereavement. The celebratory scenes are also at odds with the classic gender division on the basis of which women are identified with sorrow and grief<sup>6</sup>; and insofar as they deny the women's natural need to grieve, and to express that grief, these celebrations give rise to unhealthy psychosocial processes.

While gender plays a role in shaping Palestinian grieving and bereavement, religion also has a highly significant and crucial role. Many sectors of Palestine's traditional society are religiously devout, most commonly Muslim but also Christian. Religious faith and religious beliefs are important influences on Palestinian bereavement attitudes and practices. The interaction between the religious component and other components important to the character of Palestinian society, notably nationalism and gender, has given rise to a uniquely Palestinian culture of bereavement and mourning. The findings of this study show that, in Palestinian society with its Muslim majority, people's reliance on religion as the ultimate guide provides a way for nationalism to construct and shape a perception of bereavement as part of the collective memory. In this book, I propose that this phenomenon be understood as a new integrative concept that

<sup>5</sup>Rothenberg (2005 [Hebrew]).

<sup>6</sup>Bar-On (2004 [Hebrew]).



I have termed the “politireligization” of bereavement. Politireligization, as I have defined it, is a manipulative process in which agents of nationalism make use of selected aspects of religion in order to promote and serve a political agenda in Palestinian society at any given time. This is the first and most central dimension in the engineering and design of the culture of bereavement in Palestinian society, alongside the religious elements that have had a central role in shaping this culture. The Palestinian model has been influenced by the model of the modern national state and even, arguably, by the Israeli model. Drawing on these influences, Palestinians have succeeded in creating a culture of bereavement and mourning that is uniquely theirs, encompassing a combination of local religious, cultural (and multicultural) and gender elements that now comprise the content of Palestinian bereavement.

If we are to understand how Palestinian society has chosen to cope with loss and pain, there are questions we must address in some depth: Who has the right to mourn? What is the hierarchy of bereavement in Palestinian society? Who is in charge of Palestinian mourning, and what sort of relations do mourners have with the society around them? What meaning does Palestinian society accord to death, and what are the components that have shaped the Palestinian ethos of death and heroism?

\* \* \*

This book examines the phenomenon of individual and collective bereavement in Palestinian society and seeks to explore the boundaries of the discourse of bereavement and commemoration in that society, the interactive relations between religion, nationality and gender, and the way these influence the shaping of the mourning process for Palestinian parents who have lost their children in the second (al-Aqsa) Intifada. I share with the reader relevant research by others and present what I have learned in this study about how these components have shaped the differences in behavior between bereaved fathers and bereaved mothers: What characterizes these differences, how they are expressed, and how they have managed to shape the characteristics of the experience of Palestinian bereavement.

The term “Palestinian parents” or “parents” here will mean (unless otherwise noted) parents residing in the West Bank (but not the Gaza Strip) who have participated in the research on which this book rests. The term *martyr* (or, in Arabic, *shahid*) is the term employed by these Palestinian parents to describe the status of their dead children.

The plural of *shahed* in this text will be Anglicized to *shaheds* (in place of the Arabic plural, *shuhada*).

The book is based on the findings of field research I conducted for my doctoral thesis, which dealt with gender differences in processes of bereavement, mourning and trauma among Palestinian parents who lost their children in the al-Aqsa Intifada. For my study, I used a qualitative research approach, so that I could explore in depth and in detail the subjective experience of mourning among Palestinian parents and examine how gender differences are manifest in this experience. Between 2006 and 2008, I interviewed 20 pairs of Palestinian parents, residents of the West Bank, whose children had been killed in the second Intifada. I chose not to deal with parents of suicide bombers. The interviews with each parent were conducted separately, aside from two cases when the mother and father insisted on being interviewed in one another's presence. The field research took time, due to the difficulty of finding bereaved Palestinian parents who were willing to be interviewed for a study being done by a researcher identified with Israeli academia. Moreover, while interviewing the parents who had agreed to participate, I felt a tremendous need to share in their experiences. Some of the parents saw me as someone who could be their voice and tell their story to the Israeli public. Most of the parents expressed the hope that the outcome of this study might possibly be influential in changing Israeli public opinion concerning bereavement in Palestinian society.

One mother said to me:

Israelis think that we are a terrorist people, and that Palestinian mothers send their children to throw stones and be killed. If I were able to express my pain and grief, if Israelis were able to understand what goes on in my inner world, as a bereaved mother, they would not say such things. Maybe your research can portray the reality.

The first chapter following the theoretical survey, entitled *Coping with Bereavement and Trauma*, addresses traumatic bereavement and the ways in which bereaved parents cope with their loss. Each of the six chapters that follows the opening survey focuses on one of the five fields of knowledge relevant to our subject.

The second chapter following the theoretical survey, entitled *Loss as Individual and Collective*, deals with the impact of traumatic loss on the parents and addresses the sudden breakdown of the bereaved parents'

basic existential assumptions, as they seek to understand and explain the meaning of life and death. The parents I interviewed had diverse responses and revealed a typology of reactions to their loss and their trauma. The responses of these parents occur along a spectrum between the individual/personal, and the collective/national, to varying degrees incorporating both. On the individual plane, news of the traumatic loss of their child generally came to the parents quite suddenly, as a complete surprise, leaving them devastated and with little interest in living; later on, they would come to feel that time is not healing, but rather the opposite. The loss is correlated with deterioration in the parents' health and in their cognitive functioning. With regard to the collective national level, the findings show that the rather frequent incidence of this kind of trauma in Palestinian society tends to perpetuate the bereaved parents' feelings of loss, turning the experience of their private bereavement into an ongoing trauma and intensifying their feelings of loss, fear and insecurity. This chapter elucidates the connection between the private grief of bereaved Palestinian parents and the grief that is felt on the national plane.

The third chapter discusses the grieving process experienced by Palestinian parents in terms of the interplay of *Gender, Religion and National Feeling*. Examining this intersection of religion, politics and gender, we can learn more about how the interplay of values, norms and social and religious beliefs shapes the character of Palestinian bereavement. The gender differences between the coping patterns of fathers and those of mothers are very apparent here. Mothers used different strategies to meet and deal with the pain of their loss, including mysticism and redirecting their anger inward, whereas the men tended to use rationalization as a way of coping and directed their anger outward. Palestinian mothers spoke in a different voice than did Palestinian fathers about the way they understood death. Notably, the voice of the grieving mothers drew its content from religious faith and from social and traditional beliefs, yet managed to remain distinct from the expression of grief on the part of Palestinian fathers. The fathers' voice was clear, rational, less uncertain and better formulated, and involved less of an internal struggle regarding the death of a child, compared with Palestinian mothers whose voice was more uncertain, less confident and with a more tenuous connection to reality. In this chapter, I draw an analogy between the process of constructing a subversive women's collective identity in the Arab world and the coping processes of Palestinian women dealing with the loss of a child.

The fourth chapter deals further with *The Connection Between the Cultural, Religious and Social Components and the Phenomenon of Bereavement in Palestinian society*. I examine the influence of a combination of religious, social and cultural attitudes in shaping the content and dynamic of coping among Palestinian bereaved parents. The discussion addresses the development of the idea of sacrifice in Palestinian society and the influence of this idea on the construction of the Palestinian ethos of sacrifice. Both fathers and mothers reported that their religious faith served as a resource in shaping the way they felt about, and dealt with, the loss of their child, on both the individual and collective level. Most of the Palestinian parents cited the power of their belief in God as significantly helpful to them in coping with their loss and with the pain in accepting their child's death as part of God's plan: "Let it be as God has willed it."

This chapter goes on to address the religious meaning of the shaheed (martyr) as understood by these parents. The death of a child defined as a shaheed is seen as uniquely meaningful. For the parents, this categorization attaches special significance and purpose to the child's death, guarantees the child himself eternal life, and promises automatic entry to paradise for the shaheed and his entire family. The faith, and the feeling, that the child is eternally alive and not dead is an important component for Palestinian parents in coping with their loss. The discussion goes on to address the matter of social support and the way the notion of "parent of a shaheed" is cultivated. Their new role as bereaved parents, parents of a shaheed, places these Palestinian parents at the center of the Palestinian national and social map and affords them special status and a certain social cachet that in many cases improves their social status generally within the community.

The fifth chapter, entitled *National Identity and the Way Bereaved Parents Cope*, deals with Palestinian national identity and the transformation of Palestinian bereaved parents into a symbol of the Palestinian national struggle. This chapter introduces a concept I have termed the "politi-religionization of bereavement". The chapter examines the process of nationalization of Palestinian mourning and its transformation from personal grief and loss into collective loss, intended to support a collective Palestinian national agenda. An attempt is made to distinguish the point in this process at which the national dimension meets the religious dimension in shaping the collective bereavement of Palestinian society. As elsewhere in the Middle East, the religious discourse is linked to the national discourse in a way that promotes the national agenda of Palestinian society. The chapter examines the nature of

sacrifice and bereavement in Palestinian society and the added meanings that have succeeded in shaping a new national-religious culture around the subject of bereavement and sacrifice. I attempt to cast light on how this culture was able to transform individual bereavement into collective bereavement with the aim of shaping a Palestinian national memory. Again, the shorthand term I have coined for this entire process is the “politireligization of bereavement.” The expectation that Palestinian parents are sacrificing their child for the concept of national hegemony has created the process of nationalization of bereavement and transformed bereavement from a private, individual matter into a collective process.

The last chapter deals with *The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*. The culture of commemoration created by Palestinian society during the second Intifada has imparted a unique national-group character to the loss of Palestinian children. The memorialization of the shaheeds is part of a covert mission to raise the level of awareness around the death of the children for a national-political purpose of the first order. In this chapter, I try to show how the act of commemoration establishes a collective national identity in Palestinian society and transforms the personal sacrifice of Palestinian parents into a sacrifice for the collective and the homeland. I address the connection between memory, gender and culture, and the reciprocal interaction among them in relation to loss and trauma in Palestinian society. I concentrate on the question of how these interrelationships have led to the shaping of a national awareness and a national identity in relation to loss and trauma in Palestinian society, and how this is manifest in the Palestinian private and public space. I scrutinize the connection between commemoration, memory and gender, in an attempt to understand how the gender component manifests itself in Palestinian commemorative space and how the social power dynamics translate into the act of memorialization and influence its nature and content.

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# Overview: Coping with Bereavement and Trauma

It is commonly recognized that ending a connection with a loved one, especially a loved one from one's immediate family is a very difficult experience. People react to such trauma in differing ways. When such a relationship ends because of death, the loss is final and the shock commensurately greater. The unique responses of the bereaved are shaped by a number of factors, including the closeness of the relationship, the quality of the connection, the nature of the culture, and the stage of life at which this trauma occurs.<sup>1</sup>

Grieving for a close friend or relative who has died is certainly difficult; grieving for a dead child is almost unbearably excruciating. The loss of a child feels much more painful, and all aspects of the grieving seem much more intense, especially if the child's death is untimely, unexpected or perceived as unjust.<sup>2</sup>

The connections among loss, bereavement, grief and trauma have been the subject of considerable research in Israel and elsewhere. The loss of a child under various traumatic circumstances, including road accidents, suicide, murder and war have been thoroughly examined in existing studies.<sup>3</sup> Researchers have described the emotional, cognitive and behavioral

<sup>1</sup>Malkinson et al. (1993) and Cohen (2015).

<sup>2</sup>Murphy et al. (1989), De Vries et al. (1994), Neimeyer (2001), Bennet et al. (2005), Lehman et al. (1989), and Stroebe et al. (2007).

<sup>3</sup>Florian (1989), Beder (2003), Rubin (1991–1992), Lohan and Murphy (2006).

responses appearing during the first stages of grief. Other responses exhibited during later stages of coping with the loss, such as yearning for the loved one, searching for meaning, despair, depression, anger, anxiety, helplessness, guilt, ambivalence, purposelessness, denial, the desire for revenge, a sense of worthlessness, the disruption of routine, problems with memory and cognition, and more, have also been analyzed.<sup>4</sup> When the loss occurs under traumatic circumstances, in these circumstances, the grieving process is considered more complicated, involving processes deemed unique to traumatic loss.<sup>5</sup>

Most of those who have lost a loved one as the result of a traumatic event seem to share a number of reactions, including feelings of anxiety or impotence, shaken self-confidence, damaged or distressed social and family ties, and self-doubt.<sup>6</sup> Bereaved parents exhibit a number of responses and have various modes of coping. These include perpetuating the lost child's memory, idealizing the child's image, commemorating the child's life, pursuing justice, joining support groups and rationalizing the personal loss.<sup>7</sup>

The theoretical aspects of bereavement and grieving are the subject of two main schools of thought. One is based on models that regard grieving as a phased process during which ties with the deceased become attenuated and the grief eases to some extent. The other approach views mourning as a dynamic lifelong process aimed at sustaining the connection with the deceased.

The bereaved Palestinian parents in this book lost their children to violence brought about by the Israeli military occupation. Violence of this kind is viewed as both individual and personal, and as national and collective. The fates of the victims of this sort of violence are tied to the particular social and national reality in which they lived.

<sup>4</sup>Klingman (1998 [Hebrew]), Rubin (1993a [Hebrew], b), Conrad (1998), Kato and Mann (1999), Lindemann (1994), Littlewood (1992), Middleton et al. (1996), Miles and Demi (1992), Murphy et al. (2002), Rinear (1988), and Stroebe et al. (2007).

<sup>5</sup>Stroebe et al. (2007).

<sup>6</sup>Whitstom (2004 [Hebrew]), Keese et al. (2008), and Murphy (1996).

<sup>7</sup>Whitstom (2004 [Hebrew]), Tamir (1993 [Hebrew]), Rubin (1995 [Hebrew]), Rothenberg (2005 [Hebrew]), Bennet et al. (2005), Klass et al. (1996), Parks and Weiss (1983), and Rosenblatt (2000).

## RESPONSES TO BEREAVEMENT AND MOURNING

The complexity of mourning and its numerous causes cannot be adequately described by merely examining a person's experience and then simply detailing a structured series of scenarios which necessarily follow one another in a given chronological order. Rather, there are various periods and stages to mourning, some stormy, some calmer. Sometimes there is progress and change; sometimes there is a retreat.<sup>8</sup>

Individuals differ in an almost infinite number of ways, with different characteristics and histories, sexes, ages, cultures, modes of coping, personality types, support systems and physical and mental states. Each of these factors influences how an individual goes through bereavement and mourning. The process can continue for many years, even forever.<sup>9</sup> As a result, one cannot identify a distinct point in time when grieving ends, but only point to a turning point when the bereaved individual let go of familiar patterns of thinking and behavior adopts new ones.<sup>10</sup>

Responses to grief can be emotional, physical, cognitive and social.<sup>11</sup> Among the body's manifestations of grieving, one can identify a tendency to develop cardiac disease, immune system failure, cancerous tumors and more.<sup>12</sup> On the psychological level, grieving has been found to result in disturbed sleep, impaired self-control, increased anxiety and episodes of severe depression or anger, all of which can cause the bereaved person to feel that life has lost its meaning.<sup>13</sup>

On a social level, grieving, frequently accompanied by distortions in perceptions following the loss, has been found to be a factor leading to greater dependence on others, increased marital dissatisfaction and a loss of interest in social ties.<sup>14</sup>

The bereaved faces a constant struggle to return to their customary functioning, to the routines of daily life and to the activities they had found

<sup>8</sup>Corr et al. (1997).

<sup>9</sup>Whitstom (2004 [Hebrew]) and Martin and Doka (2000).

<sup>10</sup>Klingman (1998 [Hebrew]).

<sup>11</sup>Bennet et al. (2005), Lebel and Ronel (2006), Martin and Doka (2000), and Rando (1993).

<sup>12</sup>Prigerson et al. (1999), Stroebe and Schut (1999), Rubin and Malkinson (2001), Rubin (1996), and Li et al. (2014).

<sup>13</sup>Gray et al. (2004) and Turton et al. (2001).

<sup>14</sup>Lebel and Ronel (2006) and Murphy (1996).

important before the loss occurred. These include ordinary participation in family life and social communication with their family, social and professional circles, whether close or distant.<sup>15</sup> One's close connections become part of one's personal identity, as to how an individual internalizes these connections in ways that reflect how the individual experiences his or her self. Consequently, bereavement entails not only grief over losing someone who was meaningful on an interpersonal level, but also as pain, grief and loss arising from internal representations the bereaved had of the deceased. Therefore, it is clear that the more significant the deceased was for the bereaved, the greater the threat posed to the bereaved person's sense of self after the loss, and the greater the pain.<sup>16</sup> Symptoms of severe clinical depression, including aggression and anger, a diminished sense of security and self-worth, and loss of appetite, are common responses to bereavement, particularly among bereaved parents. Among the symptoms that the bereaved are liable to experience are Impairment of emotional and motor psychomotor functioning, deterioration of ordinary day-to-day behavior, and hallucinatory and mystical thinking.<sup>17</sup>

Some bereaved and grieving people experience profound but unjustified guilt regarding the deceased, sometimes arising from a fear of forgetting the one who has died. They consequently eliminate any happy or pleasant feelings from their lives.<sup>18</sup> Signs of what is known as pathological grieving include not only a number of syndromes, such as fear of abandonment, but also sudden onsets of episodes of sadness without subsequent improvement.<sup>19</sup>

Some pathological responses occur when the ordinary processes of grieving become highly distorted over time. In such cases, the bereaved may exhibit hostility, hyperactivity, intense anger and depression, indecision, social withdrawal, psychosomatic illness, extreme and uncompromising changes in relationships with family and friends, an inability to come to terms with the loss and the adoption of behaviors of the deceased.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Lebel and Ronel (2005).

<sup>16</sup>Yassin-Ismail (2000 [Hebrew]).

<sup>17</sup>Conrad (1998), Mahgoup and Lantz (2006), and Rubin (1993b).

<sup>18</sup>Sarnoff-Schiff (1983 [Hebrew]) and Mizota et al. (2006).

<sup>19</sup>Cohen (2015).

<sup>20</sup>Linderman (1994) and Barrera et al. (2007).

A grieving process can be viewed as successful when the bereaved does not completely part from the deceased, but instead experiences a change in the nature of their relationship, acknowledging that people can remain involved in one another's lives, perhaps even if one of the parties is no longer alive. Clearly, in a normal course of grieving, the bereaved remains connected and involved with the deceased's earlier existence, and the grieving process grows out of the bereaved person's interior representation of the deceased.<sup>21</sup>

The complexity of the connection with the dead as well as the spectrum of coping through this connection can be addressed by suggesting two distinct but parallel tracks. The first addresses the bereaved person's level of functioning, including difficulties in functioning as part of the response to the loss. The other involves evaluating how the bereaved person remembers the dead. The assumption of this two-track model is that the effects of the loss are expressed in a bereaved person's overt behavior, inner world, and continuing connections with representations of the deceased. According to Rubin, the bereaved is better able to communicate with various representations of the deceased when the process of adjusting to the loss is more successful, creating comfortable or fluid feelings. Such an accommodation to the child's loss leads to a fundamentally different synthesis in the parent's life than would have developed if the child remained alive.<sup>22</sup>

A sizeable proportion of bereaved parents undergo an acclimatization process in which they ultimately succeed in returning to normal functioning. Some however, may find it difficult to adjust to the new reality. Some parents' responses to bereavement are notably complex,<sup>23</sup> and there is certainly a connection between a complicated mourning process and psychological and social problems in adjusting. The idea of complex grieving, as presented by Prigerson, is an alternative to the term "pathological grieving,"<sup>24</sup> and refers to mourners who experience greater difficulty in the grieving process, but not necessarily at a level amounting to pathological mourning as classically defined (the pathologization of the mourning process).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Klass et al. (1996).

<sup>22</sup>Rubin Katz (1993a [Hebrew]).

<sup>23</sup>Genzborg et al. (2002 [Hebrew]).

<sup>24</sup>Prigerson et al. (1999) and Cohen (2015).

<sup>25</sup>Prigerson et al. (1999).

Theories dealing with bereavement and grieving mostly rely on psychoanalytic theory or on theories dealing with coping and stress, with some overlap regarding the various terms referring to bereavement and mourning among different disciplines. Still, there is no broad theory that integrates different approaches to the issues of bereavement and mourning, despite the large number of existing theories on this subject in the professional literature and despite the changing paradigms addressing mourning and bereavement over the last two decades.<sup>26</sup>

## BEREAVEMENT, GRIEVING AND TRAUMA

The word *trauma* comes from the Greek, meaning an injury to the body. In the professional literature, trauma is defined as a stressful event occurring beyond the bounds of regular experiences. The traumatic event is usually unexpected and uncontrolled, shattering one's sense of security and leaving one feeling vulnerable and anxious. The trauma causes suffering to almost anyone and provokes feelings of fear, threat and helplessness. Trauma may involve either a physical or an emotional injury. Emotional trauma, for example, refers to emotional damage resulting from some particularly difficult experience or experiences. A traumatic experience can be a one-time event or something recurring. In either case, the trauma creates such a situation of powerlessness and shock in a person that he or she is unable to cope with the feelings evoked by the traumatic experience.<sup>27</sup>

Judith Lewis Herman distinguishes between a single traumatic event and ongoing traumatic events. She proposes calling the post-traumatic syndrome arising from continuing injuries "complex post-traumatic stress disorder," due to the complexity of both the harm and the relevant treatment approaches.<sup>28</sup> Trauma may result from various kinds of events, such as road accidents, rape, abuse, natural disasters and wars.<sup>29</sup>

A large proportion of people exposed to a traumatic event suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the first months following the trauma, and many of these people go on to develop chronic PTSD, which

<sup>26</sup>Rothaupt and Beker (2007).

<sup>27</sup>Noy (2000 [Hebrew]).

<sup>28</sup>Herman (1997 [Hebrew]).

<sup>29</sup>Noy (2000).

may linger for many years. Bereaved parents may also suffer from a perception that life has lost its meaning, experiencing powerful feelings of despair, anger, guilt, lack of appetite, loss of control, strong ambivalence, somatization, and anxiety about death, each of which can affect every aspect of their lives.<sup>30</sup> Some researchers have found that the loneliness is the hardest part of mourning. Parents miss the company, the presence and the personality of the child they have lost and feel an intense desire to see the child, speak with the child and touch the child.<sup>31</sup> As therapists commonly believe and research demonstrates, the mourning that follows trauma involving a loss is more complicated and is associated with particular processes. The literature shows that people who have lost a loved one following a traumatic event share unique characteristic reactions, including anxiety, helplessness, damaged self-confidence, impaired social ties and disrupted family relationships, together with an undermined sense of self.<sup>32</sup>

Based on increased empirical knowledge gathered in recent years, an additional mourning response, defined as “traumatic grief,” has been identified. Traumatic grief refers to a mourning process distinguished by depression and anxiety, and can lead to physical and emotional disturbances, including the risk of suicide.<sup>33</sup> The circumstances of a child’s loss influence the degree of trauma experienced by the parents.

Loss under traumatic circumstances is defined in the literature as sudden and violent, sometimes involving mass deaths.<sup>34</sup> Many studies have shown that parents who lost a child in a traumatic event, such as murder, display intense emotional responses over an extended period of time (post-traumatic symptoms).<sup>35</sup> Those who have suffered the loss of a loved one due to a traumatic event may come to believe that the world is less secure and to feel a loss of control over their lives and a diminished will to go on living.<sup>36</sup> The traumatic circumstances of a loved one’s death can also have

<sup>30</sup>Bennet et al. (2005), Lebel and Ronel (2006), Martin and Doka (2000) and Rees (2001).

<sup>31</sup>Klingman (1998 [Hebrew]), Gray et al. (2004), and Raphael and Wooding (2004).

<sup>32</sup>Whitstom (2004 [Hebrew]), Keese et al. (2008), Litz (2004), and Murphy (1996).

<sup>33</sup>Altmann (2006 [Hebrew]) and Li et al. (2014).

<sup>34</sup>Schmidt (1986).

<sup>35</sup>Lebel and Ronel (2006), Murphy et al. (2002), Neria and Litz (2004) and Rinear (1988).

<sup>36</sup>Noy (2000 [Hebrew]).



an impact on the process of coping with the loss, and on the ability of the bereaved to integrate the experience of loss into their lives.<sup>37</sup>

The adjustment following a traumatic loss is liable to entail a longer and more painful mourning process than that for losses from other circumstances. After a traumatic loss, the primary and overriding focus of the process is on the bereaved's emotional readiness to fully experience the mourning process, the parting and the grieving. The traumatic memories can become nagging and the bereaved may suffer from invasive thoughts that give rise to panic, helplessness and destructive fantasies. Even when the situation is not considered pathological, nevertheless, from the moment the bereavement process begins, it really never ends; the bereaved simply learns to create distance from the grieving process, at the price of creating distance from feelings in general.<sup>38</sup>

As noted, when the death is violent, unexpected or untimely, the mourning process is liable to be especially difficult and lengthy.<sup>39</sup> The very suddenness of a child's death impairs the parents' ability to come to terms with it and return to prior levels of functioning.<sup>40</sup> Understanding that death can happen at any moment on an intellectual level does not make sudden death any easier to accept.<sup>41</sup> Sudden death is harder for the bereaved person to absorb because the person who died was so recently present, visible, healthy and intact. Furthermore, when a relationship is disrupted abruptly, there is no opportunity for a proper farewell, nor any chance to achieve resolution or closure with the person now gone.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, when death is anticipated, the soon-to-be-bereaved have a chance to assimilate and prepare for the impending loss.<sup>43</sup>

The age of the child lost affects the level of trauma experienced by bereaved parents. Losing a child of any age is unspeakably difficult. All the hopes and plans for the future, memories of the past, and emotional, physical and material investment contribute to a deep sense of loss and longing in the bereaved parents, whatever the age of the child. Yet the

<sup>37</sup>DeSpelder and Strickland (1996).

<sup>38</sup>Gray et al. (2004) and Raphael and Wooding (2004).

<sup>39</sup>Murphy et al. (1989) and Neimeyer (2001).

<sup>40</sup>Lehman et al. (1989).

<sup>41</sup>Raphael (1983).

<sup>42</sup>Murphy et al. (1989) and Rubin et al. (2003).

<sup>43</sup>DeSpelder and Strickland (1996), Keesee et al. (2008), and Rando (1986).

child's stage of development at the time of death shapes both how a parent copes with the loss and the meaning represented by that loss.<sup>44</sup> Research has shown that the older the child, the more difficult and protracted the grieving process.<sup>45</sup> The parent–child connection is a dynamic one, with stages of various degrees of closeness that take different forms over the years pass.<sup>46</sup> A young child's personality is less developed and less well-defined or distinct than that of an older child. When losing an adolescent child, for example, a parent experiences a loss of, among other things, the help that the child would have provided for the aging parents in the future.<sup>47</sup> The loss of an adolescent child can also be harder because of the emotionally charged nature of the parent–child relationship during that stage.<sup>48</sup>

The bereavement experienced by the Palestinian parents interviewed for this study fits into the category of traumatic loss, with all its acknowledged significance. Another aspect of their trauma that could greatly influence their mourning process is the fact that their loss is identified with a national struggle.<sup>49</sup> There are specific psychological elements associated with a loss under war conditions: patriotism, faith in the national group and its leadership and attitudes toward the conflict in the context of which the child was killed.

## THE TRAUMA OF LOSING A CHILD

The hardest death-related loss to endure is the loss of a child.<sup>50</sup> Losing a child is like losing the future itself, and nothing evokes greater hopelessness or depression.<sup>51</sup> Grieving for the loss of anyone close involves a multidimensional, multistage process that continues throughout the bereaved person's lifetime, having a deeper and longer-term impact than originally realized.<sup>52</sup> Of all types of loss of a loved one, the loss of a child is considered

<sup>44</sup>Beder (2003).

<sup>45</sup>Silverman and Nickman (1996).

<sup>46</sup>DeSpelder and Strickland (1996).

<sup>47</sup>Keesee et al. (2008) and Raphael (1983).

<sup>48</sup>Rubin (1989–1990), Smith et al. (2011), and Li et al. (2014).

<sup>49</sup>Klingman (1998 [Hebrew]) and Klass et al. (1996).

<sup>50</sup>Toller (2008).

<sup>51</sup>Bennet et al. (2005).

<sup>52</sup>Braun and Berg (1994).

the most deeply shocking to the bereaved person's emotional fabric. The impact of the shock creates changes in emotions, personalities, worldviews, priorities, life cycles and interpersonal relationships.<sup>53</sup> Losing a child is generally understood as the most painful and overwhelming of losses, posing the most profound difficulties across the broadest spectrum of mental, emotional and physical responses.<sup>54</sup>

The sudden death of a child brings with it a double component of shock, as the suddenness of the loss compounds the shock over the child's death and complicates the grieving process. Trauma disrupts the bereaved person's inner world. Trauma survivors experience themselves as powerless and weak in a world shorn of meaning, and their initial emotional responses following trauma are marked by diminished self-worth, a sense of emptiness, intense fear and strong anxiety. The literature points to two main reasons why parental bereavement has so much greater force than other bereavement. First, because of the parent's sense of responsibility for the child's well-being and assumption of an obligation to defend the child from harm, many bereaved parents develop deep feelings of guilt at having failed to protect their child.<sup>55</sup> The second reason for the greater magnitude of parental bereavement is that a child is part of the parents' identity, embodying their genetic, social and psychological continuation. A child's death ruptures the continuum from past to future.<sup>56</sup> All these feelings are liable to intensify the grief of bereaved parents, and considerably prolong the time it takes for their grieving process to attenuate.<sup>57</sup>

For many bereaved parents, their individual grief is experienced as torment, pain and suffering. The child's loss cuts short and embitters the once positive meaning and purpose the parents had previously enjoyed from the parent-child relationship.<sup>58</sup> Many bereaved parents express this change by describing themselves as no longer whole, as having been made an invalid or as having had a limb amputated.<sup>59</sup> This feeling of amputation leads many bereaved parents to immerse themselves in those parts of themselves

<sup>53</sup>Lebel and Ronel (2005).

<sup>54</sup>Weiss (1993).

<sup>55</sup>Attig (1990).

<sup>56</sup>Rando (1986).

<sup>57</sup>Rando (1986).

<sup>58</sup>Sanders (1992).

<sup>59</sup>Braun and Berg (1994).

that were connected with the dead child. They seek to connect with the emotional, spiritual space to which their child has gone.<sup>60</sup>

Focusing their emotional energy on the dead child sustains the parents' connections with the spirit of their child at varying intensities and in ways both overt and covert. Manifestations on the covert level, as found in accounts from parents in this book, include feeling that the figure of the child is present, fantasies of apprehending an apparition of the child with various senses, the belief that the dead child has an active influence on thoughts and events, and the parents' internalization of qualities of the child who has died. On a more overt level, many parents transform their identification with their dead child into a concrete reality, taking on the child's activities, hobbies or behaviors, and thus keeping the child alive in some way.<sup>61</sup> The unique grief these parents experience is influenced by their personalities, by the different positions in the family that each holds, and by the particular relationship that each had with the child who died.<sup>62</sup> How each parent copes with the mourning process and the meaning each attributes to it are also influenced by the manner in which the parent thinks he or she should respond to the loss.<sup>63</sup> All of these factors shape the meaning of the individual loss, the response to the loss and the post-loss interaction of the parents with the child who has died.<sup>64</sup>

The different paths taken by the bereaved parents in response to their loss change them in many ways; some of these changes are temporary and others are more long-term.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Barrera et al. (2007) and Riches and Dawson (1996).

<sup>61</sup>Rubin (1993a [Hebrew]).

<sup>62</sup>Avezur (1987 [Hebrew]).

<sup>63</sup>Braun and Berg (1994).

<sup>64</sup>Barrera et al. (2007) and Riches and Dawson (1996).

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## Part One: Loss as Individual and Collective

In the process of coping with their trauma, the bereaved Palestinian parents examined in this study inevitably had to acknowledge and understand their new reality. They came to see and to reconstruct themselves as bereaved parents. This process enabled them to express their pain and assimilate their unbearable loss. Although it is recognized that in some cases of bereavement, the coping process can lead to renewed personal growth, this dynamic was almost entirely absent among the Palestinian parents examined here. These Palestinian parents instead used internal and external resources to cope with the trauma, including beliefs, defense mechanisms, personality structure, resilience and strength. Avitzur argues that, in general, these resources both help bereaved parents process the traumatic event and immunize them against experiencing any pathological psychological effects.<sup>1</sup>

The Palestinian parents interviewed in this study experienced their bereavement and its consequences on two primary levels: individual and collective. For bereaved Palestinian parents, there is a close connection between their personal bereavement and a national, collective sense of bereavement. The feeling that their individual bereavement following the traumatic loss was, in essence, interwoven with the collective bereavement,

<sup>1</sup>Avezur (1987).

was shared by most of the parents. Customarily, the continuing experience of bereavement is mediated by time and by the development and cultivation of concepts of bereavement and loss. In Palestinian society, this process results from the continuing loss experienced day after day against the backdrop of the political struggle in which their society is enmeshed. In this context, death is transformed into an everyday event and thereby perpetuates the personal loss of these Palestinian parents.

With the Israeli army continuing to make arrests and routinely harassing these parents, the bereaved parents' fears and sense that their lives are basically insecure intensify, while their feelings of loss on both the personal and collective level increase. The Palestinian parents consider their personal loss a collective loss as well, and see the collective loss as their own personal loss. They relinquish their personal space for the benefit of the national-collective mourning process, and, in so doing, help themselves cope with their own painful loss.

### THE IMPACT OF TRAUMATIC LOSS ON THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Although Palestinian society exists within a reality of ongoing loss, and although traumatic events are an integral part of daily life in that society, nonetheless, the loss experienced by bereaved Palestinian parents is sudden and unexpected. Some of the young people were killed after having gone out to demonstrate, but in some cases they were killed either in their homes or nearby. Almost all the parents interviewed talked about the sudden shock, the terrible surprise they felt when disaster struck. The professional literature addresses several elements associated with trauma that can intensify the experience of traumatic loss: surprise, health problems, the feeling that all is in ruins, loss of interest in life and so on.

#### *Being Surprised with the News of the Death*

A significant component of the shock reported by both fathers and mothers involves this element of surprise as well as the impossibility of anyone ever being prepared to hear the news of such a loss, both of which have an impact on how the news of the loss is received. Many parents first learned of their loss, without any prior warning or preparation, on media channels like local television news, which has played a significant role in disseminating

information of this kind through direct coverage from the scene of the event.

One of the mothers describes this reality as follows:

I said the evening prayers and was sitting with the shaheed's brothers in the yard. After a few minutes, my son went inside to watch television. He said to me, "Mom, the army is moving around in the village. I'm going to watch television, maybe they will report on what is happening." My son saw the photo of his brother on television. He screamed to me, "Moouooooommm, it's my brother, it's my brother..." I ran into the house and stood there in shock, looking at the television... I saw the picture of my son the shaheed on the screen, hooked up to all kinds of equipment. My husband, sitting in the next room, came to see what all the uproar was about. I couldn't take it in. I took me a while to understand what had happened. I thought at first that he was wounded. But when I saw how many people were starting to arrive at our house, I understood that the worst thing of all had happened...

To hear such devastating news in that manner was a terrible blow to the parents and intensified their trauma. The news arrived without warning; the parents had had no chance to prepare themselves for the loss of their loved one. Parents usually see the death of their child as violent, unjustified and cruel. The additional elements of surprise, the violent manner of death, and the lack of preparation can only exacerbate the experience of loss for the bereaved parents, making it yet more traumatic and more complex.

### *Health Problems and Diminished Cognitive Capacity*

Another conspicuous challenge for these Palestinian parents was the need to cope with health problems and cognitive issues that arose following their loss. Most of the parents interviewed, both fathers and mothers, reported deterioration in their health. Some of the parents connected the appearance of a disease to the trauma they had experienced. In many cases, the loss was followed closely by the discovery of a chronic health problem like high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, a seriously slipped disc, etc. One mother of a child killed by Israeli shaheed related, "My health is continually getting worse. Since it happened, I have diabetes, vision problems, and high blood pressure, and I have trouble sleeping. God be praised, all the illnesses possible."

The father of another shaheed described his experience:

Thank God, less than ten days after [my child] died, they diagnosed my diabetes and I began having high blood pressure. A few months later, they discovered that I had a seriously slipped disc, and I have vision problems. Listen, I'm not a doctor and I don't understand much about medicine or people's emotions, but I'm sure that [my child's] loss has had an influence on my physical condition. Nowadays I'm unable to climb up the hill to the house on foot. It's God's will.

Parents also reported problems with attention, focus and memory, as well as a general decrease in cognitive skill functions. One of the fathers expressed it this way:

These days, I have a lot of problems with attention. I can't focus on anything. I can't focus the way I did before, and it affects how I function. Sometimes I find myself stuck while trying to remember details that I used to have under control before what happened. Now I forget the simplest things. My wife sends me to the market and I might call her several times asking what to buy.

Some of the parents interviewed directly identified the trauma, stress and emotional suppression as the reasons for changes in their health. Many of the parents believed that because their society expected them, as parents of a Shaheed, to be constrained in their response to their loss, they experienced feelings of pressure and stress that directly affected their health.

Some of the parents were found to have illnesses or conditions that could not be explained. Below is a statement from one mother, whose son was severely wounded on the left side of his face by a missile fired at their house. During the interview, this mother addressed almost obsessively the injury to her son's face. When I spoke with her, she had been diagnosed with a paralysis of a facial nerve that caused the left side of her face to sag, creating a distorted appearance.

After it happened, people told me, 'You are living in permanent mourning. It won't be good for you, it will kill you...' I kept thinking about him, about what a beautiful face he had, and I could not stop thinking about his injury. I have not been able to erase the image of his face after the injury... After I got this infection in my face, everyone told me that it was because of my emotional state...

Most of the parents reported thinking obsessively about their dead child. These thoughts never left them, making it difficult for them to function and causing health problems. One mother told me:

Since the loss, I am unable to function. I'm tired all the time. I can't manage to work, not at home and not anywhere else. The back problems I started having after it happened are only getting worse. I'm physically incapable of anything. I can't lift things. I can't carry things. I can't keep going on anything. I work for a short time, but have to stop. I am almost not functioning. I forget things, and often I just detach from the world. This happens often, in the middle of working I suddenly remember the shaheed and just detach.

### *Everything Is in Ruins, Nothing Matters*

Typical of the bereaved parents' emotional reactions following the traumatic loss of their child was a profound sense that everything was in ruins and that nothing mattered any longer. Many parents reported dreadful feelings that their world had collapsed and that their lives had lost all meaning after the child's death. A considerable number of the parents felt that without the deceased child, life no longer had a purpose. They suffered from the painful and disheartening feeling that everything they had accomplished in life and all their hopes, aims and dreams had fallen apart.

For these parents, burying their child was equivalent to burying a part of themselves, like burying one of their own organs, along with their sense of humor. These feelings were shared by both fathers and mothers. As one mother related:

There's no longer any purpose in life. Since the shaheed left us, life isn't worth anything anymore. I feel as if the world has collapsed around me. I am not able to enjoy anything. Nothing looks beautiful to me. I am even unable to laugh: I've forgotten how it's done.

One father of a shaheed described the loss of his hopes and dreams:

A disaster, a complete disaster and total ruin befell us. It's hard; very hard. (silence) I had a lot of hopes built on the shaheed; he was a splendid child. I have other children, but none of them has the abilities the shaheed had. He was an excellent student, a good swimmer. I had already planned to send him to university so that he'd get ahead in life. What can I tell you; I have a

terrible feeling all the time. Nothing can bring back into my life the happiness I had before then.

The sense of ruination and that life has lost all purpose, is commonly experienced in situations of traumatic loss. These feelings were evident among all the bereaved Palestinian parents in the study, even though their losses were caused not by a single collective event that occurred at one time but rather by discrete events that were not concurrent. The great force of their feelings can be seen in the difficulty that the parents had in overcoming them and rebuilding their lives. Another notable finding in this context was the lack of gender differences among the Palestinian parents with regard to these feelings. Both fathers and mothers reported an inability to close the open wound of their loss, and they gave similar portrayals of a sense that all was lost and that life had lost its meaning.

### *The Individual Recurring Trauma*

The Palestinian parents related that since the death of their child, they had relived the loss and the trauma continually, individually, within the family, and on a tribal-social plane. Holidays and major events acutely reawakened the sense of loss and the parents re-experienced the trauma yet again and again. Many of them disclosed that family occasions, especially family weddings and those of friends of the shaheed, reawakened the pain and sorrow and transformed these events into intolerable, paralyzing occasions. One of the mothers disclosed:

Every time there's a family event and the whole family gathers, [the child] is in my thoughts again. I am unable to detach myself from these thoughts. When my nephew celebrated his engagement, I saw all the children of the family, all the young people. For me, the day was no different than the day on which my child fell. I tried to hide it, of course, but when I saw all the young men of the family together, it was like a knife to my heart. It's not easy; it's not easy; it's really not easy.

Holidays and anniversaries are another component in the renewal of the trauma. Most of the parents reported a re-experiencing of the loss on such occasions, especially during Ramadan, when the entire family sits down together at the dinner table to break the fast, and the parents suddenly and acutely feel the absence of the shaheed again. One parent related:

During Ramadan, when everyone meets for the daily meal to break the fast, we feel his absence. He had his regular chair next to his mother, and so far the chair has been put there but no one has sat in it. On the holidays, it's the same story. Sometimes I am capable of making a mistake and saying, where is [the child], I want to take him with me to visit relatives.

Many of the parents recounted that on meeting friends of the shaheed or just people of his age, they were overwhelmed with painful, traumatic memories. The feeling of loss, of having lost out, becomes very powerful when they see the child's friends and contemporaries maturing and carrying on with their lives normally, marrying and starting families, while their own child is in the grave. One mother told me:

A few months ago, my brother-in-law's son became engaged. He and [my child] were very close friends and they were the same age. Dear God! At that party, I felt that I died a few times. I kept firm hold of myself so as not to cry and tried to look happy, for my sister-in-law's sake and for the groom to be. Finally I went up to our apartment, to the bedroom, and cried, screamed, wailed. I was clutching his picture and telling him, 'Yamma [*literally: Oh, mama!*], where did you go, how did you leave me? Yamma, if you were alive now, probably you'd be engaged too, today. Yamma, everyone has grown up and only you are still thirteen years old.

### *Time Does Not Heal*

The sense that the pain of their loss has not eased over time is a significant and central component in the grief of most of these Palestinian parents. In fact, time is perceived as an enemy. The parent continues waiting for the child, and time proves again and again that the child is not returning. Both fathers and mothers reported that, contrary to the common adage, time did not heal. Instead, time only made them miss the lost child more, and thus intensified the sense of loss. Many parents described time as something that made their pain more acute, like a knife turning in an open wound, so that the wound could never close or heal. Many of the parents saw time as a kind of traitor, adding to their burdens rather than easing them, as they had hoped. In one mother's words:

No child can take the place of another. Time will help? We will forget [the child]? I remember him at every moment. On his birthday, I remember him



so much. When I cook something he liked, I remember him. I remember difficult moments he faced in his short life, but he had no work and no money, [my child]. ‘Time was vengeful, not comforting’ as they say.

### TRAUMATIC LOSS ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL: THE LOSS IS DOUBLED, THE TRAUMA MULTIPLIED

There were a high number of casualties during the al-Aqsa Intifada. Thousands of Palestinian mothers and fathers in the occupied territories became bereaved parents. Because they were accorded the elevated status of “parents of a shaheed” in the collective national lexicon, their loss and grief became distinct from the personal grief of others.

These parents are part of the Palestinian collective that has been engaged in an ongoing, hostile struggle with the Israeli military. Bereaved Palestinian parents and their families are targeted for military searches and for detention, further affecting how they experience their personal loss and the trauma of that loss, which they feel as a double loss and a double trauma.

Due to the reality of the occupation in the territories and the burdensome presence of the military in Palestinian villages and cities, many of the parents reported feelings of tremendous vulnerability and insecurity. Many felt that they could not protect their children in life or in death. Mothers and fathers alike felt that their entire existence was constantly precarious; they could never trust the Israeli military and were always afraid of it. One mother of a shaheed spoke of her sense of helplessness and her fear of the soldiers during her son’s funeral:

When we got to the cemetery... I told them [the young men who were pallbearers] to be careful with the shaheed, and I stayed with him until we reached the graveside... The army began firing tear gas and shooting... Fear was in the air. When I saw the situation deteriorating, I stuck even closer to the body, fearing that they’d take him away and we wouldn’t be able to bury him. So I stayed with him all that time until the last moment before they lowered him into the grave, and we managed to bury him after all.

Many parents recounted how they were targeted by the Israeli military after their loss, including arrests of family members and utterly unjustified searches conducted by the army inside their homes. These searches, often violent and destructive and always frightening, created havoc with all the

family's belongings, and sometimes culminated with the arrest of someone in the family. One of the mothers recalled this experience as follows:

The army would show up at our house every few days looking for my son. Since the shaheed was killed, the army decided that we are a target, and every couple of days they would come to search the house. The house turned into an army base. I had stores of cheese, olives, all kinds of things, and after the searches everything was always on the floor, all the carpets were torn, the sofas were broken, the telephones broken, nothing was left... During Ramadan, they always came and broke everything... In short, I can't take it anymore. My lips tremble and my hands tremble. I want an end to this story.

Some parents reported feeling profound loss and trauma when the military deliberately disturbed the belongings of the Shaheed. One father recounted the incident and his feelings afterwards:

They [the soldiers] came into the house and started upending all the furniture, breaking whatever was in front of them. They turned the whole place upside down: the mattresses, the sheets, the pillows, everything. But what really tore me apart was when they started moving around the pictures of him that we'd hung in the living room, and some they tore. I just held onto the torn pictures, I hugged them and cried. I felt at that point as if I'd buried him again.

These Palestinian parents describe having felt very intensely that they lost any sense of security after the trauma of their loss. They felt that their lives and those of their families were under perpetual threat. According to numerous accounts in the professional literature, this feeling of insecurity that emerged from the interviews with Palestinian parents is a typical emotional response to traumatic events that were life-threatening for the people involved.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Recurring Collective Trauma*

Now midway through the second decade of the twenty-first century, traumatic events, the loss of loved ones and bereavement are inseparable parts of daily life for Palestinian society. All of the parents interviewed for this study, without any evident gender differences, addressed this situation in

<sup>2</sup>Noe (2000 [Hebrew]) and Raphael and Wooding (2004).

which Palestinian parents have no choice but to cope with this reality as something ongoing and permanent. Many parents described the loss as a constantly recurring wound. Time, said the parents, only made them miss their child even more and intensified the pain, frustration, hurt and sorrow; every political incident, every new casualty reopened the wound and amplified the pain. One mother of a shaheed portrayed it this way:

A few months after my son [shaheed's name] fell, God have mercy on him, my eldest son said to me, "Mom, there is something I have to tell you." I was in the kitchen, cooking, and I asked him what had happened. He said that [name of the shaheed's good friend] had fallen. "Oh my God," I shouted crazily, and believe me, whatever I hadn't done when I learned of my son's death, I did at that moment. "On the life of my beloved son [the shaheed]," I screamed, and threw the pot into the sink. I told them I would not cook that day; there would be no food that day. Honestly, that's how it was. Every shaheed who falls brings me back to the day my son fell.

The official Memorial Day for shaheeds was also an occasion when it was obvious that the bereaved parents experienced their loss as a recurring trauma. Some of the parents admitted how difficult it was for them on the many memorial days marked in Palestinian society. The parents of shaheeds explained that they are expected to organize, participate in and provide leadership for such memorial days on both the personal level and on the societal-collective level. Their descriptions clearly conveyed that this expectation evoked deeply painful feelings by reawakening their personal traumas. They felt their own wounds reopening yet again. As one mother expressed it:

On Memorial Day we would conduct ceremonies. Not today. I just can't handle it any more. I can't. You know, I even find it hard to cope with the news of the death of additional shaheeds. I can't listen to it. I can't even take part in a shaheed's funeral or watch it on television. I can't do it anymore. You know, every such sight brings back what happened, again. I was at the funeral, I was at the hospital, I saw the body, everything brings on a flood of these memories.

A shaheed's father added:

Every Memorial Day I participate in, reopens the bleeding wound. Unfortunately, for a while I had to take part every week in a Memorial Day for one

of the shaheeds, and some of them were friends of [his child's name], may he rest in peace. During that period I felt that I was on the verge of collapse. My emotional and physical state deteriorated. Every time there was one of those memorial days, I felt as if I'd lost him again.

It is clear that the powerful emotions, hurt and sorrow endured by the families ever since their loss first occurred do not fade with time. Time passes but does not ease the pain. The parents are unable to become accustomed to their loss or to accept it. They do not manage to return to their regular lives, despite the passage of time.

While the amount of time that had elapsed since the death of their child as a shaheed varied among the parents interviewed, it did not appear that more time significantly reduced their emotional pain. Indeed, their grief can be described as an experience of perpetual bereavement. The extreme nature of the trauma, a byproduct of the reality of occupation and the presence of the Israeli military in West Bank Palestinian villages, refugee camps and cities, makes traumatic losses like these, and their pathological aftereffects, unusually difficult to bear. Palestinians must cope with a myriad of stressful day-to-day incidents rooted in racism, discrimination and oppression, all common under the Israeli occupation. By trying to do so, these bereaved parents become even more vulnerable than the general population.<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \*

No differences were noted between the fathers and the mothers in this study regarding the consequences of their loss and its impact on them. Presumably the force of such traumatic loss has a similar influence on both genders. The gender dimension is examined in more depth in the next chapter.

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## Part Two: Gender, Religion and Nationalism in the Grieving Process

### GENDER DIFFERENCES IN COPING WITH BEREAVEMENT

Gender is a significant variable in the way people cope with bereavement and must be adequately considered in this kind of dialectic. Gender helps not only to shape the patterns of behavior and social structures of mourning, but also has an impact on the subjective experiences of mourners on the cognitive level in daily life. Gender, moreover, may well be a factor in determining whether someone is or is not accorded the right to mourn at all.<sup>1</sup> Socialization processes influence, in different ways, the manner in which men and women respond to their loss. Since bereavement is in any case a painful and difficult experience for both sexes, preconceptions involving gender can sometimes function to amplify the burdens of grieving.<sup>2</sup>

The research literature reveals a substantial interest in gender as an important factor influencing the response to bereavement.<sup>3</sup> Yet very little attention has been paid to the special circumstances of grieving *parents* in terms of how their gender may differentially impact their coping with bereavement, and still less to cases in which the loss in question is an outcome of a traumatic incident connected with a national struggle.

<sup>1</sup>Doka (1989a).

<sup>2</sup>Martin and Doka (2000) and Thompson (1997).

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., Rubin (1995 [Hebrew]), Martin and Doka (2000), Polatinsky and Esprey (2000), and Stroebe and Schut (1999).

### *Masculinity and Loss*

In the literature dealing with bereavement and death, the masculine representations are generally doctors, clergy, the religiously devout and those who deal with burial. In other words, men are more identified with the practical side of bereavement, while women are more identified with its emotional aspects. Against the backdrop of these differences, men have in practice shaped the actual content of mourning.<sup>4</sup>

The social expectations regarding bereavement-related behavior patterns are different for men and women. In various societies, the tendency is to emphasize the man's responsibility. He is supposed to "be a man," to be active and practical, and to suppress his pain or set it aside so as to continue to function on the day-to-day level.<sup>5</sup> When such a loss befalls a man who lacks the emotional tools to deal with his situation, he may not reveal what he feels or how hard he finds it to cope, instead making an effort to appear strong and to continue functioning as usual. Inwardly he may feel upset and weak, while the effort to maintain self-restraint and the pretense of normalcy may be detrimental for him.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, in coping with this kind of loss, men prefer active modes of problem-solving and stress reduction, while women prefer social support that leaves them passive.<sup>7</sup>

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the association between masculinity and loss is complex and multifaceted, hence it demands special consideration. The claim that men do not openly express their loss warrants further critique.<sup>8</sup> In my judgment, we should approach assumptions about gender differences in the realm of bereavement and mourning with some much-needed critical scrutiny—addressing both the social and individual dimensions of these dynamics as well as the patriarchal prejudices that are evident in the male attitudes to this kind of loss. The male disinclination to cope openly with bereavement and mourning processes should be examined nonjudgmentally, i.e., our scrutiny should accept masculine norms of mourning as authentic.<sup>9</sup> Our attitude of containing (rather than judging)

<sup>4</sup>Chen et al. (1998), Field et al. (1997), Grad et al. (1997), Polatinsky and Esprey (2000), and Stroebe and Stroebe (2001).

<sup>5</sup>Thompson (1997).

<sup>6</sup>Littlewood (1992).

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Field et al. (1997).

<sup>9</sup>Doka (1989b).

may sometimes be crucial and highly effective, especially in examining situations involving a crisis in the social dimension. On the individual level, however, mourning behaviors that are more active may actually prove to be less appropriate, given the individual need to assimilate the loss on the personal level. By upsetting the inner balance that allows for a feeling of coherence in life, mourning behavior that stresses greater activity may augment the mourner's sense of losing control, of being buffeted by ups and downs, of losing the ability to function normally, of feeling helpless. In bereavement, quiet time to cope with the psychological and personality aspects of grieving is as important as dealing with the social aspects.<sup>10</sup>

### *Femininity and Loss*

Women, as compared to men, are depicted in most Western cultures as expressing sorrow and grief very strongly in their response to the loss of a child. This characterization of feminine mourning and grief, like its masculine counterpart, comes from gendered social beliefs that allow women to express their grief more openly.

The judgmental attitude toward the differences in the character of masculine and feminine mourning labels feminine mourning as "mourning as it ought to be." And yet, the research suggests that while women are more identified with the image of the term "mourning," they are less identified with its actual content.<sup>11</sup> The professional literature offers descriptions of numerous and diverse responses by women to situations of bereavement. Different studies have found that bereaved mothers deal more with loss and everything it involves than do fathers. Women have been found to have many more symptoms, both physical and emotional, and for a longer period of time than men; they show higher levels of anxiety, anger, guilt feelings and depression; and they experience more frustration and social isolation than do men.<sup>12</sup>

Women are sometimes perceived as more sensitive, more empathic,<sup>13</sup> and sometimes as more flexible and more emotionally resilient specifically

<sup>10</sup>Baron (2004 [Hebrew]), Murphy et al. (2002), Schwab (1996), and Stroebe and Schut (1999).

<sup>11</sup>Hockey (1997).

<sup>12</sup>Baron (2004 [Hebrew]), Murphy et al. (2002), Schwab (1996), and Stroebe and Schut (1999).

<sup>13</sup>Rubin (1993).



in times of crisis. In many cases women have been found to be capable of enlisting appropriate support networks for themselves, as compared to men, who tend to withdraw into themselves.<sup>14</sup> In the traditional professional literature broader use has been made of the term *motherhood* than the term *femininity*, especially concerning parental bereavement. The development of the professional literature on this subject and its broadening to encompass different disciplines has led to the emergence of the term *femininity* and to the ability of both terms, *femininity* and *motherhood*, to coexist, without the implication that they are contradictory. In this spirit, recent studies have shown that the unique qualities of maternal bereavement are apparently connected with intrapsychic and interpersonal sources, leading to the formulation of a “maternal” identity, to the psychological mother–child bond, and to the personal significance that the child and the relationship with him signifies for the mother.

There is debate in the professional literature between two main streams, the psychodynamic and the feminist, concerning the meaning of the mother–child bond and the meaning of “maternity.” The psychodynamic stream focuses on the development of the child and on maternity as a basis for that development; the feminist stream, in contrast, focuses on the woman and the social constructions regarding her and regarding “maternity.”<sup>15</sup> Theoreticians from the psychodynamic stream who have addressed the mother–child bond have defined “maternity” as the woman’s principal and central identity, starting with providing for the physiological and emotional needs of the child. Simultaneously, they have defined the mother’s need for self-actualization.<sup>16</sup> The feminist theories protest this approach and the social reality it reflects. They deal with the social constructions around the subject of maternity on the political, social and individual level, and hold that the role of maternity developed out of a patriarchal conception that was constructed, over the years, as central to a woman’s life.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Stroebe (1992–1993).

<sup>15</sup>See, e.g., El-Or (2001 [Hebrew]), Broner (1993 [Hebrew]), and Birkovetz (2001 [Hebrew]).

<sup>16</sup>Sberski (1984 [Hebrew]).

<sup>17</sup>Arendel (2000).

Maternity and femininity have become synonymous, and the maternal role continues to be perceived as central in a woman's life.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the strength of maternal mourning following the loss of a child reflects both the loss of internal pieces of the self and the loss of social relationships that had become an inseparable part of the mother's emotional alignment.

## GENDER, BEREAVEMENT AND NATIONALISM IN PALESTINIAN NATIONAL DISCOURSE

When we come to address the structure of the relations between the sexes in patriarchal Palestinian society, we encounter great inflexibility. This structure is intended to assure the ascendancy of men at the upper levels of the hierarchy and to preserve the inferior status of women at the lower end of the hierarchical structure.<sup>19</sup> The patriarchal structure and the male hegemony are preserved by means of male control and interpretation of the tradition.<sup>20</sup>

Changes in gender relations in Palestinian society—a society that has undergone many changes, especially after the occupation of 1967—have been almost nil. Most studies dealing with gender relations in Palestinian society have shown that any changes in the situation of the Palestinian woman in recent decades in economic, educational and even social-political terms<sup>21</sup> have actually led to increased control and supervision of women by men. Hammami demonstrates this argument via the meaning of the hijab (women's head covering)—which, he argues, was forced on Palestinian women starting in the 1970s and has undergone a transformation from a socioeconomic or religious group status symbol to a national-political-gender symbol.<sup>22</sup>

Two main streams are discernible in the literature dealing with Palestinian women: One focuses on women's role in the national liberation movements, and the other examines the immediate and less immediate

<sup>18</sup> Baron (2004 [Hebrew]).

<sup>19</sup> Brakat (1984 [Hebrew]) and Sharabi (1988).

<sup>20</sup> Hammami (1990).

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Jad (1992 [Hebrew]).

<sup>22</sup> Hammami (1990).

influence on women of norms like heritage and patriarchy. The emphasis is on the connection between social oppression and political oppression.<sup>23</sup>

In many Middle Eastern countries that have undergone national liberation processes, women, despite their active participation in the struggle, have remained behind; only rarely have women been included in the nation-building processes or in the establishment of institutional political arrangements following the struggle. In the recent history of Arab and Islamic countries, and likewise in Palestinian society, the symbolic and the real connection between the state and the old and new patriarchies has been preserved, even strengthened.<sup>24</sup> Hammami argues that, during the First Intifada, men acted in the name of the revolution in order to continue to control and supervise women. Moreover, women's behavior, like men's behavior toward women, was categorized according to the degree of women's contribution to or damage to the national struggle. Presumably the definitions of contribution and damage were set solely by male revolutionaries. They saw themselves as emissaries of the revolution and, as such, authorized to act against any attempt to sabotage the revolutionary mission or harm the "institution of the Intifada."<sup>25</sup>

Oppression of women is also manifest in the bereavement process, the content and values of which are determined by Palestinian men.<sup>26</sup> Evans, who examined the connection between motherhood, bereavement and nationalism in various cultures, reinforces this argument. She has found that the norms and codes that a society develops concerning issues of bereavement and mourning for women have mainly been intended to serve and advance the national-political agenda, as defined by the men of that society.<sup>27</sup> By these means, the men "secure" themselves, so that even during periods of broad social change, they do not lose control and hegemony.<sup>28</sup>

The assurance of male control in Palestinian society led to a process by which mothers were nationalized. Written documentation from the First Intifada shows that a new status was created for the national maternity, a status variously referred to as "mother of the shaheed," or "creator of the

<sup>23</sup>Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2003).

<sup>24</sup>Kandiyoti (1988) and Sharabi (1988).

<sup>25</sup>Masalha (2004 [Hebrew]).

<sup>26</sup>Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2003).

<sup>27</sup>Evans (2007).

<sup>28</sup>Maitse (2000).

‘revolution,’ or ‘creator of heroes.’ This new national status brings the Palestinian woman social esteem and appreciation thanks to the “shaheedism” of her child. The feminine national obligation involves a “different” and more symbolic sacrifice; since women’s active self-sacrifice has been discouraged, she is required to sacrifice her sons.<sup>29</sup>

The use of symbolic terms in a national context or that of a national liberation struggle shows that in many cases, nationalism and cultural tradition operate together to create maternal, feminine and sexual imagery. This linkage makes it hard for women to speak out against tradition, against the nation.<sup>30</sup> Such images, as determined by Sassoon-Levy and Rappaport, relate to a woman’s body as an asset that is wholly the property of the society, much more comprehensively than does the existing attitude toward the man’s body, because both are shaped in the context of a discourse, laws, norms and institutions controlled by men.<sup>31</sup>

Viewing Palestinian women as the mothers of the nation has located them within the realm of the home and of traditional roles and made them the bearers, in their wombs, of the collective itself. In Arabic this idea is aptly phrased by relying on the etymological connection between the term *um* (mother) and *umah* (the people, the nation).<sup>32</sup>

The phrasing and creation of this concept of mothers of the nation involved not only politicians and leading political figures but also people enlisted for the purpose from the realm of arts and letters. Thus, for example, the idea appears in the well-known painting entitled “The Nation,” by Palestinian artist Sliman Mansour, in the center of which crouches a Palestinian woman from between whose legs erupt the masses who labor, build and wage war for the sake of the Palestinian nation.

Thus reality positions Palestinian women in a delicate and problematic status. Bereaved Palestinian mothers suffer a double, indeed multiple oppression: On the one hand there is political oppression, a product of the occupation, along with gender-based oppression (because they belong to a patriarchal society), and on the other hand there is the image that the West and the media create for them in all things involving bereavement and mourning. Also worthy of mention is the fact that Western culture

<sup>29</sup>Tzorif (2004).

<sup>30</sup>Maitse (2000).

<sup>31</sup>Sassoon-Levy and Rappaport (2002).

<sup>32</sup>Tzorif (2004).

judges the behavior of these women and their responses to bereavement and mourning based on Western norms and interprets them accordingly. These interpretations have created a profile of the Palestinian woman who is a prisoner of her ethnic and religious roots, a woman who expresses happy, cheerful and even ecstatic feelings during the funeral of her child.<sup>33</sup> Mothers of a shaheed have not simply been defined as “bad” in Western commentary, but are also assigned additional responsibility for supposedly having willingly sent their children to die for the homeland. Another issue is the absence of awareness, in Western society, of the necessity of repressing the pain of a child’s killing. The forced repression of the pain of the child’s death is dictated actually by the men of Palestinian society and is not a choice made by the women. This coerced response disrupts the process of grieving since Palestinian women are unable to cry openly in public and are even expected to show gladness rather than to be in pain, to be angry or to break down.<sup>34</sup>

### MYSTICAL THINKING FOR THE MOTHERS, RATIONAL THOUGHT FOR THE FATHERS

For parents, coping with the loss of their child is a staggering challenge that begins at the moment of loss. In my conversations with Palestinian parents, they described various modes of coping that helped them in the immediate aftermath of the child’s death, and in the long term, in dealing with their traumatic loss. In these conversations, it emerged that the mothers preferred mystical thought as a means of coping with the loss and the pain, while the fathers preferred rational thought. From the interviews an impression emerged that in most cases, the mothers felt an almost existential need for mystical explanations for everything relating to the child’s death as a shaheed. They evidently choose this kind of thinking as a way of coping with the unbearably harsh reality. In my estimation, women choose the tactic of mystical thought in order to transcend the limitations on their personal mourning set by the rules of the new culture of mourning created by Palestinian society over the course of two intifadas.

Mystical thinking in this context is defined as thinking that enables the crossing of boundaries between the tangible world of our perceptions and

<sup>33</sup>Awedah (2001).

<sup>34</sup>Tzorif (2004) and Khamis (2000).

the spiritual world. Mystical thinking is a blend that merges one's emotions, mind, will and awareness. It affords the thinker the certain knowledge that he or she has come into direct contact with reality itself, and this reality resembles a person's inward experiences more than it does the outer environment, until it achieves identity or at least a close proximity between the self and reality.<sup>35</sup> Sometimes, for these mothers, mystical thinking is manifest by seeing or sensing their child nearby, and sometimes the mother even feels an actual merging with the child.<sup>36</sup>

Palestinian mothers themselves describe connecting with their dead child as a mystical experience, and many of the mothers express satisfaction with this, describing their yearning for such a mystical experience connected with the child. In Arab and Muslim culture, there is an honored place for mysticism and broad legitimacy for activity in this field. The phenomenon is particularly conspicuous when death or bereavement is involved. Many mothers described a continuation of the bond with the dead child through various mystical experiences, the most common being in dreams. But beyond ordinary dreams there are other experiences that reinforce this connection, such as waking dreams, hallucinations, a vision of the child's image in an animal or an object and supernatural powers that work for the child's benefit even after his death. Taken together, this range of experiences shows us the honored place of mystical thinking in dealing with such a loss. One of the mothers described her experience this way: "Every Monday and Thursday [sacred days for Muslims], I can smell the odor of incense and musk from his bed, truly, and I get into his bed and hug his pillow and fall asleep." Note that this olfactory experience is connected with a mystical religious belief that a shaheed emits an odor of incense and musk. Thus the experience this mother describes illustrates how she sees her son's bed as a locus of two assurances: that her connection with her son continues, and that he really is part of the circle of shaheeds, as evidenced by the fact that his bed emits an odor of incense and musk.

Other mothers talked about visions that seemed to promise continuation of the daily connection with the shaheed. "He hasn't disappeared for even one moment," says one mother of a shaheed. "His picture is everywhere in the house, I talk with him, I tell him what's happening with me, what I cooked, what is hurting me. I feel that he's here by my side, he answers

<sup>35</sup> Shprshstien (1972 [Hebrew]).

<sup>36</sup> Carmel (1998).

me, he speaks to me. He comforts me a lot. Several times I've seen him walking around the house. Sometimes he walks right by me and smiles at me."

Other mothers talked of supernatural powers. One of them said:

I swear to God, the Red Crescent people told me that when they had his body on the stretcher, one of the sisters could not bear to see it and felt that she was going to faint, and she called to one of the volunteers but they weren't able to pass him the stretcher and it started to fall. Wallahi they said that the stretcher was held up in the air without support. The Red Crescent people were astonished. One of the sisters told me, Congratulations, you have a shaheed.

In contrast to the mothers, the fathers articulated a very rational discourse that relied on their religious faith and on rational explanations, both religious and otherwise. Rational thinking demands describing and explaining phenomena and events that people cope with dialectically using logic. This thinking rejects mystical and supernatural explanations. As to the connection between rational thinking and faith in God, philosophers explain in several ways how faith in God may be rational. One proposes that faith in God is rational if there are proofs in support of the existence of God. Another holds that faith in God would be considered rational only when a person has direct experience of God. From a reading of the literature on this subject, rational thinking or rational argument must meet certain clear and well-defined criteria, so that anyone who adopts those criteria will reach the same conclusion anywhere and in any context.

And indeed, many of the fathers interviewed sought to provide a logical and legitimate explanation for their son's death, whether the explanation was required by some philosophical understanding of life and death or whether it was required to grasp the essential meaning of life. "He's a shaheed and that's a source of pride," many of the fathers said repeatedly. Many of them related to local politics and to the politics of the occupation. Conspicuous in the paternal discourse were themes like sacrifice for the homeland and the importance of faith in God. The fathers emphasized the importance of patience, the strength to accept, and a belief in fate (*al-qada'* *w'al-qadr*). As one father said:

'Thanks be to God,' I said, the moment I received the news of his falling (istish'hado). And I still say that. There are no other words to speak, apart

from ‘thanks be to God.’ God has blessed us with his death in this manner. That’s it; the time had come for God to redeem his pledge... If the boy hadn’t died in that manner, he would have died in some other way, perhaps in a traffic accident. That’s it; his life had ended.

Another father wondered, philosophically:

From my standpoint: Thanks be to God. That is, I gave thanks to God and said “Nothing will happen to us except what God has ordained for us; He is our Protector. In God let the faithful put their trust.” (Surat al-Taubah, Verse 50). A person has no refuge except patience. He must thank God for everything that happens to him... because, in the end, we all die. I am talking with you right now, and you are having a conversation with me, but both of us will die and we were both born to mortal parents. We die, as one buries the other. We come from dust and to dust we shall return, according to the Qur’an. These are the laws of life. People die and others are born. My life on the spiritual and social plane has not changed, because I accept these laws.

This same view appeared in what another father said:

I comfort myself with the question of how many more years remained for me to live. Another twenty years? Or if we exaggerate, another thirty? Think of him as being on a journey. So although I miss him painfully, in the end I’ll meet him in paradise, and that’s what’s important.

## WOMEN INTERNALIZE THEIR ANGER, MEN EXTERNALIZE IT

Another conspicuous subject emerging from the women’s interviews was that they direct their anger inward, at themselves. They spoke of guilt feelings and perpetual suffering and pain. These feelings prevented them from returning to full functioning or the enjoyment of everyday life. Many women reported that, following their loss, they neglected themselves, took no pleasure in life, and had serious illnesses. The fathers, by comparison, were less likely to direct their anger inward at themselves and tended more toward directing their anger outward and to blame external factors for the traumatic events that had brought about the loss of their children: the occupying army, the Palestinian authorities and the Israeli settlers. Thus, for example, one of the fathers argued:



The Palestinian Authority contributed to the murder of my son just as the occupying army did. The Palestinian Authority stopped us out there and forbid us to go to my wounded son to save him, together with the other Red Crescent wounded. The Palestinian authority has a major part in my son's death; it was partly their doing. Imagine, the injured were abandoned out there from eight in the evening until four in the morning, wounded and bleeding.

Another father articulated a similar attitude:

The authorities did not stand with us in any of this. On days of mourning, they would show up with an envelope. One of them whispered to me that the envelope contained four thousand dollars. When I opened it, I saw four hundred dollars. The next day they wrote in the papers that I had been paid four thousand dollars. What could I do, they're a bunch of thieves.

A different father turned his anger on the Israeli occupation army. He mentioned that he'd said the same things to the (Israeli) district commander, too.

I hate the occupation; I hate the occupation. I said the same thing to the district commander when I met him. I told him, you symbolize the occupation and I hate you. He told me: But I'm stronger than you. I told him, I know that you're stronger than I am. And he replied, If you know my strength, how do you think you'll hold on to this land? I told him, You're stronger than I am by force, okay, but this land will never belong to Shlomo, or Mordechai, or Yitzhak, or Rabin, or anyone. This land will always bear the name of [his child who died].

The mothers, on the other hand, expressed their personal pain. One of them said:

I'm unable to sleep at night. I think about him incessantly, think about how the shaheed who was so lively a young man is now buried in the ground. How could we put him in the ground? And let his body rot? He'll turn into earth himself, yamma, yamma; he'll turn into earth, and why will he? They used to bring me religious people who preached and explained that the shaheed remains alive with God... If only he were alive, and his body not rotting but being preserved. This parting is the hardest; it's the hardest.

A different mother spoke in a similar vein:

Since [name of her child] fell, I am unable to enjoy anything. Sometimes my daughter tells me, Mom, color your hair, put henna in your hair, your hair is white. I tell them, as I've been forbidden to see him, I have forbidden myself adornment. I swear to God, sometimes my eldest son tells me, it doesn't look good, your mustache is as big as mine. That's how it is, I have no desire to do anything, I just can't beautify myself.

As noted, sometimes the pain of the loss stimulates the development of various illnesses. "Since we lost the shaheed," said one of the mothers, "thanks be to God, I have come down with every illness under the sun... vision problems, from crying so much, and diabetes, and high blood pressure."

One mom said:

Since we lost him, I haven't been able to return to a normal life. Everything has changed for me. I can't be a wife to my husband, do you understand? ...I can't dress in anything but black, I don't go to festive gatherings. I don't like to leave the house, and I even stopped making sweets at home... Nothing in my life is normal now.

## FROM PERSONAL LOSS TO COLLECTIVE LOSS FATHERS SACRIFICE, MOTHERS PROTEST SILENTLY

The personal bereavement of Palestinian parents is nationalized and becomes a collective bereavement. This complicated process has a decisive influence in shaping the direction and content of the parental mourning. Although the nationalizing of this personal mourning and its transformation into a collective mourning is comforting and even gratifying to the parents, at the same time it also sabotages their personal grieving, and in some cases their grief becomes pathological. Women described a perpetual inner conflict between these two voices: one is about feeling pride at their special status as mothers of a shaheed; the other is lamenting their fate and expressing their dissatisfaction with the national agenda and the behavior expected of them as mothers of a shaheed—meaning that they are to celebrate the death of their child, since they will never celebrate his marriage. The demand to turn the funeral (*jenaza*) into the equivalent of a wedding ('urus) confronts these mothers with a dilemma. They described a pattern of behavior so constrained as to deny reality: the shaheed's mother

adopts the role of comforter, calming and encouraging the people who have come to comfort her and even, sometimes, becoming the one who encourages others to participate in a festive, celebratory ritual of bereavement for her son, the *arees* (the groom). In my judgment, these mothers of a shaheed serve as effective agents in the service of male hegemony in the nationalizing of the shaheed concept.

In contrast to the mothers, the fathers sounded a more complete voice, one that has come to terms with their sacrifice for the sake of the homeland. The fathers gave religious and nationalist explanations for the sacrifice demanded of them. Most of these fathers agreed that there is a need for personal sacrifice as part of the collective sacrifice intended to achieve the national goal: the liberation of the homeland from the occupation. Both the fathers and the mothers found comfort in religion. The religious explanation that turns them into parents of a shaheed—someone entitled to be supremely valued, both before God and in the view of Palestinian society—acts as a kind of comfort irrespective of gender.

One of the mothers expressed this very precisely: “My daughter tells me, ‘Mom, how were you able to bear all of this pain on the day when the shaheed [child’s name] died? Momma, you cried nonstop when he fell off his bicycle, so how could you celebrate and sing for him at his funeral?’”

Another mother explained:

*I went into the hall where they had laid out the shaheed, and the women started to cry. I turned to them and said that no one should dare to cry. If someone wanted to cry she should get up and leave, that I was the shaheed’s mother, there is no pride and no status more exalted than that. I began to sing to the shaheed... I sang Hai ya [child’s name], Yamma... Hai, pray to the Prophet Mohammed... Hai, this is a double prayer, one to repel Satan and the other to protect [name of child] from the evil eye. Hai ya [child’s name], a flower that grew alongside a river. Hai ya [child’s name], your word is honored, hai ya yamma I lean back on the cushion of your arms... I said to the other women, my son is a groom now, and for a groom we sing and dance.*

Still, some parents were not supportive of this construction of their loss. One mother said: “It’s true, I’m the mother of two shaheeds, but all the words and all the prestige in the world aren’t worth my sons. I would prefer not to be the mother of shaheeds and not to lose my sons.” Her husband, who was sitting next to her, berated her: “What are you saying, woman!” She murmured a few words in disagreement and was silent. But

the protest she voiced against the nationalist/religious construction of her bereavement was not unique.

Another mother, who had also lost two of her sons, articulated this clearly:

Listen to me. For the first few days, I comforted the people who came to give me comfort. I rejoiced and told them that I'm the mother of a shaheed and can't be prouder than that. You're doing this while you don't really grasp what's happening to you. Today I tell you: No land, ideology, struggle or nation is worth even one fingernail of either of my two sons who were killed.

Unlike the mothers, the fathers spoke with more uniformity and less confusion about their personal bereavement. One father, for example, said:

As the father of a shaheed, I am extremely proud. Everyone wishes this status for himself... Not everyone is granted it. The shaheed gets seventy of his family into paradise. The shaheed is not punished, not called to account. One must pursue martyrdom... It's very precious.

Another father said something similar:

Praise be to God, I have thanked God, said thanks be to God, everything that comes to us from God is good, and quoting from the Qur'an: 'Nothing happens to us but what God has commanded us, he is our shield and on God the believers will rely' [*Surat al-Taubah, verse 50*]. Thank God that he died in this manner. A shaheed is an honor... You are familiar with words like these... I said that life is in the hands of the creator of the world, God has given and God has taken back again.

A different father spoke in a way that demonstrates the honor accorded parents of a shaheed by Palestinian society:

After the loss, I felt the honor and love that people so amply show me. The family I work for has also related to me in a special way since then. Society shows me a lot of respect now as the father of a shaheed.

A few of the fathers spoke clearly of their deep faith in God and in destiny—*al-qada' w'al-qadr*. One father, said, for example:

People said to me: What will you do now? I said, What can I do, there's nothing more powerful than God. My son is not the first shaheed and won't be the last shaheed. I said that God would have mercy on him and take my son into paradise. I am proud and hold my head high in pride... Thanks be to God for our lives.

The literature addresses differences between women and men in their attitudes toward death, but the conclusion drawn are only partially valid when the loss comes in a nationalist context, because the research ignores the sociopolitical processes taking place in Palestinian society. These processes have actually created new norms of bereavement—masculine norms that call on the bereaved to show emotional restraint and moderate their behavior. Palestinian women are forced to adopt these behavior norms and values and in so doing aid in preserving the status quo from a social, political, and gender standpoint. Palestinian fathers, by contrast, are part of the gender collective that determines those norms and values intended to serve and promote the Palestinian national agenda, and hence presumably the pain and frustration of these bereaved fathers is likely to be less, compared to the situation of the bereaved mothers, who are obliged to accept these patriarchal norms of grieving, however imprecisely those norms reflect their worldview as women and mothers.

Worthy of note is that, in the interviews for my study, the Palestinian mothers who dared to protest aloud in a more significant way were those who had lost two sons. These mothers have social legitimization for venting their feelings, even at the cost of casting doubt on the collective values of sacrifice. These mothers comprise a social minority and the general attitude toward them is one of pity, as it is more difficult to judge what they say and do, in light of their double loss.

Palestinian mothers, like most women in the Arab world who are coping with issues of life and death, national struggles and poverty, choose quiet modes of struggle. The ways in which Arab women cope depend on how acutely conscious they are of the reality surrounding them and the restrictions placed on them by that reality.<sup>37</sup> The differences between Palestinian mothers and fathers in how they deal with bereavement, and the way in which the men direct their anger outward, reinforce the binary gender division whereby men are identified with the public sphere and women with the private sphere. Indeed, the findings lend support to this gendered division:

<sup>37</sup>El-Saadawe (1986).

Women, as noted, direct their anger inward at themselves and seem unable to divert their anger from the personal plane to the public, whereas the men succeed in doing so. Sometimes the loss of their child is interpreted by the women as indicative of failed parenting on their part, as if they had been inadequately protective of the child's welfare. Worth mentioning in the discussion of this behavior is that these findings would seem to substantiate the view that women are relegated to the private sphere (private patriarchy) and prevented from moving out into the public space.<sup>38</sup> My goal here is not to provide support for one or another outlook on the connection between women's ways of coping with the loss of their children and their link to the private sphere, but rather to point out the gender differences as they emerge in what the women themselves express relating to the construction of bereavement and mourning in Palestinian society.

In my view, resorting to mysticism for help in coping with the loss and the pain affords these bereaved Palestinian mothers a certain degree of legitimacy for detaching themselves temporarily from what is an unbearable reality for them. Most of the characteristics of bereavement—missing the child, looking for him, depression, despair, merging with the image of the dead child, and the eventual return to normal life—have parallels in the mystical experience. According to David Aberbach, mysticism can serve as a framework for coming to terms with, and overcoming, unresolved grief. In certain cases, he says, bereavement encourages a person to adopt a mystical approach. Mysticism, in his view, can be a part of one's religious faith with its own value and significance. The notion of "mysticism" provides a place for nonrational content, and in mystical thinking there is a linking of disparate worlds, combining emotion, mind, will and awareness, creating a unique reality based on the inner experience of the person concerned.<sup>39</sup> To summarize, Palestinian women speak in a different voice in terms of their religious understanding of death. While that voice relies on traditional socio-religious faith, with broad legitimacy in Palestinian society, it can still be distinguished from the masculine ways of coping, and it provides a unique solution for dealing with the harsh reality in which the mothers of the shaheeds live and act. This reality places the Palestinian mother on the altar of the nation in relation to which she herself is excluded and marginalized. My opinion is that mysticism for these

<sup>38</sup> Hansen (1987).

<sup>39</sup> Aberbach (1987).

women is a tactical choice enabling them to circumvent the constraints imposed on their personal mourning, constraints created by the new culture of bereavement that has emerged during the two Intifadas. Through mystical thinking, bereaved Palestinian mothers are able to find an individual world, with its own individual characteristics, where they find it easier to be and to cope: a world unlike the external reality surrounding them, which imposes inflexible modes of coping that preclude the space for personal grieving so needed by these women. The mystical space they create allows them to move about within it, letting their feelings out, and coping.

By contrast, the fathers speak in a very clear, rational voice in relating to their bereavement. Most of the fathers displayed a well-formulated masculine worldview that provides a religious and logical explanation for their loss. As compared with the women's voice, the men's voice was less indecisive and less entangled with inner conflicts. The men's voice is a hegemonic voice displaying power and control. The manner in which this voice constructs the loss and the bereavement they are experiencing is another layer in the structure of power affording the men substantial advantages in Palestinian society.

Similarly, an investigation of the second issue, anger as a central component of the grieving process, demonstrates the structural gender differences involving the interior and the exterior—feminine and masculine.

The mothers turn their anger inward, while the fathers turn their anger against external agencies—whether the occupation or the Palestinian authorities—and thereby find a way to release the accumulated inner stress and pain. The fathers' coping strategy enables them to channel painful feelings into outrage against others over the death of their child, expressed in the larger struggle in the name of justice.<sup>40</sup> This response, moreover, sometimes ignites a public struggle against public figures or organizations.<sup>41</sup>

Palestinian women also utilize traditional behaviors as part of a political struggle. Abu-Baker argues that Palestinian Arab women dealing with local political leadership use an approach they refer to as “pragmatic” to alter their status. Palestinian women look for ways acceptable to their society to express their desire for change. This approach, claims Abu-Baker, attempts to influence the status of women via cooperation with the existing social

<sup>40</sup>Lebel and Ronel (2006).

<sup>41</sup>Lebel and Ronel (2005).

structure and its adaptation to the present needs of the society (Abu-Baker 1998).

The third subject addressed in this chapter is the transformation of personal bereavement into collective bereavement and the various ways in which men or women cope with the issue of sacrifice. The men, as we have seen, view their personal sacrifice as a sacrifice for the homeland and the nation. Women, too, see in their child's death a type of sacrifice for the homeland and for God, but at the same time express a quiet protest against this view. Notably, again, the mothers who dared to express more serious protest were those who had lost two sons, not one.

According meaning to the death of the child, understanding it as part of a personal sacrifice made for the benefit of everyone, gives the death existential significance, whether on the individual or the social-national plane. This approach includes an effort to preserve and cultivate the bereavement of the parents as an inseparable part of the national-collective identity and memory.<sup>42</sup> This societal outlook has led to the development of the notion of a "culture of the shaheed," expressing the heroic significance that Palestinian society accords to the loss of its boys and girls in the context of the national struggle. The heroic outlook views the death of the children as a sacrifice by the parents for the continued existence of the society and the nation.

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<sup>42</sup>Bar-Tur and Milkinson (2000 [Hebrew]).



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## Part Three: Coping with Bereavement in the Religious, Cultural and Societal Contexts—How Religion and Culture Shape Bereavement

How do various social categories influence the dynamics of bereavement and the ways in which the bereaved cope with their loss? To what extent do people behave according to their religious worldview and how much is this view influenced by social rules and norms? Is there a difference between women and men in terms of their religious views on death and, if so, how is this manifest in the way they cope with bereavement?

I suggest that bereavement, mourning and the experience of loss are dependent on culture, religion, nationalist outlook and gender, and hence when we address these subjects we must understand the profound connections among them and the ways in which those connections shape the character of the mourning process in a given society.

The three categories at the heart of this chapter—gender, religion, and culture—are addressed here in terms of their social aspect. Their long-term ability to preserve a distinct form is a product of an ongoing process of social construction during which they are continually changing, and each of the three categories influences the others and is influenced by them.<sup>1</sup>

Although mourning is a universal experience, with general outlines and characteristics shared by diverse people,<sup>2</sup> it molds itself to fit the religious

<sup>1</sup>Herzog (2014).

<sup>2</sup>Doka (1989).

and social context in which it is happening. This religious-social context has many practical as well as theoretical implications that must be taken into account if we wish to attain an in-depth understanding of the processes of bereavement and mourning in Palestinian society.

A renewed scholarly understanding of social categories and scrutiny of the interrelations between them regarding bereavement and mourning suggest a new perspective, wherein these social categories develop, build up and challenge one another in the discourse of bereavement and mourning in Palestinian society. The empirical ground from which I seek to examine this theoretical position is Palestinian society in the occupied territories.

Religion and culture are two important sources of support aiding the individual and the family in coping with bereavement. They are helpful in a process of formulating a logic that can give meaning to the loss. The fear of death, one of the keys to understanding the entire enterprise of philosophy and theology and indeed all of human thought, is deeply foundational in the shaping of religions.<sup>3</sup>

The writing about death in Islamic literature is diverse and colorful, but it mainly deals with practical aspects of death like the laws of burial, mourning, and purification, fixing the time of death and so on. The Islamic approach concerns itself inter alia with questions of immortality, i.e., with what awaits a person after his death. Islam treats death as a certainty. Like the other monotheistic religions and in contrast to the pre-Islamic Arab view, Islam adopted the view that death brings an end only to one's earthly life. Death is inevitable—"every *soul shall have a taste of death, and return to me*" (Surat al-Hadid, Verse 29); it cannot be avoided: "*wherever you are, death will find you, even though you find tall, strong towers*" (Surat al-Nisa', Verse 78).

Islam relates to three components comprising the essential nature of a human being: body, spirit and soul. The connection between the body, the spirit and the soul is described with reference to "electricity" or the energy that the soul instills in the human body. When the energy ceases, the light goes out, the body stops functioning and life ends.<sup>4</sup>

In Islam, the belief is that life begins at birth and ends at death, as noted in the Qur'an: "*On the earth you shall live, and there you shall die*" (Surat

<sup>3</sup>Martin and Doka (2000), Riches and Dawson (2000), and Yasien-Esmael and Rubin (2004).

<sup>4</sup>Hedayat (2006).

al-A'raf, Verse 24), and God's will appears in the verse "*No soul can die but with God's permission, and at a predetermined time*" (Surat ali-'Imran, Verse 145). Life in this world is seen as a period when a person is tested and is temporary. Death signifies an active process of the spirit's transition from the present, material world to the pure world of the spirit.<sup>5</sup>

In the Qur'an, God rules over the human circle of life, both in this world and in the next; He instills the breath of life and He is also the one who extinguishes it. In the Qur'an itself, there is no special treatment of death. It was subsequent theological and philosophical activity that created a clearer Muslim theology regarding everything connected with death.<sup>6</sup>

Death makes the social existence of those who have died much more tangible. Thus, ceremonies of death and burial, in which the dead are detached from the living, are one of the important channels of investigation of the cultural values shaping the lives of various societies. In many societies, ceremonies of parting from the dead are few and simple, while ceremonies of transitioning the deceased to the world of the dead, that is, preparing the body for burial, are longer and more complex.<sup>7</sup>

The Islamic concepts relating to death and to what follows it—such as the disintegration of the body versus the survival of the spirit and its passing into the world of the spirit—have been influenced by concepts common in the local society on the Arabian peninsula before the appearance of Islam. Nonetheless, Islam redefined the interactive relations between life and death and determined that life is sacred, since it is God who gives life to human beings.

According to Dwairy, Islam organizes nearly everything about a person's mode of living.<sup>8</sup> Islam provides a unique design for the manner in which death is interpreted and understood in Arab society. Islamic theology offered broad frameworks and schemata for coping, functionally and emotionally, with the loss of a loved one—including a typical system of beliefs detailing special ways of handling mourning and bereavement. Mourning

<sup>5</sup>Hedayat (2006).

<sup>6</sup>Yasien-Esmael and Rubin (2005).

<sup>7</sup>Hirsch (2005).

<sup>8</sup>Dwairy (1997 [Arabic]).

rituals are linked very closely to the religious beliefs surrounding death,<sup>9</sup> and Muslims believe in everlasting life after death.<sup>10</sup>

Burial rites in Islam have four stages, which are discussed extensively in the Qur'anic commentaries rather than in the Qur'an itself: washing the body, dressing it in burial garments, prayers during the funeral and the burial with the body face-down.<sup>11</sup>

It is customary to mourn the deceased for three days, in which relatives of the deceased are prohibited from wearing jewelry, changing their clothes or using scent. Furthermore, mourning rites are closely related to the belief in predestination—*al-qada' w'al-kadr* (an absolute faith in destiny and the will of God).<sup>12</sup> Islam held that a person's fate in the world to come is subject to God's mercy and is determined by his deeds during his corporeal lifetime.<sup>13</sup> These deeds are what determine a person's place in the next life—whether his fate will be the hellfire that awaits a heretic, or the paradise that awaits the deserving such as a shaheed.

The suicide attacks carried out during the Al-Aqsa Intifada had a great many victims, and turned the idea of a shaheed into a feared and evil symbol in Western society in general and in Israeli society in particular. Hence the importance of going deeper into Islam to understand the various meanings of the shaheed concept so as to see the development of the idea and the changes it underwent, in order to broaden our understanding of the culture of the shaheed, its significance and its influence in the shaping the culture of death and its associated rituals in Palestinian society.

## THE SHAHEED AND HIS RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE: DEATH AS REBIRTH

The shaheed is an ancient idea in the Muslim faith, originating with the casualties who have fallen sanctifying the name of Allah.<sup>14</sup> The word shaheed itself is the Arabic word for martyr; its literal meaning is "witness." In the Qur'an, it appears with this meaning and also denotes one of the

<sup>9</sup>Yasien-Esmael and Rubin (2005).

<sup>10</sup>Klingman (1998 [Hebrew]).

<sup>11</sup>El-Aswad (1987) and Yasien-Esmael and Rubin (2005).

<sup>12</sup>Al-Krenawi et al. (2001–2002) and Yasien-Esmael and Rubin (2005).

<sup>13</sup>Hirsch (2005 [Hebrew]) and Yasien-Esmael and Rubin (2005).

<sup>14</sup>Al-Krenawi (1996) and Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2001).

names of God. Muslim scholars give different explanations as to how this meaning emerged from the verb “shahad” (was a witness, bore witness). It is said, for example, that the martyr is called a shaheed because God and his angels were witnesses to the fact that that person deserved a place in paradise, and also because when the time comes, God will testify that the intentions of the shaheed were good and pure. Another interpretation holds that the use of the word “shaheed” as martyr is post-Qur’anic—a translation of the Greek word *martyr*, equivalent to the Syriac *sabada*, a word used by Christians to indicate one who died a martyr’s death.

The reward for those who fell in battle for the sake of God is noted explicitly in the Qur’an: “Do not think of those who fall in the cause of God as dead. They live, and receive their reward from their Master... they have no fear and no sorrow” (Surat ali-’Imran, Verses 169–170). The Qur’an speaks about a warrior who fell in battle and the term used in the medieval literature to describe such warriors was *shuhada al-maraka*—meaning “those martyred in battle.” They were also called *shuhada al-dunya w’al-’akhra*—meaning “martyrs in this world and the next.” This is evidently the oldest type of martyrdom found in Islam.<sup>15</sup> This type of shaheed is considered highly esteemed and belongs to the “highest” and most respected group. The shaheed is buried in his clothes without prayers for his soul, because all of his sins are forgiven in advance and his entry into paradise is assured. In the words of the Qur’an: “And whoso fights in the cause of Allah, whether he is slain or victorious, to him we shall give great reward” (Surat al-Nisa’, Verse 74).<sup>16</sup> Another division that exists among religious Muslims (al-’Ulmaa) relates to the two other types of shaheed. The first of these is the *shuhada al-’akbra*, meaning “martyrs in the world to come,” whose fate is not determined in this world (referring to the way their bodies are treated after death), but whose fate in the world to come will be as the shaheed’s. In this category of shaheed are included: (1) one who dies of an epidemic; (2) one who drowns; (3) one who dies of a severe illness; (4) a woman who dies in childbirth; (5) one who dies in a fire; (6) one who dies due to a natural disaster or the collapse of a building; (7) one who is killed following a struggle for his family’s honor; (8) one who is killed in a struggle to protect his property and money.

<sup>15</sup> Kolberg (1998 [Hebrew]).

<sup>16</sup> Rothenberg (2008 [Hebrew]) and Aljabrini (1998).



A second type is the *shuhada al-dunya*, meaning “martyrs in this world”; this refers to someone who fell during the fighting but is not a Muslim. From the standpoint of how his body is cared for, the standing of such a martyr in this world is as a shaheed’s, but in the world to come his standing is not as a shaheed’s.<sup>17</sup> In the course of the Palestinian national struggle, the theme of self-sacrifice in Islam was joined all along the way with the theme of the Palestinian national sacrifice, and created a new ideal of death in Palestinian society. This ideal went through many changes and processes of transformation in the course of giving rise to a Palestinian ethos of sacrifice.

### THE PALESTINIAN IDEAL OF DEATH—THE ETHOS OF SACRIFICE

From 1948 until the Al-Aqsa Intifada, Palestinian society evidenced not a few changes of a political nature. An important point in this series of changes was the sense of an utter defeat of the Arab nations in the Six-Day War of 1967. This feeling led to the collapse of the pan-Arab national vision,<sup>18</sup> a vision that was then replaced with religious outlooks. The Palestinian national discourse underwent, as a result, a process of Islamization as the Islamic discourse underwent a process of nationalization. This accelerated the formulation of a national collective and prepared it for the struggle for independence.

The first Intifada and the Al-Aqsa Intifada helped these religious outlooks penetrate Palestinian society, concurrent with processes taking place in the Arab-Muslim world, and were instrumental in formulating a new strategy to deal with the painful political reality and with issues to which the loss of 1967 had given rise. This way of coping involved a new definition of the concept of the shaheed as one who fell in battle for the homeland.<sup>19</sup> In the Palestinian national discourse, the shaheed undergoes an accelerated process of nationalization from a shaheed for Allah (*fi sabeel Allah*) to a shaheed for the revolution (*fidaa*). Those involved in formulating this

<sup>17</sup> Aljuabra (1993 [Arabic]).

<sup>18</sup> Pan-Arabism (*al-wahda al-arabiyya*) was an approach calling for political, social and economic unity among the Arab peoples and nations in the Middle East and North Africa. This term has a deep connection with the Arab nationalist idea. Pan-Arabism was characterized by a secular, socialist and anti-colonialist worldview.

<sup>19</sup> Sivan (1986 [Hebrew]) and Tzorf (2004 [Hebrew]).

discourse have woven together the theme of revolutionary national sacrifice and the theme of Islamic self-sacrifice.<sup>20</sup>

Precisely this process came through clearly in one of the interviews I conducted for this study. I met with a bereaved father who was among the more outstanding leaders of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in the Bethlehem area. The father, who had been bereaved relatively recently, used the concept of a shaheed frequently during the interview, referring to his son who at the age of 13 had fallen during a demonstration at the height of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. As the interview proceeded, I found myself preoccupied with the question of how a bereaved father who belongs to one of the secular factions, a socialist faction whose members are even viewed as radical leftists in Palestinian society, can make use of a religious concept like that of the shaheed. How can he live with the emotional and conceptual dissonance involved? I was surprised by his reply when I asked this question; smiling sadly he said:

Look, I'm still a secular person and even a socialist. Still, faith in the martyrdom of my son as a shaheed is meaningful for me and my family. It allows us to hope that my son fell for some lofty goal, and instills in me the hope that my son has earned everlasting life. For according to our beliefs, the shaheeds are living. You know the verse that says, "Do not think of those who fall in the cause of God as dead. They live, and receive their reward from their Master... they have no fear and no sorrow" (Surat ali-'Imran, Verses 169-170). I find comfort knowing that he is alive somewhere, sees us, protects us and watches over us.

Along with the pain of the families that suffered this traumatic loss of a child, the Al-Aqsa Intifada also created a new sociocultural reality that offered a way of coping with grief through an idealization of the child's death and the idea of the shaheed, involving the belief that a shaheed's death is in some way useful. Such a death bestows honor on his parents, and his death as a shaheed brings honor and status to the deceased as well as to his parents.

The blurring of the boundaries between the national discourse and the religious discourse, and the appropriating of the shaheed concept as a mark of prestige that idealizes the image of the dead child, were expressed in that same father's story when he told me that, during the Lebanon war of 1982,

<sup>20</sup>Tzorff (2004 [Hebrew]).

when the Civil Administration building in Sur (Tyre) collapsed, the Popular Front claimed that the explosives-laden car that caused the explosion and collapse of the building was driven by a young fighter belonging to their organization; the Popular Front called the young man a shaheed. In response, the Palestinian branch of what was then the Muslim Brotherhood issued an announcement in which they tried to explain to the people of the Popular Front why the young man could not have been considered, religiously, a shaheed but only a suicide.

Here is that part of our conversation:

*Father:* In response to that, we decided to educate them our way.

*MM:* What is your way?

*Father:* To educate them at that time meant to put them into an isolated apartment in Bethlehem and beat them.

*MM:* And did that help?

*Father:* It helped for a little while. We didn't stop with education; we also put out an announcement in which we responded to those arguments. I even remember what the announcement said.

He looked at his wife and then the two of them recited together, in Arabic:

*Why, why, why, tell me why.*

*He asked the Muslim Brotherhood*

*who said that the young man who fell in West Beirut was not a shaheed.*

*In a proclamation, they disparaged the Popular Front.*

*Oh, my brother in Islam, that's more than enough; you have destroyed the West Bank and Gaza.*

*Wait for the shouts of joy they are preparing for you in the Marxist manner.*

*Oh my brother in Islam, who scorns civilization, the physician and the Guevara...<sup>21</sup>*

This story demonstrates the complexity of recent political and religious processes in Palestinian society. A Marxist-socialist secular organization like the PFLP borrows some of its political concepts from the world of religion and uses them to advance its political goals. This kind of process is evidence

<sup>21</sup>The *physician* is a reference to the highly educated Dr. George Habash, who led the PFLP from 1967 until 2000; the same word (*hakim*) in Arabic means both a wise man and a doctor. The *Guevara*, after Che Guevara, is a reference to Mohammed al Aswad, known as Guevara al-Ghazi (the Guevara of Gaza), who was killed in Gaza and became a symbol of the revolution.

of the beginning of the desire to build an unassailable myth, a myth of everlasting life—that the dead are alive—scribed to the shaheed; and it expresses the will to triumph over the intolerable and unwanted reality. Despite the deeply anti-religious, Marxist-socialist outlook on which the vision of the PFLP is based, during the 1980s the organization sought for support in the Qur'an rather than in Marx. In my opinion, martyrdom is the ultimate response enlisted by the Palestinian right and left, by the religious and the secular, on behalf of the Palestinian national struggle. In martyrdom there is something that cannot be vanquished. The martyr defeats death and lives forever. Therein the one who has sacrificed himself experiences death as something purely symbolic, while gaining eternal life.

The symbolic suspension of death or elimination of the experience of death is always crucial for the existence of a society in formation, fighting for its territory and seeking to earmark for its sons an ethos of power, of life, that will transform the impossible into the possible.<sup>22</sup> The sociologist of mythology Georges Sorel was of the opinion that the inculcating of a will to sacrifice—heroic and spontaneous—is made possible by a myth or by great faith that can energize a person to act; for Sorel, it was the “myth of the general strike.” It must lead a person to demonstrate bravery and sacrifice, and hence the person must be tested as a worker, an agent and a player in the process.<sup>23</sup>

### SACRIFICE ON THE ALTAR OF THE NATION

Many students of religion and anthropology have attempted to understand the idea of sacrifice. Why do people sacrifice? How do they sacrifice? Some researchers have addressed sacrifice as a gift expressing spontaneous thanks; others have emphasized the guilt humans sometimes feel for having taken away Nature's fruits.<sup>24</sup>

In his pioneering study of sacrifice, Marcel Mauss emphasized the reciprocal economic relationship created when a sacrifice is made. They saw the sacrifice as part of an economic relationship between gods and man: this relationship involves reciprocity and a belief that the compensation for sacrifice is that the one making it will be entitled to a reward from the relevant

<sup>22</sup>Zartal (2002 [Hebrew]).

<sup>23</sup>Sternhal (1992 [Hebrew]).

<sup>24</sup>Neria (2011 [Hebrew]).

god or the gods. In his subsequent writing, Mauss further develops this view, arguing that even if the gift is given willingly and without legal or moral obligation, it is not given for free. There is no attempt to control the god; rather, this is about the creation of an economic relationship with the god: the one sacrificing expects that the god will reward him for his generosity.<sup>25</sup>

If we examine more deeply the theories attempting to provide an explanation for the essential meaning of sacrifice on the part of humans, we can see that none of the theories offered covers all types of sacrifice known to us. Arguably, the sociological and anthropological treatment of the phenomenon of sacrifice has focused more on the psychology of the one sacrificing and less on that which is sacrificed. This reflects an anthropocentric and essentially secular approach that cannot provide a broad, in-depth explanation for the “doctrine of sacrifice.”

Islam, like the other monotheistic religions, involves demands for sacrifice. In the philosophical dimension, Islam dealt with sacrifice through the story of the binding (of Ishmael by Abraham). Clearly this philosophical discussion developed over the years, against the backdrop of the social and political reality in which it arose. The types of sacrifice portrayed in Islam are material sacrifices, i.e., the sacrifice of money or property for the sake of God, and the loftier sacrifice that consists in sacrificing oneself for God. The duty of self-sacrifice is broad and varied, and the shaheed concept is the most common type in that category.

Ideas of sacrifice and of the shaheed in Palestinian society have undergone successive alterations in recent decades. During the 1920s, the Palestinian fighters were known as *thuwar*: revolutionaries. This idea of the revolutionary originates in the conceptual aspirations of the modern national state and in the conceptualization that developed around the rise of national movements and the idea of the nation-state in Europe. The concept found its way into the Arab world and the Middle East with the emergence of the Arab national movement.<sup>26</sup>

The Palestinian national movement,<sup>27</sup> an offshoot of the broader Arab national movement, likewise adopted this idea to address the needs of its

<sup>25</sup> Mosse (1990).

<sup>26</sup> The Arab national movement was conspicuous for a pan-Arab outlook and began developing along with the Young Turk revolution in 1908.

<sup>27</sup> The “Palestinian national movement” is an inclusive name for all the Palestinian streams that grew out of the Arab national movement. The movement became active at the beginning

national struggle, and the concept of al-thawra (the revolution) attached itself to the Palestinian revolution that erupted openly in April 1936 against the British mandatory regime. The Palestinian challenge to the British Mandate in Palestine, starting in the 1920s, birthed a new generation of revolutionaries to fight for the revolution.<sup>28</sup>

The revolutionaries who fell in the cause of the homeland have been granted a status equivalent to that of the shaheeds, and their place in paradise is assured. Having fallen on the battlefield, they are seen as shaheeds in the sense of having earned their standing both in this world and in the next (*shuhada al-dunya w'al ukbra*).<sup>29</sup> *Thawra hatta al-nasr* (“revolution until the victory”) was the slogan with which the Palestinian liberation movement known as Fatah<sup>30</sup> emerged onto the stage of history and in its name sought to lead the Palestinian people and bring far-reaching changes in its consciousness, its behavior and its destiny.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the drastic changes did not stop there, but proceeded to develop the concept of the shaheed—a new conceptual turning point. The Palestinian fighters were called *fedaiyoon*—those who risk their lives. The concept of feda'i originates with the word *fidaa*, meaning a sacrifice of property or self-sacrifice for a cause.<sup>32</sup> The word *fidaa* is also connected with the story of the binding of Ishmael.

of the twentieth century in a quest for self-determination and independence for the Palestinian people. The movement draws its ideology from the idea of nationalism.

<sup>28</sup>Kabaha and Sarhan (2009 [Arabic]).

<sup>29</sup>Kolberg (1998 [Hebrew]).

<sup>30</sup>The Fatah movement's name is a reverse acronym, from the words *harakat tabrir falastin* (organization for the liberation of Palestine). This movement and its offshoots have ever since played a central role in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and in the Palestinian people's struggle for liberation. The movement was founded in 1959 and its outlook relies on the ideology of the Palestinian national movement.

<sup>31</sup>Melstein (2005 [Hebrew]).

<sup>32</sup>Lisan Alarab (2010 [Arabic]).

In the Muslim faith tradition, God commanded Ibrahim, who was poised to bind his son Isma'il,<sup>33</sup> to ransom him with a worthy animal sacrifice—as the alternate who ascends:

My son, I have seen in a dream that I will offer you up as a sacrifice... he said, "O my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you, so see what you think." He said, "O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, of the steadfast." And when they had both submitted and he put him down upon his forehead, We called to him, "O Abraham, You have fulfilled the vision." Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good. Indeed, this was the clear trial. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice. (Surat al-Saffat, Verse 37:102–107)

Without going too far into a broad psycho-theological analysis, the use of the concept of the feda'i shows that the story of the binding comprised a conceptual and ideational aspiration for the Palestinian revolution in the 1950s, and became even more acute and powerful in the 1960s with the rise of the Fatah movement. In the Palestinian act of binding, it appears that the one offering up the sacrifice (the revolution—the homeland) and the one sacrificed (the feda'i) are at the foundations of the sacrificial process in which the feda'i sacrifices himself on the altar of the nation.

Palestinian poet and artist Mahmoud Darwish describes this as the *sacrifice ascending* in his poem *The Offering*<sup>34</sup>:

<sup>33</sup>In the Muslim tradition, Ibrahim is the founder of the ancient monotheistic religion of the Arab land, al-hanifiya (monotheism). This religion was known in the language of the Arabs as "the law of Ibrahim." An expression of this is found in the Qur'anic verse "Ibrahim was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but a simple monotheist with God and was not among the ??? מַשְׁתַּפִּיִּים" [al-'Imran, Verse 3]. Ibrahim, together with his son Isma'il, restore the Ka'aba, an old temple in Mecca, as the house of Allah. In this view, Isma'il was the real heir of Ibrahim (Abraham), whence originated the genealogy of the northern Arabian tribes. The Muslim tradition also holds that the story of the binding took place in Mecca at the Ka'aba, and some of the Muslim commentators believe that the bound son was Isma'il and not Isaac. The discussion surrounding the identity of the bound son was in dispute among Muslim religious experts over the years, and was decided in the tenth century AD by al-Tabari, among the outstanding historians and interpreters of the Qur'an, who ruled that the bound son was Isma'il and not Isaac.

<sup>34</sup>The poem *The Offering* by Mahmoud Darwish opens the issue of the Palestinian cultural magazine *Al-Carmel* published in the winter of 2001 during the Al-Aqsa Intifada. The entire issue was devoted to the connection between literary and artistic works and the Al-Aqsa Intifada. The English translation here is based on the one by Daniel Roters, retrieved at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtSPJ4wEHRa>.

*Forward, come forward, you alone.  
The high priests around you await God's will, so ascend  
O offering towards the stone altar, O lamb  
Of sacrifice, our sacrifice... ascend strong.*

The Palestinian feda'i sacrifices, first of all, himself. He who sacrifices has an experience of death, as part of which the high priests, as Darwish puts it, offer him up; he sacrifices but actually he is the offering, the sacrificed. The feda'i embodies the sacrifice, both Ibrahim's and Isma'il's, the binder and the bound on the altar of the nation.

The *fedaiyoon* who died on the battlefield were considered shaheeds whose reward awaited them with their Master. Jacques Derrida says that the profound apprehension of self-sacrifice cannot be built on the economic relationship presented by Mauss because in the case we are dealing with, the one who sacrifices is no longer there to receive his "benefits"; it is an altruistic sacrifice and is based on deep faith in God.<sup>35</sup> I disagree with this argument, for two reasons. The first is that most of the fedaiyoon whose intent was to sacrifice themselves were motivated by nationalistic factors, not religious. Most of the Palestinian resistance movements until the late 1980s defined themselves as secular movements, and some even adopted a Marxist-socialist worldview. The second reason is the new array of rewards that has made its way into the Palestinian national struggle through the adoption of the term *shaheed*. The Qur'anic verse from Surat al-Taubah (Repentance) very openly and explicitly expresses the economic relationship between God and man:

God has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties in exchange for Paradise. They fight in God's way, and they kill and get killed. It is a promise binding on Him in the Torah, and the Gospel, and the Quran. And who is more true to his promise than God. So rejoice in making such an exchange. (Surat al-Taubah, Verse 111)

In this verse, God offers a deal to his believers: every type of sacrifice has its compensation. When Muslims sacrifice themselves, they rely on this system of rewards. The shaheed concept itself has its origins in this outlook of a sacrifice for God and a concomitant reward.

<sup>35</sup>Derrida et al. (2013 [Hebrew]).



The 1980s brought new winds of change. The Iranian revolution, the Iran–Iraq war and the 1982 war in Lebanon reshaped the shaheed concept in the Arab world and there were substantial changes in its content. The shaheed idea was linked with holiness while also undergoing a process of nationalization. Fatwa (religious law) rulings dealing with the shaheed concept and its reward in paradise enjoyed renewed attention and, hundreds of years after Ibn Jawziah and al-Asfahani, who dealt with this concept and its significance, the shaheed idea found its way into modern theological literature.<sup>36</sup> The suicide bomber phenomenon intensified the theological interest in the shaheed concept. Hatina, for example, documented Fatwa opinions supporting the shaheed and promising him the pleasures of paradise, foremost among them the prospect of spending time with seventy virgins.<sup>37</sup>

The insertion of the religious component (the shaheed) into the political struggle (the Intifada) is a strategy of a society dealing with loss and pain. The promise of eternal life to those who are killed, and their sanctification, were a tool to enlist and retain support for a society at war. George Mosse describes this process as the creation of a new civil religion in the national state of the early twentieth century. “Sacrificing the sons” continued to justify itself as part of the struggle and the war for the homeland.<sup>38</sup>

Palestinian society has its own unique characteristics as a society in a longstanding national struggle for its independence. This struggle has made collective loss an inseparable part of daily life, and led to the nationalization of loss and its transformation into a collective event. I would argue also that the national-collective mourning has fulfilled an important role in shaping the nature of Palestinian parental bereavement. Religion, nationality and gender all have a central role in shaping the character of this parental bereavement and the ways used to cope with it.

Encouraging the use of religion as an instrument for dealing with bereavement led not only to the blurring of the differences between the secular streams and the religious streams in Palestinian society, but also to a blurring of gender differences, at least outwardly, so there was a perceptible moderation in the emotional responses of women and their behavior

<sup>36</sup>Rothenberg (2008 [Hebrew]).

<sup>37</sup>Hatina (2006 [Hebrew]).

<sup>38</sup>Mosse (1993).

drew closer to the masculine patterns of bereavement. The research findings show that religion was a significant, central, and enduring factor for these Palestinian parents. Both fathers and mothers reported relating to religion as a resource that shaped the nature and manner of their coping with their loss, both on the individual plane and on the collective level. The exalted status of the shaheed in God's eyes is the core support relied on by all the parents, without exception, as they grieve. This chapter presents the content of three typical aspects of this support: the power of faith that helped the fathers and mothers deal with their bereavement; the religious significance of the idea of the shaheed for these Palestinian parents; and the social support for, and cultivation of, the notion of "parents of a shaheed."

### FAITH AS SUPPORT: THE STRENGTH PARENTS DRAW FROM GOD AND RELIGION

Religion and culture organize systems of familiar ideas defining distinct patterns of behavior and beliefs, values and norms about death. They determine the roles that an individual plays based on his belonging to certain social groups or to a given gender.

For these Palestinian parents, God and religion are of major significance in their lives and hence in their mourning, and greatly helped them to deal with their trauma, pain and grief. Most of the parents spoke of the power of faith as a resource. Studies have shown that faith in God aids bereaved parents to comprehend their loss as something meaningful rather than happenstance.<sup>39</sup> Religion is a tool the parents find helpful in dealing with death; their faith in God, as the one who controls life and death, equips them to come to terms with their traumatic loss.<sup>40</sup>

The research literature shows that bereaved parents who are more religious show lower levels of anxiety, grief, anger and guilt as compared with less religious parents. The Muslim religious faith reduces the believer's pain by bestowing meaning on the loss—the death as a shaheed.<sup>41</sup> This research was substantiated by many of the parents in the present study, who noted that without faith and without God's mercy, they would not have survived the loss. It was God, they felt, who had imbued them with the strength

<sup>39</sup>Bohanon (1991), Davis and Nolen-Hoeksema (2001), and Parappully et al. (2002).

<sup>40</sup>Parappully et al. (2002).

<sup>41</sup>Al-Krenawi et al. (2001–2002).

and the patience to keep going. They explain that it is God who decides how much to help them to deal with their personal loss. A large proportion of the interviewees said that they find in the Qur'an and in their religion a pillar of strength that sustains them through their distress.

Explaining the power of religion as a support, one of the mothers said:

Look, at first it was very hard. During that period, a devout woman would come to see me regularly – a preacher. She strengthened me greatly through the Qur'an and religion, and thus my faith in religion got stronger. I had a lot of faith in her. You know, however much we read and go deeply into religion, we still don't know anything. She told us a lot, a lot about the position of a shaheed in heaven. This made me calmer, and a part of me was happy for him, for his having achieved this status, because the shaheed is guaranteed to go to heaven and things like that... it made me feel better.

One father of a shaheed described how religion had lent him strength and given him an anchor:

*Sometimes, when life just seems too cruel to me, I go into my room, I pray, I sit on the prayer rug and read the Qur'an. This gives me a sense of relief. Something inside me is calmed. My chest relaxes, and that choking feeling subsides. Subhan Allah [Hallelujah]. He brings the sorrow, but he also gives the strength to cope with it.*

Also conspicuous was a profound belief in God and in fate (*al-qada' w'al-qadr*). This is an inseparable part of the faith of every devout Muslim—the belief that we are fated to die as God decrees, and that we have no control over it. These Palestinian parents relied on that worldview, which is rooted in Islamic texts, particularly the Qur'an, which teaches that every person has his own fate and that the hour of his death is fixed on the day he is born, and that it is impossible to dispute or appeal because these things are as God has decreed them. Such faith puts the responsibility for life and death with God; hence a violent death, or death as a shaheed, are as God wills. Many of the parents found that this belief eased their grief and helped them accept God's will, which cannot be argued with. As one father put it:

There is no appeal against the word of God. As a man who believes in fate (*al-qada' w'al-qadr*), I accept God's will. It doesn't matter what I might have done, his fate was to die in that manner on that day and at that hour. I accept the will of God.

Religious texts also have a central and significant place in how the Palestinian parents cope with their traumatic loss. Most of the parents relate to the Qur'an as a resource that affords them the strength and the capacity to deal with their grief and their loss. For them, the Qur'anic texts, in both the way their content relates to the shaheed and the frequency with which they are recited, provide a sense of inner calm, a serenity that nothing else can provide. For these parents, especially in their darkest hours when they find it hard to bear the terrible pain that has befallen them, the Qur'an is an important and meaningful resource. Many parents describe how religion and the Qur'anic text came to be their only comfort in their insupportable grief. They read at length from the Qur'an when they visited their son's grave and also when they were terribly lonely, especially during the first months after the loss.

This chapter points to the place of religion and faith in God as something to which the Palestinian parents in this study turned for help. The Qur'anic text itself and the deeply ingrained concept of the shaheed play an important role in investing their child's death with meaning and assuring him an exalted status and this was a source of great relief to many of the bereaved parents, irrespective of gender. Palestinian society is defined as a traditional society. A traditional society is one which relies on religion and integrates a religious worldview with the social and political processes occurring in that society. The inability of these parents to express their anger and frustration with God, given the religious proscription of such expression, leads them to hold fast to their religious faith, which ascribes such a lofty and special status to the shaheed and his parents as chosen by God to cope with the terrible reality of such a loss. The findings of my research show very emphatically the centrality and significance of religious faith as a way of coping with traumatic loss, especially this kind of loss—the death of a shaheed.

In the discussions of faith and its significance for these bereaved parents, no differences came to light between the group of fathers and the group of mothers. Both groups described the power of faith in giving them strength to deal with their pain and distress. Many parents said that their faith was almost the only thing that could comfort and calm them. Leaving to God the responsibility for their child's death made things easier for the bereaved families as they tried to cope with the loss and imbue it with meaning.

The mother of one shaheed expressed in her own words this deep faith in God and in his will:

I said ‘Praise the Lord,’ whatever God has decreed is good. We praise that he died as a shaheed and not in some other way that is not honored. Nothing is more precious than the will of the Creator (*mish aghla min illi khalako*). Martyrdom is at a very high and exalted level next to God, and the household chosen or the child chosen must be special in order to become a shaheed. God chooses those whom he loves. Not every child is chosen to be a shaheed. We don’t have many children, only six, we said Praise be to God, they are a gift for life. But what belongs to you, belongs to you, and what does not – belongs to God.

A father explained his own loss this way:

I said to my wife, say thanks be to God, God loves us and has chosen us to be the parents of a shaheed. We must be proud of our son and happy for him. I told her that our son could take seventy people from his family to paradise with him. He will enter paradise without any accounting and without any suffering.

### THE SHAHEED AND HIS RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE: DEATH AS REBIRTH

As someone who has sacrificed his life for his homeland and his people, the shaheed is an exemplary figure in Palestinian society. The governing socio-religious worldview holds that the shaheed dies only temporarily, because he will live ever after in paradise—a view which obviates any need to express sorrow or grief for the shaheed. In my opinion, this is intended to protect the bereaved parents from the distress that would be expected to develop following the traumatic loss that they have experienced. Giladi studied the phenomenon of the death of children in Muslim society and parents’ responses to the loss of their child. He examined the emotional responses and the influence of religious attitudes on the way parents cope with the loss, noting the cultural and religious outlook of Islam regarding one who sacrifices his life for his religion and his homeland—the shaheed. According to Giladi, faith helps many parents to accept their child’s death as a death that occurred for the benefit of a lofty, righteous, and highly significant goal. The political and national context diminishes the weight of their loss and their grief.

In Islam, the shaheeds are considered pure, and eternal life in paradise is guaranteed to them. Arguably, based on the research findings, the religious system is highly influential in shaping the society's connection with the shaheed and the manner in which the shaheed's parents cope emotionally with his death. Palestinian parents in this study find comfort in these beliefs and, moreover, most of the mothers and some of the fathers mentioned concrete perceptions and signs indicating that the shaheed is not dead but alive. The parents said that the loss of a child in this way is preferable to death under other circumstances such as illness, traffic accidents, suicide or drowning, and they mentioned the honor and respect attached to this status as something not many people achieve. During the interviews, many parents compared this manner of death with death occurring in other ways. In all of the interviews, the Qur'an was cited as the main source on which the parents rely in shaping this worldview, especially the verse "Do not think of those who fall in the cause of God as dead. They live, and receive their reward from their Master... they have no fear and no sorrow" (Surat Ali-'Imran, Verses 169–170). This verse provided the parents with important proof that death as a shaheed is a special kind of death, and that the shaheed's place is alongside God, in paradise.

The assimilation of the shaheed concept into the Palestinian national struggle, and the creation of the religious and national meanings connected with the shaheed's sacrifice, enabled these parents to feel, indeed to know, that their loved one had been sacrificed for a lofty goal on the altar of the nation and of God. Many saw in their child's death as a shaheed a mark of prestige that not every parent achieves. One can see in this process an attempt to channel the feelings of sadness and grief into an acceptance of the loss and an understanding of it as a sacrifice on behalf of the national and the collective, out of a deep belief in the will of God and in fate.<sup>42</sup>

Klass, who studied a group of bereaved parents not long after their loss, emphasized that their religious/spiritual faith enabled them to cope with the pain and sorrow, and evoked positive feelings as they dealt over time with feelings of helplessness, sadness and despair.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Al-Krenawi (1996) and Yasien-Esmael and Rubin (2004).

<sup>43</sup>Klass (1993).

DEVELOPMENT AND CULTIVATION OF THE CONCEPT  
OF THE “PARENTS OF A SHAHEED”—*AHALI*  
*AL-SHUHADA*—IN THE CONTEXT OF SACRIFICE  
AND BEREAVEMENT

Living in the perpetual shadow of war transforms bereavement from a one-time, extremely traumatic event into an ongoing element in the everyday Palestinian reality. This situation fosters an atmosphere of tremendous uncertainty.<sup>44</sup> The myth of the fallen in Palestinian society is based on universal models of “exemplary masculinity” on the one hand, and on the adoption of a religious worldview on the other. The link between the political and the religious have created a Palestinian mythology of bereavement that encompasses the family members of the fallen, who join the larger circle of the bereaved national family. They bear a social obligation to serve as a kind of living commemoration of the shaheeds, and this gives broad legitimacy to the crushing grief of the bereaved parents while adding to the distinction of their stature. A similar process has taken place in Israeli society.<sup>45</sup>

These processes led to the development of collective representations in an attempt to accord meaning to the loss of a child in this war of survival; this, in fact, is how the link between individual mourning and national mourning came into being.<sup>46</sup> These same processes transformed the personal bereavement of Palestinian parents into collective bereavement, which in turn was employed to shape a national Palestinian memory. My research findings show that the collective mourning process relies on the national-religious worldview; the Palestinian public and its leadership have invested the grief of these parents with meaning, by means of the idea that they have now become parents of a shaheed, a status which in the eyes of their society lends prestige and a certain mystique to the parents of the children who died. This is the basis for the guarantee of a place in paradise for the shaheed and his parents.<sup>47</sup>

When national-political significance is accorded to the death of a child and that death is understood as part of a family’s personal sacrifice for

<sup>44</sup>Tamir (1993 [Hebrew]).

<sup>45</sup>Bilu and Witzum (1999 [Hebrew]).

<sup>46</sup>Malkinson and Bar-Tur (1999).

<sup>47</sup>Al-Krenawi et al. (2001–2002).

the collective, the child's death acquires an existential significance both on the personal plane and on the social and national plane. This social posture engendered the development of the concept of the "culture of the shaheed," expressing the heroic significance that Palestinian society grants to the loss of these boys and girls in the framework of the national struggle. This heroic perspective views the death of the children as a sacrifice on the part of the parents for the sake of the continued existence of the society and the nation. The literature notes that when the collective is facing stressful times, the individual feels more involved in the preservation and shaping of the group identity.<sup>48</sup> The impact of the loss of a child in these circumstances has been discussed in the research literature, where it is defined as a significant component in shaping the new identity of the parents as bereaved parents.<sup>49</sup>

The personal worldview of the bereaved Palestinian parents is of course influenced by the rules and norms of Palestinian society. Many researchers state that the bereaved parents are seen as a national symbol that their personal bereavement is understood as national bereavement, shared by everyone. There is in this outlook something of an attempt to preserve and cultivate the parents' bereavement as an inseparable part of the national-collective memory and identity.<sup>50</sup>

Again, bereavement in Palestinian society accords the parents of the shaheed a new national status, and they earn distinction and social prestige because of the death of their child.<sup>51</sup> My assumption is that the identity of these Palestinian parents has undergone changes on the national-civil plane after the killing of their child by the Israeli military, and on the national-social level after they have been accorded the status of parents of a shaheed.

As the sacrifice of these Palestinian parents has transformed them into "parents of a shaheed," the elevated stature thereby accorded to them includes respect for their sacrifice, a respect not accorded to parents who have lost a child under other circumstances. The meaning of this respect comes from the nationalist worldview that views such sacrifice as part of the continuing struggle for the existence of Palestinian society, alongside the

<sup>48</sup>Volkan (2001).

<sup>49</sup>See for example Harvey (2000) and Talbot (2002).

<sup>50</sup>Bar-Tur and Malkinson (2000 [Hebrew]).

<sup>51</sup>Tzorf (2004 [Hebrew]).



Islamic religious view that accords respect and a special stature to the shaheed and his parents in paradise. One of the fathers of a shaheed explained:

You know, in Palestinian society there is a very important and meaningful place for the shaheeds. Many people meet me on the street and tell me how much they envy me for my standing as the father of a shaheed. They tell me that the shaheed helps his parents in life and in death, meaning that he raises their morale while they are alive and brings them into paradise when they die. The society gives a lot of respect and appreciation, but the attitude on the part of the Palestinian authorities is not the same; there, things are different.

The bereaved parents view their loss as something that united them under the heading of “parents of a shaheed.” Many parents find a commonality in the special characteristics of this group of parents of a shaheed. They feel that the deaths of their children occurred under similar circumstances; they themselves subsequently underwent similar changes in their own identities; and then their society began to treat them in such a way as to create a common denominator and encourage the sense of a shared situation. Many parents reported similar feelings of sorrow and pain, similar ways of coping with their grief, similar difficulty in coping with daily life, and even similar outward characteristics like wearing clothing that is similar in color and style to that of other parents of a shaheed. One of the mothers described this as follows:

When we meet as mothers of a shaheed in forums all over Palestine, I tell myself, it’s incredible, as if we had known one another for years. We share so much, so very much. I don’t know if you have noticed, but we are immediately picked out – mothers of a shaheed. We can no longer enjoy life. The pain is the same pain, and we miss our children in the same way. Nothing seems worth doing.

The new status of the bereaved parents as parents of a shaheed has positioned them at the center of the national and cultural map. Many of the parents said that their new identity has a quality of celebrity, with the distinguished status and special mystique attaching to them in the wake of their loss. Many described their new honorific—“parents of a shaheed”—as having made them better known. Their society, they say, has been very supportive of and interested in them as parents who sacrificed their child for the nation and the homeland and for the shared struggle. Numerous people now want to be close to them, and with their new status they have

become a highly meaningful symbol in Palestinian society. One mother described the changes this way:

After [my child's] death, relations with people became even closer. I'll tell you, people care and they express interest in you and in what happened to you as the family of a shaheed. When I walk along the street, people point at us and say, that's the mother of a shaheed, that's the father of a shaheed. Yesterday I was sitting in the yard, and two really small children walked by our house and one of them pointed to the house and told the other one: "You see that house? That's the house of a shaheed." I said to myself, could they really know that? How? Seven years have passed since my son fell, but they know? The children in the [refugee] camp always tell one another: "We swear in the name of the shaheed..."

Then, too, the Palestinian leadership both in the territories and beyond, as well as the leaders of the Arab and Islamic world, have demonstrated ample support and sympathy for parents of the shaheeds. The parents spoke of the pride they felt when some of the Palestinian leadership in the territories and elsewhere in the Arab world supported them through visits during the mourning period or the pride that they felt deep in their hearts at all kinds of things people say privately and all kinds of declarations that are made publicly praising and glorifying their personal sacrifice. Notably, this feeling of support was typically evident in the initial period after the child's death, perhaps for a year or so. After that, evidently, such feelings waned, to be replaced gradually by feelings of frustration and disappointment in the Palestinian leadership, especially as the years passed.

Many of these parents raised the issue of the social expectations directed toward them as parents of a shaheed. The prestige they garnered and the mystique that developed around them dictated certain patterns of living and ways of behaving. Both directly and indirectly, the parents get the message that their behavior is expected to be restrained, balanced, ideal and even noble. They feel, however, that their duty is to behave nobly toward their lost child, not toward society at large or its leadership. Their duty as parents of a shaheed is to protect and continue to preserve the good name of the shaheed by adopting new rules of behavior. One father described his efforts in this regard:

The status we earned as "parents of a shaheed" obliges us to adhere to different rules of behavior. We can't harm the good name of the shaheed. This status demands openness to others, and acceptance of and respect for others:

behavior that the shaheed would be proud of. We can't allow ourselves to speak or behave in a way that would bring shame to the good name of the shaheed.

Another outstanding dynamic on the national plane is the transformation of the parents of a shaheed into a symbol of the Palestinian national struggle. The vast majority of these parents noted that their loss is not just their own personal loss but rather is a collective loss intended to help achieve the collective national aim of the Palestinian people. Most of the parents see their own sacrifice as part of the collective journey of sacrifice of the Palestinian people.

The parents note that Palestinian society has a major role in the shaping of this feeling. Palestinian society relates to a shaheed's parents as a meaningful and central symbol of the Palestinian national struggle. This attitude on the part of the wider society is understood as supportive and encouraging, and as granting broad legitimacy to the loss suffered by the bereaved parents. One of the fathers explained:

The homeland is part of us. Every people that has lived under occupation has rebelled. The Palestinians are not the first and won't be the last such case. Take the Vietnamese people, or many others in South America. Millions of people have sacrificed themselves and their children for their homeland. My loss is a drop in the ocean of sacrifice of Palestinian society. True, we are the parents of a shaheed and our son is a shaheed, but we are a part of an entire society that has sacrificed and is still sacrificing every day for its freedom.

The parents' new national identity as *parents of a shaheed* is influenced primarily by social processes and less so by individual processes. The new status and identity highlight the importance and centrality of the collective national identity. These Palestinian parents experienced a very traumatic and difficult event, but not in a vacuum: it happened while they were living in a society in which traumatic events are a real and demanding part of everyday life for everyone. That reality is an influential factor in the parents' damaged sense of coherence following their loss. They cannot help but focus more acutely on the national aspect of their evolving identity and status, in order to equip themselves with some kind of emotional defenses amid the traumatic and unstable reality that is Palestinian society in these times. The need to sharply focus on their new status as parents of a shaheed and to reinforce their Palestinian national identity have led to the transformation of the parents of a shaheed into part of the process of nationalizing

Palestinian loss as a whole. The Palestinian terms “family of a shaheed” and “parents of a shaheed” have also assumed a significant role in shaping public opinion on the political plane. A similar role is ascribed, for example, by Lebel and Ronel to bereaved Israeli parents. They argue that the role of Israeli bereaved parents was already fixed when the state was founded and is intended to influence political public opinion, support the military conscription of young people and imbue the military establishment with value and legitimacy. In both cases—the Israeli and the Palestinian—individual bereavement is co-opted for the benefit of collective national bereavement, which serves the political and national interests of each of these two societies.<sup>52</sup>

### SOCIAL SUPPORT

Social support has an important role in the dynamic of coping with loss and pain. Islam treats social and community support in times of mourning—such as participation in the funeral and comforting the bereaved—as a religious obligation. Those who participate in the mourning process are blessed, even rewarded. Rewards are there in the religion itself, reinforced by social and community norms and values relating to bereavement. Differences in the way one culture or another views bereavement and mourning are evident in diverse forms, including the degree of social support given the bereaved person, the social customs surrounding mourning, the individual and societal understanding of the bereaved person’s continuing and future connection with the deceased, and the society’s definition of what constitutes abnormal grieving.

Traditional societies like Palestine’s have their own clear beliefs about death, accepted ways of expressing grief, customary attitudes regarding the bereaved family’s social roles and the image of the deceased and typical characteristics defining the local support system. All of these traditions imbue death with structured meanings and offer clear directions as to the social behavior expected of people when a death occurs. Their traditions help people to understand and accept a death; mourning rituals imbue the loss with meaning and play an important role in preserving social order following a death that is particularly disturbing in some way. Rituals facilitate the provision of support and the expression of social and emotional

<sup>52</sup>Nave (1998 [Hebrew]) and Lebel and Ronel (2005).

solidarity, and contribute to a sense of stability and security through their symbolic representations of the loss.

This web of support is evident in the description given by one of the mothers:

The truth is, I don't know what I would have done without the support I received from people, including my extended family, my neighbors and my friends. They didn't leave me for a second. They filled the house every day for more than two months. They ran the household, and I didn't have to take care of anything. This really helped me.

One of the fathers mentioned the importance of moral support:

You discover the worth of people in your hour of need. Truly, both those close to us and people not as close supported us in almost every imaginable area for the first few weeks, and it helped a lot. It helped us a lot as a family. We felt embraced and felt there was someone to rely on; people dealt with things like the burial, the tent for mourners, the food for people who came to express condolences; everything was done by neighbors and friends.

In sum, Palestinian society has its own unique characteristics due in part to its extended struggle for independence. Loss has become inseparable from daily life, to the point where personal loss has been nationalized and transformed into something collective. I would argue that national-collective mourning has played an important role in shaping the nature of Palestinian parental bereavement, and that religion and culture have a central role in shaping the character of parental bereavement and modes of coping. Religion was a significant and central factor for the Palestinian parents in this study, and helped them deal with their traumatic loss. Both fathers and mothers reported that they saw religion as a resource shaping the way they coped, on the personal and on the collective level, with their child's death.

The assurance of eternal life for the fallen, and the sanctification of their sacrifice, served as an instrument of recruitment and self-preservation for a society at war. Note that George Mosse has described this process as the creation of a new civil religion in the national state of the early twentieth

century. The “sacrifice of the children” continues, finding its own justification in the continuing struggle for freedom and the endless war for the homeland.<sup>53</sup>

With the evolving religious attitudes to bereavement, certain longstanding differences have become somewhat less distinct in the context of Palestinian bereavement: the secular-religious divide is less conspicuous, and gender differences, at least outwardly, have diminished as women’s emotional responses as mourners have been moderated to be closer to masculine patterns of mourning.

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<sup>53</sup>Mosse (1993).

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## Part Four: National Identity and the Way Bereaved Parents Cope

The discourse of identity demands legitimacy for existing collective identities and delineates the social-traditional boundaries between them while reorganizing them in terms of time and space.<sup>1</sup> The discourse of identity creates new geographic and moral spaces and facilitates political change. Thus are communities created that provide meaning for their members; thus do cultural repertoires and cognitive maps appear that once again nourish the need for organization on the basis of identities, while molding them with new characteristics; and thus, especially, does the discourse of identity create new categories of “us” and “them.” These processes are manifest in the context of national, ethnic, gender and sexual struggles. In all of these contexts, the use of the notion of identity allows for the renewal of the discourse connected with history and memory.<sup>2</sup>

Addressing the issue of a collective political identity is complicated because the current definitions of the concept are unclear. The concept of identity developed as an adjunct to the analysis of various psychological situations and yet, despite its widespread use in psychology, the concept still has no unambiguous definition. Scholars, viewing the idea of identity

<sup>1</sup>Shenhav (2001 [Hebrew]).

<sup>2</sup>Shenhav (2001 [Hebrew]) and Derrida (2001).

as having an essential inner significance, theorize that a collective is determined *inter alia* on the basis of common origins or similar experiences. This contrasts with the concept of individual identity, which is mostly defined by distinguishing it from some other identity.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars today consider national identity the most essential form of modern collective identity. National identity assumes the existence of an autonomous individual identifying with a national affiliation. We would be hard-pressed today to define any other (nonnational) collective identity without the element borrowed from national identity and national movements.<sup>4</sup> National identity is sometimes an expression of a people's national aspirations under certain conditions. A strong expression of national identity can influence a people engaged in a struggle for national rights, hence the clear connection evident between such expression and political developments on the ground.<sup>5</sup> That is why, during recent decades, a marked turning point has been distinguishable in the discourse of identity, a discourse that has diverged from the conceptual and the practical one of "the old politics" to reorganize itself in post-national and postcolonial cultural and political arenas.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the concept of national identity is among the most elusive and least agreed-on notions. The current centrality of nationalism as a universal intellectual category can deflect attention from the fact that nationalism, as a concept and as a reality, is a relatively new thing, with perhaps five hundred years of history behind it, and moreover a wholly Western phenomenon until the last century.<sup>7</sup> Nationalism actually represents the situation common in Europe, where it was offered as a replacement for ecclesiastical arrangements. Hence national identity and religious identity are often perceived as being in a tense state of binary opposition to one another.

In addressing national identity in the Middle East, however, I will argue that in this region national identity has never managed to detach itself from

<sup>3</sup>Suleiman and Beit-Hallahmi (1997), Bishara (1998), Howard (2000), Rouhana (1997), and Smoooha (1998).

<sup>4</sup>Bishara (1999 [Hebrew]) and Herzog (2010 [Hebrew]).

<sup>5</sup>Riggs (1991).

<sup>6</sup>Shenhav (2001 [Hebrew]).

<sup>7</sup>Pierson (2004 [1996]), Herzog (2014 [Hebrew]).

religious attitudes; like its European sister, it has always relied on definitions of tradition and continuity and on feelings of belonging.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, because since the founding of the Muslim religion no clear distinction has ever been made between Arab identity and Islamic identity, the boundaries between national identity and religious identity in the Middle East were always blurred. Arguably, national identity in that part of the world underwent a process of Islamization just as Islamic identity underwent a process of nationalization, creating what is known today as political religion or political Islam, the “Eastern” parallel to Western nationalism.<sup>9</sup>

### COLLECTIVE NATIONAL PALESTINIAN IDENTITY

Palestinian national identity developed between the twentieth century’s two world wars in a process parallel to and resembling the development of particularist identities in neighboring Arab countries. Although Zionism and the challenges it posed to Palestinians added another important layer to the crystallization of Palestinian national identity, these were not the cause of its coming into being. All the Arab national movements in the Middle East evolved during the period between the two world wars and ranged between these three poles: pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism and particularist identities within the boundaries of the various national states previously fixed by Britain and France.

The Palestinians are no different than the rest of this group. In fact, between the First World War and our own times, Islamic pan-Arab streams have been competing with the streams working for a particularist Palestinian identity to determine the nature of collective Palestinian identity and the national and social agenda of Palestinians.<sup>10</sup>

What is known as the Nakba,<sup>11</sup> the catastrophe that befell the Palestinian people in 1948, was a significant component in shaping Palestinian identity. The Nakba was a collective trauma, a turning point that united

<sup>8</sup>Hobsbaum (2006) and Herzog (2014 [Hebrew]).

<sup>9</sup>Bishara (1995) and Alian (2004).

<sup>10</sup>Manaa (1999 [Hebrew]).

<sup>11</sup>The word “Nakba,” an Arabic work meaning a major catastrophe, became synonymous with the expulsion, massacre and plundering of the country’s Palestinian residents and the prevention of the refugees’ return to their homes at the end of the 1948 war.

the Palestinians as Palestinians.<sup>12</sup> The expulsion of the Palestinian elite and the waves of widely scattering refugees were a terrible blow to Palestinian society. Thousands of Palestinians were uprooted from their cities and villages and found themselves refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and other places around the world. From a situation of a society in formation, Palestinian society abruptly became one of exiles and refugees. The expulsions and displacements reinforced Palestinian national identity and consciousness against the backdrop of new concerns about the evolving strength of the Zionist movement.<sup>13</sup>

Further traumatic events would soon ensue for Palestinians. The defeat of the Arab armies in the 1967 war (al-Naksa)<sup>14</sup> and the conquest and occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by Israel reanimated the painful memories of 1948. The Palestinians began to understand the ongoing losses in their lives as the loss of Palestine. Still, the Naksa was a turning point in the evolution of the Palestinian national consciousness and led to a stronger and more coherent Palestinian identity.<sup>15</sup> The war in Lebanon in 1982, which brought about the expulsion of the Palestine Liberation Organization's leadership from Lebanon and its move to Tunisia, augmented the Palestinian trauma by creating a new split in the Palestinian national identity.<sup>16</sup>

The First Intifada (1987) generated a very important change in Palestinian national consciousness and identity: For the first time since the Nakba, the mainstay of the struggle for a national state returned from abroad to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. People were encouraged by the fact that the Intifada broke out from within "the territory" itself and not as a consequence of a decision "from above." The result was to empower Palestinians in the occupied territories while also dramatically strengthening the Islamic movement locally, which was eventually to become a competitor to the secular Palestinian national movement.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Rabinowitz and Abu Baker (2002 [Hebrew]) and Kanaana (2000).

<sup>13</sup>Said (2001 [Hebrew? Arabic?]).

<sup>14</sup>Al-Naksa, meaning "defeat" in Arabic, is the name given to the defeat of the armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan during the 1967 war. For Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular, this occurrence constituted a second round of defeat for Palestinians, following the Nakba.

<sup>15</sup>Manaa (1999 [Hebrew? Arabic?]), Bishara (1998), and Haidar (1997 [Arabic]).

<sup>16</sup>Shikaki (1999 [Hebrew]).

<sup>17</sup>Shikaki (1999[Hebrew]) and Tamari (1999 [Hebrew]).

In 1991, Palestinians achieved significant world recognition at the Madrid Conference, where a Palestinian delegation participated. This recognition augmented the strength of those voices among Palestinians that called for coming to terms with the existence of the State of Israel and with the Oslo accords. The Oslo accords were followed by the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. This was the first time that Palestinians had had the possibility of administering territory under the umbrella of an international agreement.

The failure of the Oslo accords and the frustration felt by Palestinians at the chaos and corruption in the Palestinian Authority led to the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000.<sup>18</sup> The two Intifadas eroded the general consensus as to the essence of Palestinian national identity. The new political arrangements focused on a new way of bestowing legitimacy, based on a future goal, with the installation of an authority to function as independently as possible under Israeli sovereignty. The process was supposed to lead ultimately to the establishment of a Palestinian state, through negotiations.<sup>19</sup>

Amid this complicated diplomacy and while the Al-Aqsa Intifada that erupted in 2000 was still going on, a new trauma intervened. The momentum of global recognition (including by Israel) of the Palestinian aspiration to establish a state was seriously derailed and the standing of the Palestinian national movement was gravely harmed in the aftermath of the suicide attacks perpetrated in the United States on September 11, 2001. Meanwhile, the Palestinian national movements (as opposed to the Islamic movements) were perceived as tainted by association with the corruption in the Palestinian Authority and with the deterioration in the economic situation of ordinary Palestinians during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, and the movements were weakened. The takeover by Hamas of the Gaza Strip at the beginning of 2007 led to further reinforcement of Palestinian Islamic elements, buttressed by their adoption of both national and religious components into their programs.

The literature reviewed in this chapter concerning national identity in general and Palestinian identity in particular is important for an understanding of the social, national/ethnic and religious background of Palestinian

<sup>18</sup>Jad (1992 [Hebrew]).

<sup>19</sup>Shikaki (1999).

society and of how all these factors influence the experience and the behavior of bereaved Palestinian parents as they cope with their personal loss and pain.

## HOW NATIONAL IDENTITY SHAPES MEMORY

The development of a collective national identity is always influenced by a number of different factors, including memorial sites and commemorative activities. The act of remembering and commemorating aggregates three different times—the past, the present, the future—whose presence together produces a very powerful event that contributes to the creation of a national identity.

“Death is something that is never quite closed,” writes Israeli scholar Idit Zartal in her book “The Nation and Death” (Hebrew). “The dead do not belong to the past; they are an integral and active part of the present. They belong to the present and they fulfill roles in the present, so long as they are remembered and made to speak by the living, who project their own lives onto the dead and draw from the dead their own lessons.” The living choose to relate to the dead, resurrect them and give them heroic meaning in the national space.<sup>20</sup>

The act of commemoration provides a frame, a set of dimensions and reference points to values relevant to the narratives of individual people.<sup>21</sup> Despite the variance in leadership and in versions of Palestinian national identity, what is common to all of them in a reality of ongoing loss is that they view the Palestinian fallen as heroes who sacrificed their lives for the common good. Such heroes are generally a central mythic component in the formulation of a national identity<sup>22</sup> and that is also their role in Palestinian society.

Evans argues that most societies look for social, national and religious meaning in loss. The quest for meaning is conducted via the elaboration of collective representations. Memory and forgetting, in her opinion, are consolidated through the hegemonic social discourse. Words like *sacrifice*, *the*

<sup>20</sup>Zartal (2002).

<sup>21</sup>Ben-Amos and Bethel (1999 [Hebrew]) and Sa’di (2002).

<sup>22</sup>Granot (1976 [Hebrew]).

*fallen* and *martyr* are but examples of the role of the hegemonic discourse in the shaping and construction of these meanings.<sup>23</sup>

In international conflicts, the need for a historical-cultural narrative justifying the struggle is overt and understood. There is a tremendous need for the creation of a subjective cultural narrative of this kind, since it significantly bolsters resilience both in the personal sphere and in the collective sphere.<sup>24</sup> Myths about the “heroism of the fighters” are important in creating a new Palestinian identity. This is manifest, *inter alia*, in the Palestinian national discourse, in which the concept of the shaheed has undergone an accelerated process of nationalization, from a martyr for God (“*shaheed fi sabeel Allah*”) to a martyr for the revolution (“*shaheed al-thawra*” or “*tha’ir*”). The forces shaping the national discourse outlined the character of the theme of national revolutionary sacrifice (*fidaa*), and linked it with the Islamic theme of self-sacrifice (*istish’had*)—in order to accelerate the formulation of the national collective and prepare it for the struggle for independence. The Islamic discourse undergoes a process of nationalization, and the national discourse undergoes a process of Islamization.<sup>25</sup>

In my view, the symbolic postponement of the experience of death through the bestowing of eternal life on the sacrifice/the fallen, and the overcoming of death, comprised a crucial and even critical component in the emergence of Palestinian society, as it has fought for its independence and fought to build its territorial space. This process has managed to bridge disparities and internal contradictions in Palestinian society while successfully blurring the outlines of personal loss, emphasizing collective loss, and elevating the national ethos and national interests above the personal lives of individual Palestinians. As Homi Bhabha has written, a national ideology aspires to unify a heterogeneous people into a single nation and create a sense of unified national identity. Thus ideology tends to gloss over and blur the internal contradictions and conflicts between the various groups comprising the nation, just as it blurs the internal contradictions between the individual and the collective.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Evans (2007).

<sup>24</sup>Rothenberg (2005 [Hebrew]).

<sup>25</sup>Tzorff (2004 [Hebrew]).

<sup>26</sup>Bhabha (1994).

## THE POLITIRELIGIZATION AND GENDERING OF BEREAVEMENT

In Evans' book *Mothers of Heroes, Mothers of Martyrs*, dealing with the connection between motherhood, religion and nationalism, she writes as follows: "War and religion have been constant companions for millennia. They support each other, providing proof of other validity and poignant stories to ensure their place in memory."<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Gershoni argues that nationalism is an ideal locus for a historical, social, cultural and political scrutiny of the development of collective national memory. What produces nationalism shapes it through rediscovery, reconstruction, restoration or invention of the collective memory.<sup>28</sup> The results of this present study show that in Palestinian society, with its Muslim majority, religion as a source of supreme authority is what enables nationalism to construct and shape the understanding of bereavement as a part of the collective memory. I propose that we conceptualize this integrative combination in a new concept: "*politireligization*."

Politireligization, as I have defined it, is a manipulative process in which agents of nationalism use certain parts of religion to further a political goal in a society at some given time. Politireligization is the first dimension in the process of the engineering and design of bereavement in Palestinian society. Bear in mind that at the end of the 1967 war, there was a crisis in pan-Arab nationalism, with a retreat from Arab nationalist worldviews and an upsurge in religious movements.

The rise of the religious movements provided space and legitimacy for religious attitudes, which had an increasing influence on the shaping of a new national conceptualization.<sup>29</sup> The old stories of sacrifice interwoven with religion were retold and reshaped by the new needs of the society and of the culture through the prism of different times and different circumstances. Various historians and researchers have already noted the hidden potential and motivation in religious stories of sacrifice.<sup>30</sup> The use of the

<sup>27</sup> Evans (2007).

<sup>28</sup> Gershoni (2006).

<sup>29</sup> Sivan (1986 [Hebrew]).

<sup>30</sup> Evans (2007).



concept of the shaheed relies on the Islamic religious apprehension of sacrifice for God or for any exalted aim.<sup>31</sup> Religion has always been a source of inspiration and authority; the strategy to employ concepts of sacrifice, which rely on religious sources, was utilized by the national hegemony in Palestinian society in order to further the Palestinian national aim.<sup>32</sup>

In my opinion, this use of religion involves a kind of memorialization of the collective national loss and its transposition into a permanent dimension. The blood of the shaheeds sanctified the homeland, but also bought increased legitimacy for Palestinian rights to the land. The change undergone by the concept of the shaheed, and the incremental meanings it has acquired, have succeeded in shaping a new national-religious culture regarding bereavement and sacrifice.

Artists and intellectuals interested in the Palestinian rite of sacrifice have not always been encouraging, and their critiques have often been trenchant, as in the poem by Mahmoud Darwish, “The Offering”:

*Yours is the shape of meaning. So do not return  
To the parts of your body. Leave behind your name in the echo.  
An adjective of something. Be an icon for the believers.  
An adornment for the sleepless. And be a martyr bearing witness  
With a face, open and kind.*

*Which is it, of the favours, that we deny? Who purifies us  
Except you? Who sets us free except you?  
You were born there in our stead. You were born of light  
And of fire. And we were carpenters with a talent for  
Fashioning the cross, so take your cross and ascend  
Above the heavens.*

*Forward, come forward you alone, O metaphor of ours  
Singular above the bottomless pit of the lyricists. We, the hollow  
Asleep on horseback, we ask of you fidelity, so  
Be faithful to the race and the message. Be faithful  
To the beautiful myths, be faithful!*

—“The Offering”, 2001

In “The Offering,” written during the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2001, Darwish attempts to examine daringly and deeply a social issue that has become a

<sup>31</sup>Al-Krenawi et al. (2001–2002).

<sup>32</sup>Tzorff (2004 [Hebrew]) and Evans (2007).

myth. He tries, in a partial way, to subvert this myth. The poem conceals a trenchant critique of the Palestinian cult of sacrifice and rhetorically is apologetic toward the shaheed for his transformation into a legendary sacrifice. One ought to note here that the use of the concept of the sacrifice is relatively new compared with other terms that have been employed by the Palestinian revolution, such as revolutionary, *feda'i* and *shaheed*. Yet in the symbolism suggested by the concept there is a subversive dimension vis-à-vis the conceptual world of the Palestinian revolution. The sacrifice, according to Darwish, is poised between two historical possibilities—victory and defeat.

Darwish adds: *Do not break!*

*Do not break! Do not be victorious, be in-between  
suspended. If you break, you break us.  
And if victorious you break us, and destroy our temple.  
Be dead-living, and living-dead, that the high priests  
May carry on with their work. And be a hidden apparition.*<sup>33</sup>

In my view, Darwish in this poem presents us with the historical ethos that was created and the extent of its effectiveness. The text addresses the self-sacrifice for the collective that is intended to continue the work of the policy-makers and decision-makers: “*That the high priests may carry on with their work*”; “*Let them celebrate you, they who have no memory, who have no beautiful moon.*”

The critique made by Darwish in “The Offering” ignored the gender dimension in these social-political processes. The gender dimension is central to the politereignization process that has taken place in Palestinian society.<sup>34</sup> This process has managed to exclude Palestinian women and mothers from the arena where decisions are made and policies shaped, and has in

<sup>33</sup>After the version by Daniel Roters, at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtSPJ4wEHrA>.

<sup>34</sup>The inattention to the needs of Palestinian women in the poems of Darwish cannot but make me think of Ibrahim’s inattention to Hagar or Sarah in the story of the binding. Hagar and Sarah are given no response or mention in the story of the binding in the Qur’anic text. They appear in later texts, for example that of Al-Tabari (839 and 923 AD), who drew on earlier scholars of the Hadith. At the time of the binding, Isaac said: “My father, tie the rope tightly around me so that I will stay still, and remove your clothing so that my tears do not splash it, because when Sarah sees this, she will be shocked. Slice the blade cleanly and fast across my neck so that my death will be easy. And when you return to Sarah, bless her that she may have peace” (Al-Tabari 2000). That the Qur’anic text ignores the needs, beliefs and

fact created new norms for mourning, masculine norms, as the designers of national policy and commemoration in Palestinian society are mostly men. Nationalism and the national memory are characterized by their reliance on masculine memories connected with national struggles and internal power struggles among Palestinian men.<sup>35</sup>

Likewise in Palestinian society, national struggles and nationalism are constructed and shaped in a masculine arena and controlled by the masculine discourse. The evolving role of Palestinian mothers has not, in the end, brought about a change in their status or situation and has not created a space that encourages them to take part in determining the political agenda. On the contrary, it has reinforced the status of mothers as “creators of heroes” and “creators of the revolution,” and transformed them into mothers with special characteristics. In this context, Tzorf argues that Palestinian society uses a moral justification in turning the mothering of Palestinian mothers into “other mothering,” mothering that has an additional role beyond that of traditional mothering, given its responsibility for producing the “generations of the revolution.”<sup>36</sup> The process of excluding Palestinian women from the sphere of politics and decision making is not typical only of Palestinian society or of traditional societies. This is a global phenomenon. McClintock argues that women are considered “symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency.”<sup>37</sup>

Palestinian collective national bereavement focuses on the national and collective meanings given to bereavement and loss by the national group.<sup>38</sup> According to the findings of my study, Palestinian women feel that they must adopt masculine rules of behavior lest they be obliged to pay a price if they do not act according to the men’s expectations of them. There is thus a double oppression of bereaved Palestinian women: On the one hand, despite their personal sacrifice, society reinforces the constraints of their role in the most traditional way, and on the other hand, in the framework of their

views of Hagar and Sarah while later texts mention rituals to ease their maternal pain, brings to mind the current reality of Palestinian mothers in particular and of mothers in general, whose children are caught up in any political conflict.

<sup>35</sup> Enloe (1989).

<sup>36</sup> Tzorf (2004).

<sup>37</sup> McClintock (1993).

<sup>38</sup> Evans (2007).

role they are also forbidden to grieve for their children in public. The use of nationalism and of religion in national liberation struggles serves to prevent women from any opposition to either religion or the national collective. The use of women in national liberation struggles is a tool to create a national culture that designs symbols of collective national suffering. Their role has something of a symbolic hatred for the oppressor, and empathy and pity for the oppressed nation.<sup>39</sup> This sophisticated sociopolitical process assures the preservation of the social reality and the gender hierarchy via emplacement of rigid norms of bereavement that expect women to show emotional restraint and moderation.<sup>40</sup>

Palestinian women are obliged to adopt these behavioral norms and values. They are expected to turn their grief and sorrow into happiness, an act that sabotages their natural, individual grieving process and appropriates it for the benefit of the collective mourning. They thereby aid in preserving the social-political-gender status quo and reinforcing their role within the conceptual world of Palestinian culture. In contrast, Palestinian fathers are part of the gender collective determining the norms and values intended, for the most part, to serve and further the Palestinian national agenda.

### FUNERAL AS WEDDING: A SHAHEED'S BETROTHAL CEREMONY

\*\*\* My brother and my sisters, they can be married, yes, but I belong to my mother.

—Federico Garcia Lorca, *Blood Wedding*, 1988

In various cultures a connection is made, both in literature and in art, between a sacrificial death and the birth of the nation. For a description of this connection we will make metaphorical use of the idea of a “blood wedding,” an image expressing the unity of the fallen with the land, his homeland, an image paralleling the covenant of unification undertaken by a betrothed couple during their wedding. The metaphor of death as resembling a wedding gives to death a gallant and beautiful side. Federico Garcia

<sup>39</sup>Maitse (2000).

<sup>40</sup>Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2003).

Lorca called his tragic play *Blood Wedding*.<sup>41</sup> The play has been interpreted by many commentators as having nationalist themes. *Blood Wedding* articulates an Oedipal complex with the double symbolism of libido and death and a double image of the earth, both as mother and as beloved, switching roles according to the need for sacrifice (unification).<sup>42</sup>

In Palestinian culture, the erotic femininity of the earth coupling with the sacrificed shaheed draws on Western images of nationalism, and also received a unique cultural adaptation connecting this universal concept with Palestinian folklore and culture through what Palestinian society refers to as *zaft al-shaheed*, paralleling the term *blood wedding*. In Palestinian folklore, the *zaft al-aris* (the groom's promenade) has an important and central place, since it is part of the last stage of the marriage ceremony lasting, according to Palestinian tradition, between two and three days, until the union of the bride and groom and the formal joining of the bride to the family of the groom. Hence the great symbolism and significance of the *zaft al-aris*. During the ceremony, through the social declaration of the marriage, the society itself participates in the joy of the groom and his parents.

Preceding the *zafa* (promenade), there is a ritual preparation of the groom, who is shaved, showered and dressed in his new marriage finery. Then, with the groom seated on the shoulders of his friends or on a finely decorated horse, there is a ceremonial procession through the length and breadth of the village. All the villagers participate. Women, and mothers, have a central role in running this ceremony, receiving the guests, and chanting and singing joyously to the groom. The *zafa* ceremony is the subject of numerous Palestinian folksongs.<sup>43</sup>

The funeral of a Palestinian shaheed recreates the components of the *zafa* ceremony, transforming the shaheed's funeral into a national-social procession that makes its way through every part of the village. The shaheed, wrapped in the Palestinian flag, is carried aloft on the shoulders of his

<sup>41</sup>The play **Blood Wedding** (*Bodas de Sangre*) was written in 1933. It is a story of love, betrayal and revenge whose central character is a bride who plans to run away with her lover after her marriage ceremony. On the eve of her wedding, the bride flees with her chosen consort toward their intended freedom, toward destiny, toward death. The betrayed groom decides to pursue them; when he finds them, he challenges the lover to a duel in which they are both killed.

<sup>42</sup>Gilboa (1991 [Hebrew]).

<sup>43</sup>Eraq (2002 [Arabic]) and Kanaana (2000 [Arabic]).

friends; all the village residents participate in a shaheed's funeral. People bless his parents for the sacrifice and their child's elevation to the status of a shaheed, and his mother is expected to chant joyfully for her child the shaheed who has now become a groom. Inevitably, the discussion and analysis of the processes undergone by bereaved Palestinian parents has expanded to encompass the additional discourse centering on the funeral of the shaheed.

The arrangements for global media coverage of the funerals of the shaheeds is meant to establish, openly and concretely, the connection between the emergent nation and the mother, the sacrifice (the shaheed), and death. This idea was expressed by one of the mothers as follows:

I made them swear in the name of God that I would go to the funeral. I told them, I must be at [name of shaheed]'s wedding; today the shaheed is a groom. In the cemetery I sang for the shaheed. I told the people to sing for him, [name of child]: he is a groom. I went with them in a procession through the whole city. People told me when the days of mourning were over, We couldn't speak with you, you were radiant, because you are the mother of a shaheed; we know that you were glad in your heart that he is a groom – a shaheed, and that this was the *zaft al-aris* (the wedding of a shaheed).

Another mother spoke in the same vein:

At the funeral, I began singing to the shaheed... I said: Heyya [name of shaheed], yamma [name of shaheed], hai, all of you pray to the Prophet Mohammed... Hai, this is a double prayer: One to insult Satan, and the other to protect [name of shaheed] from the evil eye. Heyya [name of shaheed], O flower that grew by the river. Heyya [name of shaheed], your word is honored. Heyya yamma, and your arms are my cushion... I told the other women: My son is now a groom, and for a groom we sing and dance.

The *zaft al-shaheed* expresses the connection between life and death. The death of her sons enables the nation to be born. The nationalization of Palestinian motherhood, in a broadening of biological mothering, transforms the Palestinian mother from a private mother of her own biological children into the mother of all the nation's children. This reality traps the Palestinian mother in an emotional paradox, caught between her instinctive

motherly role to protect the lives of her children and see to their happiness and well-being, and her role as mother of a nation.<sup>44</sup>

Such a paradox is not unique to Palestinian motherhood, and is certainly evident in Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, which describes the special place reserved for the mother-child relationship in human experience. The dramatic driving force in this work is the fact that the mother's attention is always directed to her son, while the son's attention is directed outward—to the world and to the future. The totality and power of the mother's feelings reinforce the tragedy; Lorca's mother figure does not encourage her son to seek revenge, but is also unable to openly protest against the social norm that costs him his life, because despite all her efforts she fails in the principal mission she set herself—to protect her son.

This is the experience of Palestinian mothers. They fail to protect their child, and moreover they are expected to be glad that their son has been killed. One way a Palestinian mother can overcome this defeat is to vanquish death via her faith that her child has earned immortality in paradise. She is expected to be glad because her son is about to be married, as it were, to 72 virgins in paradise. If in this life he would have merited one bride, in paradise he is entitled to seventy-two virgins. Among the parents interviewed for this study, some saw the *zafa* ceremony as a real wedding, marrying their son to the 72 virgins promised to the shaheed in paradise.

One of the mothers said:

I got home from the hospital, I went into the living room where people were sitting, and I began to sing. I told people, today is the wedding of [the shaheed's name] to the virgins who are waiting for him in paradise. He so wanted to die a shaheed. One day I ran after him in the street, walla! I was barefoot, crying and screaming, and I told him: What will become of me? What will become of your betrothed? He replied: Mama, she has God, and I have 72 virgins waiting for me in paradise. Today is the *zafa* of [shaheed's name]. Be happy for him.

In this context there is a well-known popular song that Palestinians often play, especially at the funerals of shaheeds: "Hey, mother of the shaheed, do not grieve, but sing out gladly, for all the young men are your sons."<sup>45</sup> This

<sup>44</sup>Tzorf (2004 [Hebrew]).

<sup>45</sup>Tzorf (2004).

expresses the expectation that Palestinian mothers will not express their sorrow, and will even turn that sorrow and mourning into joyful singing. This approach is very clearly reinforced by the results of the present research in terms of the descriptions of the shaheed's funeral. The Palestinian mothers sang joyfully at their child's funeral, in his honor, showing their pride that he died as a shaheed. The funeral of a shaheed is an alternative marriage ceremony, since the real one cannot take place due to the boy's death. This is the *ares al-shaheed*—the wedding of the shaheed. It marries the groom, the shaheed, and his “alternative” bride—the land of Palestine.<sup>46</sup> This custom reflects the belief that the role of Palestinian mothers in the national struggle cannot deviate from their traditional role—to celebrate the marriage of their sons. One of the mothers expressed her objection to this expectation:

During the funeral, you aren't in control of yourself and you aren't aware of what you're doing. It's as if something is controlling you. You know that they expect you to sing joyfully, you are about to die of the pain but you show what's supposed to be “happiness”... Everything is foggy, and if there had been no video to record the funeral, I'm not sure I'd remember what I was doing... You really start to believe that you are giving him in marriage. Everything is there: he is there, the people, his friends, only the bride is missing.

This mother's statement describes the emotional dissonance in which most Palestinian mothers live. The social expectation of bereaved mothers to function as mothers of shaheeds in a way that so contravenes their most basic maternal feelings—the deep desire to protect their child, not to sacrifice him—reinforces the emotional conflict around the sacrifice. The double oppression of Palestinian women is manifest in the trauma of the imposed sacrifice and loss coupled with the constraints that prevent them from grieving for their lost child in their own way.

In Idit Zartal's book *Hauma vehamavet* (The Nation and Death), she quotes Yitzhak Lifben, among the most interesting but least known literary figures of Israel's labor movement, as follows: “We do not want marriages of blood. We are not a people of heroes and knights...” His mention of the concept of blood weddings, albeit in a negative and critical way, points to the consciousness linking death and the nation: death as unification with the

<sup>46</sup>Tzorf (2004).



homeland. Such a death is beautiful and heroic, a death that sacrifices the self for a particular ideology; Lifben's doubt and disagreement, conscious or unconscious, are evident in his comment that "we are not a people of heroes and knights."<sup>47</sup> We in turn can scrutinize the ethos of self-sacrifice with a critical and dubious eye. Thus far, for the most part, Palestinian women have been unable to protest openly and actively against these social expectations; any women's voices raised in dissent have been so few in number as to be insignificant, failing to attain a serious platform in Palestinian society. The voices of Palestinian mothers remain a kind of inward scream that has no place in the public space, a scream that is permitted in very limited forums but may not be brought to the political or public agenda, a silent scream that reverberates inside these women with the pain they feel and cannot express.

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# Part Five: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration

## PERSONAL LOSS, PUBLIC COMMEMORATION

From these mercilessly multiplying cemeteries, the biography of the nation steals for itself acts of suicide turned into exemplars, holy sacrifices, murders, executions, wars and holocausts. But if the nation's narrative is to be well served, we must insure that these violent myths are remembered/are forgotten as if they were really our own.<sup>1</sup>

Rituals of death and bereavement are an inseparable part of every human community, and we can learn a lot about a society from its attitudes toward its dead. The purpose of many acts of remembering and commemoration is to aid the bereaved and the society in coping with terrible loss and severe trauma, and such acts are important on both the personal and the national level. It is therefore appropriate when discussing memory and commemoration in Palestinian society that we address both the individual and the social level, in terms of the dialogue and the balance between remembering and commemoration as approached on each of these levels. Previous research on Palestinian bereavement and the analysis of the Shaheeds remembrance came from a secular and critical perspective, which views bereavement as a resource that plays a role in the power relations between the Palestinians

<sup>1</sup>Anderson (1999 [Hebrew]).

and Israel, the world and between the Palestinians themselves. The most prominent of these are the ethnographic work of bereavement and memory in the Palestinian refugee camps by Laleh Khalili<sup>2</sup> and Julia Petit's,<sup>3</sup> study of the refugee camps in Lebanon, which traces the manner in which private mourning mediated utilitarian through national appropriation and serves as a collective resource.

This chapter focuses on the individual level, through an evaluation of what emerged from my interviews with Palestinian parents concerning their remembering and commemoration of their children who became shaheeds. I examine the spatial practices memory of the shaheeds and focus on the gender variance of space creation in relation to bereavement within a broad framework of religious and national significance.

Commemoration becomes part of the grieving process for these parents. Dealing with commemoration in and of itself enables them to ease the terrible pain of their loss as parents and to infuse meaning and content into the harsh reality of bereavement. On the societal level, the collective understanding of remembering and commemoration determines what events will be deemed significant and what the national story is that connects with and binds together the society.

Collective memory is a type of social reality and cultural product designed within the system of social and political variables and interests of a given community.<sup>4</sup> Commemoration is a social, ideological and cultural act intended to transform personal memory into collective memory and thereby accord immortality to an individual, while also solidifying the identity of the society.<sup>5</sup> As Sivan emphasizes, a society does not become a nation without first have a "community of memory."<sup>6</sup> Memory is part of the cognitive-consciousness layer of a society, which determines how and what people remember and what happens to those shared memories over the years; commemoration at the behavioral level, in comparison, is driven by the desire to preserve the memory of the dead and the impossible wish to make the ephemeral eternal. At the same time, bear in mind that the governing narrative always reflects the desires of the living, whether

<sup>2</sup>Laleh Khalili (2005).

<sup>3</sup>Julia Peteet (2005).

<sup>4</sup>Halbwachs (1980 [1925]).

<sup>5</sup>Witztum and Malkinson (1993 [Hebrew]) and Gershuni (2006 [Hebrew]).

<sup>6</sup>Sivan (1986 [Hebrew]).

they adopt the dead or not, whether they remember them, and how they remember them. Acts of commemoration and remembering draw inspiration from the symbols of the modern national state, and are based on the apprehension that commemoration provides nationalism with a means to convey national messages.<sup>7</sup>

We must consider the social-political processes occurring in Palestinian society during the two Intifadas and the meanings attached to the many symbols incorporated into the work of remembering and commemoration in that society. The politireligization process, essentially a manipulative process in which national agents employ certain elements of religion to advance the political agenda at any given time, was highly influential in shaping the work of remembering and commemoration in Palestinian society.<sup>8</sup> The outlook underlying this process conceals heroic, national meanings of personal sacrifice for the collective. This outlook is what led to the exalted status for a shaheed and his family in Palestinian society. Darwish's poem "The Offering" deals with this issue, hinting at a process of personal sacrifice for the collective: "Burn to illumine us"; "You are not one of us"; "Be a dream that we may dream":

May all that turns green celebrate you,  
Trees and stones, things forgotten  
by the Butterfly, a poem at the end of time...  
And may they celebrate you who are without memory,  
or a splendid moon.<sup>9</sup>

The society functions to support the bereaved individual and bereaved families in coping with the loss. In my estimation, in the "contract" struck between the individual and the collective in Palestinian society, the sacrifice of the individual encounters the sense of guilt of the collective, which led to the building of the Palestinian culture of remembering and commemoration.

The form of a ritual of remembering and commemoration, and the social significance a society accords to that phase in the life cycle, are not the same thing. The ceremony's main significance is not to bestow honor on the dead; it is oriented toward those who are still alive. The ceremony eases

<sup>7</sup>Gershuni (2006 [Hebrew]).

<sup>8</sup>Masarwi (2014 [Hebrew]).

<sup>9</sup>After the version by Daniel Roters, at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtSPJ4wEHrA>.

the grief of the shaheed's relatives by allowing the mourners to express their sorrow in an acceptable way. The modes of behavior during the ceremony implant in the individual a sense of belonging to the group and reinforce group continuity and solidarity. Remembering and commemorating are more than an important and meaningful component of the individual mourning process that provides a framework for emotional coping and a solution to the quest for meaning in death and reinforcement of life's endurance; they also have a collective national character.<sup>10</sup>

Commemoration ceremonies as they have developed in Palestinian society have drawn on ceremonies of commemoration in the modern national state, and I argue that the Israeli model was among the sources of inspiration for the Palestinian production of remembering and commemoration, a production whose purpose is to provide nationalism with the means to convey nationalist messages. This process of commemoration in Palestinian society relies, I believe, on that principle, and its central characteristic is the enlistment of the past to serve the future: "to control the future, one must enlist the past."<sup>11</sup>

Palestinian society nevertheless gradually developed a culture of local remembering and commemoration that encompasses components from Palestinian popular culture, with religious foundations that introduce a local character. This evolving character drew its uniqueness and content from the immediate environment. Yet no gaps or differences have been evident between the manner and style of commemoration in the cities as compared with the villages.

Palestinian commemoration has many faces and expressions: monuments and gravestones, ceremonies and rituals, memorial days and shrines. There are significant differences between fathers and mothers in terms of how commemoration is handled. Commemoration by fathers has to do more with the public space and less with the personal household space. Fathers are in charge of erecting monuments and gravestones and organizing memorial days, and they generally serve as the family's intermediaries to various political entities that take sponsorship of the deceased and thereby determine the content of the memorials. Mothers, by contrast, serve in the household space, where they set up shrines. They create alternatives, verbal and material, using the feminine space and the maternal space to

<sup>10</sup>Mosse (1993 [Hebrew]).

<sup>11</sup>Lebel and Ronel (2005).

memorialize their children. They spend a lot of time cultivating the grave and its environs by tidying and planting flowers. They also invite friends to memorial days for which they prepare foods that the shaheed used to like, as another way of memorializing their son.

### FATHERLY COMMEMORATION—MONUMENTS AND GRAVESTONES

The gravestone has an important social role in death-related ceremonies and is a post-liminal stage in the ceremony of transition to the world to come. During this stage, the deceased person assumes the sacred identity of one who has fallen in sacrifice for the state and the society and, when the circumstances of the death had the relevant political overtones, for the entire nation.<sup>12</sup>

It is the Palestinian fathers who express the desire to instill deeper meaning in the experience of bereavement and to find justification for the sacrifice and the loss. The efforts toward memorialization in Palestinian society created in due course a collective commemoration shared by most of the bereaved parents throughout the West Bank who have lost their children under similar circumstances. Concurrently, localized styles of commemoration developed. In certain places, the site of the child's death was the ultimate location for erecting a monument, while in other places the shaheed's house itself turned into a permanent monument. The father of two shaheeds explained:

With my own hands I built a monument to each of them. One monument is on a piece of land where [child's name] fell, and the other is near the [separation] fence where [child's name] fell. I sit at the monument to [child's name] every day. That is, so I won't forget. The gravestone in the earth will always remind me of the connection between the struggle and protecting the land.

See Fig. 1.

Another father expressed similar feelings:

<sup>12</sup>Nora (1993 [Hebrew]).





Fig. 1 Memorial on a main street in Nablus, where a son fell as a shaheed

At [location], a custom developed whereby we build a monument next to the shaheed's house, so that everyone will know that this is the home of a shaheed, a home he sacrificed for the homeland and for the struggle, you see, it's impossible to ignore it. You stand there, you read what's written. This is very important; for me, it's very important. That people remember, that they stop and don't ignore it.

See Fig. 2.

There were some who chose to locate the monument, unusually, inside the house. Thus, for example, one of the fathers described his special way of memorializing his son:

I chose a special way of memorializing my son. I have at home a frame, 120 X 70 cm, and in this frame are the trousers and belt that belonged to [name of child]. The trousers still have bloodstains on them, his cigarette lighter and cigarettes are in the pocket, and his belt shows where the bullet hit him. And his shoes are there, too. I framed all his belongings, and I don't allow anyone



Fig. 2 A monument erected on the wall at the entrance to the house of a shaheed

to touch them. Of course my goal is to memorialize him in this way. But another goal, no less important, is to remind myself that those who are able to massacre me and my family and my people will not bring me to despair or surrender... I like to look at his clothes every day, all the time, so as not to forget. These things are energizing somehow, reminding me that I raised him right and received the right reward: I got a shaheed.

The inscriptions on the monuments and gravestones of Palestinian shaheeds are not uniform, and there are no clear official printed instructions in this matter. At the same time, the results of this research show that Palestinian society relies mainly on what is considered appropriate and customary in Islamic burial traditions. Islamic customs seek to memorialize the grave and the headstone. Generally the inscription appears on the headstone section of the gravestone. A quote from the Qur'an will always begin with a Qur'anic verse, generally from the Surat al-Fatihah—the first verse of the Qur'an. The inscription includes the full name of the shaheed, the date of his birth and the date of his death. On the grave of a shaheed, the inscription also includes the quote, “Do not think of those who fall in the cause of God as dead. They live, and receive their reward from their Master... they have no fear and no sorrow” (Surat ali-'Imran, 169–170). In practice, there is no formal law and no prohibition, formal or informal, preventing the family from inscribing something more personal on a monument or gravestone, yet it is rarely done, whether in secular or religious families. The type of gravestones, the monuments and the inscriptions on them have been modest and standard.

In this context, the question arises as to why these Palestinian parents relinquished the right to express a personal connection, through the inscription on the monument, with their dead child. This contrasts with their involvement in choosing the form and location of the monument, which did include individual components. In my judgment, there could be two main reasons for this. The first is that the Palestinian culture of bereavement in the territories is a relatively new culture, and will require more time to become fully formed and stable. The second reason is that since Palestinian society is a traditional society with religious ideas and beliefs, there is a preference for adopting a unified religious text that has automatic social consensus and will be less prone to social or political differences of opinion.

See Fig. 3.



Fig. 3 A shrine in the home of a shaheed

### *MIKBARAT AL-SHAHEED—THE MARTYR’S CEMETERY*

Cemeteries for fallen martyrs and official memorial sites are the two principal arenas for the rituals surrounding the war dead in modern nation-states. As the Palestinian commemoration process has continued to evolve, special cemeteries were created for the shaheeds, analogous to the military cemeteries in Israel. This is a relatively new phenomenon in Palestinian society; it began during the First Intifada. In my judgment, the Palestinian leadership felt the need for developing special means for coping with these losses to help the families deal with their grief and to reinforce the justification for such sacrifice. Modern European national models supplied the inspiration for this mode of memorializing the fallen. I have argued that the Israeli model, likewise based on the model of the modern nation-state, was also a source of inspiration, however partial, for the Palestinian model. This model produces a culture of death that George Mosse has called a “cult of

the fallen” and a “civil religion.” This culture of death has aided in formulating the myth of “heroic sacrifice”<sup>13</sup> and it offers a kind of social contract, in that it defines the nature of the relations between the Palestinian authorities—policy-makers—and the families of the shaheeds, and acknowledges the uniqueness distinguishing the deaths of these Palestinian children in service to the homeland. This process resembles the Israeli process of the cult of the fallen, which Azaryahu has called a “state cult.”<sup>14</sup> He suggests that the state and especially the establishment of military cemeteries and official memorial ceremonies are intended to bring the fallen closer to the nation, but that first and foremost their goal is to establish a relationship between the state and the families of the fallen. The cemetery for the shaheeds and the military burial ceremonies—*al-janazat al-‘askarya*—take on a special status in Palestinian society, and have an additional role in the creating of the collective Palestinian memory and identity. Apart from the official role of the cemeteries as a place of interment, they also play a key role in the transition of the fallen son and his family to the status of a shaheed and parents of a shaheed, a situation of prestige and honor in Palestinian society.

Alongside the hierarchy of death in Palestinian society, there is also a hierarchy of burial. The various political factions have a central and significant role in shaping the content and arrangement of the cemeteries. In the area under the Palestinian Authority, the fallen of all factions, including those who are in conflict with one another, like Hamas and Fatah, are buried in the same cemetery but not in the same section. In recent years, a tradition has developed of allocating areas based on the deceased’s allegiance to a fighting unit within the “overall organization.” Each unit has its area in the cemetery for burial only of the fighters who belong to that unit.

That area is called, in Palestinian military terminology, *al murba’ al-amni*—the security section. Sometimes the fallen are buried in a section belonging to the shaheeds who are not fighters. For burial in the security section, there is an order embodying a hierarchy based on allegiance to a fighting unit. The place of a shaheed in the unit will also determine his priority for burial within the security section. It is appropriate to note here that this custom is not uniform, and changes from group to group

<sup>13</sup>Mosse (1993).

<sup>14</sup>Azaryaho (1995).

and from city to city in the territories. In certain cases a unit may adopt deceased persons who are unconnected with any party or unit in order to enable the person's burial together with members of the unit. In such cases, the bereaved fathers are those who do the negotiating with the faction interested in adopting the shaheed. One of the Palestinian fathers described this phenomenon as follows:

Yes, sadly, in the camp there are a great many shaheeds, so it was decided to set up a cemetery for the shaheeds. There are cemeteries for shaheeds everywhere, and this is true in the Bethlehem area, too. Also in Beit Jala, Beit Sahur, and in Bethlehem itself, and in our refugee camp. In Bethlehem itself there are two such cemeteries: one for the eastern areas and a second one named after the shaheed Hussein Abbayat, and in the camp there is a cemetery that belongs only to the refugee camp. When [name of child] fell, the young men came to me from [name of unit] and said to me: Ya abu [name of child], we have the honor to offer to [name of child] burial in our section of the cemetery for the shaheeds of this camp.

In addition to the inspiration provided by the nation-state model for the rituals of burial in Palestinian society—flag, military parade, gunfire salute—the content of the Palestinian ceremony is also drawn from Muslim religion and tradition. Thus, for example, the funeral—whether civilian or military—cannot take place without a religious figure at its center—the imam, whose job it is to lead the prayer for the shaheed at the mosque closest to his home and, sometimes, at the mosque closest to the cemetery. This prayer is called the prayer for the dead. One of the main issues discussed in the literature of Muslim religious law is whether it is permitted to pray for the shaheed, on the assumption that the blood of the shaheed is his witness before God. That is why the shaheed is fated in Islam to be buried in his clothes without his body having been ritually washed and purified, and is always wrapped in the Palestinian flag. Evidently most Muslim religious experts are persuaded that one may pray for the shaheed, although they have left the decision to the local religious leaders. The process is described by one of the fathers:

They brought him to me from the hospital already wrapped in a flag, God be praised, his face was beautiful... His friends carried him on their shoulders... and they paraded with him like with a groom... When we got to the cemetery the Imam prayed for us... His friends eulogized him and we all read [Surat] al-Fatihah.

### Another father:

I felt a great honor during my son's funeral. His friends from his squad of fighters came to the funeral and paid their respects to him as warriors... They did a 21-gun salute and raised Palestinian flags with his picture. I felt proud of him.

The funeral rites for a Palestinian shaheed draw their content from Islamic religion and traditions. A shaheed's funeral combines the military and national dimension with the religious dimension. Mostly the deceased is buried without a coffin, wearing his own clothes and wrapped in a Palestinian flag, but if the body is not whole or if they are burying only body parts, he will be buried in a coffin. Most of the funeral is led by a representative of the military or political faction to which the shaheed belonged, but the burial rites themselves are conducted by a clergyman, who reads verses from the Qur'an dealing with the death of a shaheed and death in general. Afterwards his friends and family eulogize him.

Note that the foregoing descriptions do not apply to every funeral of a shaheed in the territories. During periods of active warfare, the ceremony is shortened due to the fear of an Israeli military attack, because the funerals of shaheeds, especially if they were wanted men, have become a military target.

Note also that although the traditions for the burial rites of a shaheed draw on the religious worldview, the Muslim religious rites also contain components that contradict that worldview. The Muslim religious worldview sees death as *qada' waqadr* (predestined)<sup>15</sup>—and thus the ceremony and even the grave are to be deemphasized. Islamic law demands explicitly that the grave and burial rites be modest.<sup>16</sup> The integration of the military and national ritualism and the religious approach creates new norms and values relating to death and to the burial rites. We can see that the Palestinian national experience relating to loss and bereavement, an experience that is developing as a process unique to the Palestinian people, is taking place within a continual dialogue encompassing parallel processes in global society and in Jewish-Israeli society, and is influenced thereby.

Girtz, in addressing the religious dimension, argues that “a religious system is created by integrating sacred symbols with any organized overall

<sup>15</sup>Al-Krenawi et al. (2001–2002).

<sup>16</sup>Amir et al. (2006 [Hebrew]).

entirety.”<sup>17</sup> Palestinian society has made similar use of symbols and thereby created a “civil religion.” The grave of a shaheed becomes a symbol, and the dead young man turns into a national hero—*shaheed al-uma*. The process in Israeli society has been similar; Noah argues that the dead young man has a role in enlisting his family, retroactively, into the service of the state.<sup>18</sup>

## MEMORIAL DAYS

Memorial days are an additional component in the realm of memory and commemoration in Palestinian society. “Memory is life, and is always borne by living groups. Thus it is always developing, is open to a dialectic of remembering and forgetting, is sensitive to all kinds of uses and manipulations, and knows periods of latency and sudden resurgences.”<sup>19</sup> In a culture of death, memorial ceremonies are very important. Most such ceremonies connect the community with its past or with events that occurred in the past. They have supreme importance<sup>20</sup> and are based on the beliefs and values of the society concerning memory and doing honor to the dead, so these rites have a significant role in strengthening the society and the culture. Memory is mostly a personal thing, and everyone has private places and spaces in his memory that are personal to him or her; but in terms of the memorial ceremonies for Palestinian shaheeds, there is another aspect that is collective. The collective dimension encompasses the shaheed’s family, the political faction or group to which he belongs and, both narrowly and broadly, Palestinian society. In my opinion, memorial ceremonies in Palestinian society have a central role in commemoration and in the shaping of the Palestinian memory. The national memory is anchored in archives, memorial sites, ceremonies and monuments.<sup>21</sup>

In Palestinian society, memorial days and memorial ceremonies contribute to the sense of “togetherness”—the feeling that we (the society) are all one large family, a feeling that allows for moments of solidarity, unity and empathy, all of which can ease the tremendous pain that the bereaved Palestinian families feel. One father described it this way:

<sup>17</sup>Gertz (1990 [Hebrew]).

<sup>18</sup>Nave (1998 [Hebrew]).

<sup>19</sup>Nora (1993 [Hebrew]).

<sup>20</sup>Azaryaho (1995 [Hebrew]).

<sup>21</sup>Shkedi (2004 [Hebrew]).



Once a year they organize a mass memorial event in memory of all the shaheeds who have fallen, and they always dedicate part of it to [name of child]. It may be a speech that I give as the father of a shaheed, or sometimes it's a poem that a friend wrote for him, and sometimes it's a procession in his memory. I feel that we, the parents of the shaheeds, have become one big family.

## MATERNAL COMMEMORATION

The commemoration engaged in by Palestinian mothers of shaheeds has acquired a different character and different content than that of the fathers. Among the mothers, three main methods of commemoration have emerged clearly: the memorial shrine at home; visiting the cemetery and cleaning and beautifying the grave; and planning and organizing more intimate personal memorial events.

### *Small Shrines*

One of the main maternal approaches to commemoration among these Palestinian mothers is the creation of a small shrine at home. Nearly every Palestinian shaheed's home has a memorial corner of some kind, generally containing photographs of the shaheed, badges of honor from the various political factions that gave the shaheed their sponsorship, flowers and personal belongings such as a wristwatch, a wallet and so on. Palestinian mothers in our interviews talked about the importance of the shrine and how central it was to their home. The shrine acquired different characteristics and contents in different districts and from household to household. For some of these Palestinian families, the memorial shrine was a presentation of pictures and badges of honor of various kinds, hung on one wall of the house; in recent years, however, a custom has developed of preparing an actual separate corner of the house, usually a large chest or large corner table, on which the mother places the shaheed's objects, his pictures and badges of honor, alongside a vase with flowers, usually artificial flowers. When the family is well off and has a large living space so that they can do without the shaheed's own room for other purposes, his room would generally become the shrine. Many mothers spoke about their ideas for turning the shaheed's room into a refuge where they can go with their pain. One mother described her memorial shrine this way:

I collected all of the belongings of [child's name] and turned his room into a sacred place, a place where no one goes. Every day I open the room and sit there for hours. I hung his pictures in my bedroom and every morning when I wake up, I stand in front of his photograph and tell him "good morning, yamma," and before I go to sleep I turn to his picture and tell him "good night, yamma."

The appearance of these memorial corners in Palestinian homes surprised me, every time. The nature of these private maternal shrines is very different than that of ordinary Palestinian cultural and social memorials, and the question that immediately arose for me was, Where did the inspiration and the models for these shrines come from? Could the Israeli model possibly be the source, or is this a personal feminine effort to dissociate from the Palestinian national hegemonic voice that succeeds in bringing private, personal grieving into the private sphere? Is this, for example, an effort to develop an alternative maternal language, a visual language, rhetorically distinct, that encompasses personal rituals and rites, a rebellious language undermining the national hegemonic discourse? These and other questions preoccupied me a great deal regarding this maternal commemoration.

Following are a few quotes addressing issues of commemoration, from the research journal I kept during 2006–2008:

I must confess that I immediately thought of the Israeli model as a parallel and influential model. I walked around with these thoughts in my head for a long time, and I tried to understand if it was about the influence of the media. But where do you see such memorial shrines elsewhere in the world? Maybe in Japan, I thought, and laughed to myself..

Today, after I left Khalkhoul, I found myself wondering again about the memorial issue... What I saw at the home of Umm [name of child] [i.e., at his mother's home] left me dumbfounded. Is this a private language, a "mother's language" that articulates the personal and private case of the mothers' experience, their pain, their sorrow over the loss of a child, or is this a struggle over the personal within the public sphere?

I think I've found an explanation, maybe a partial one, for the conflict I feel inwardly in relation to these memorial shrines. On my way back from Jerusalem to Neve Shalom, I passed Bab al-Wad /Shaar Hagai. There are a few tanks there by the side of the road, and memorial monuments, I think from 1948, so who cleans these tanks and these monuments? None other than Palestinians... yes, and also Palestinian women have worked in the homes of Israelis.

I don't want to construct an entire theory around my personal misgivings, assumptions and conjectures. Plus, this is about two peoples who share a common space and influence one another. Whether through processes conscious, or unconscious; whether or not the Israeli model is a source of inspiration; and whether or not this is about the development and cultivation of a feminine language battling with the national hegemony about the personal and private—Palestinian maternal commemoration has managed, in my view, to create its own unique characteristics.

See Fig. 4.

### *Cemeteries*

Along with the memorial shrines, these mothers also took on the responsibility for cleaning and beautifying the grave of the shaheed. The mothers told of visiting their child's grave nearly every Thursday (Thursdays being the traditional day set aside for this task among Muslims), washing the grave, weeding the land around it and watering the flowers on the grave. One mother described it this way:

When I visit his grave, I feel him strongly. I sit for hours at the graveside, reading the Qur'an, talking with him, cleaning the area around it and watering the flowers. Sometimes I bring new flowers and replace the old ones. I beautify the grave [i.e., his resting place] as if it were his bed.

On memorial days, too, the Palestinian mothers have their own special way of commemorating their child. They are mainly responsible for the home sphere, and they memorialize their child in an interesting way on a memorial day. One mother explained:

Every memorial day, I prepare the foods that the shaheed loved and I invite his best friends. They gather at our house, eat together and remember the shaheed. Every year on Memorial Day, they tell me a new story or something that happened to them with the shaheed, and I feel fulfilled by that.

## COMMEMORATION THROUGH MEDIA PLATFORMS

One modality for memorialization that is common to both fathers and mothers is via the new social media. The media in Palestinian society have a very significant and important role in commemorating the children. During the Second Intifada, local photography studios proliferated, and they



Fig. 4 A home shrine in the home of one of the shaheeds

understood the potential in documenting the incidents surrounding these deaths, mostly without the authorization of the family. The photographers would come to the scene of an incident, filming what took place and passing along the materials to the local television station. The station would film the funeral and prepare a video that included documentation of the funeral, the photos from the arena where the incident happened and from the hospital, including photos of the shaheed in the morgue and his friends and parents saying their farewells to him. After a few days, the family would receive a gift of this video with all the recorded material, and an audio track with a song generally written especially for the shaheed. Generally this was paid for by the organization that took sponsorship of the shaheed, but if the family was well off, it would fund this by itself. Other media involved might include the Internet, where a memorial website could be established. One father of a shaheed talked about this:

His friends came to me and asked for material to create a website for him, and his brothers are always posting various things on the site. I can't update the site, I don't have the necessary skills. My sons do it, but I look at it nearly every day, and sometimes when I am overcome with longing I can sit for half a day looking at the materials already on the site. I am glad and proud to know that there are other people who visit the website for [name of child]. I am glad of that.

## CONCLUSION

At the center of the issue of commemoration in this study are the thoughts of the bereaved parents, their desire and will to commemorate the memory of their children and find meaning in their personal loss, alongside the national and the collective, where the object of memorializing is to mold and enmesh the national, collective memory.

The findings of this study point to conspicuous differences in the way that Palestinian mothers memorialize their children as compared with the way fathers do. The research shows that Palestinian mothers choose to memorialize their children mainly at home, and their activity is mainly about creating private shrines there as well as caring for the child's grave. In contrast, the fathers' way of approaching this emphasizes the public sphere, where they deal with the building of monuments and tombs, the burial of the shaheeds in the cemeteries, and the organizing of public memorial days.

These differences emphasize again the binary division according to which the women are identified with the private sphere and the men with the public sphere. The understanding of space as a social product raises many questions regarding the identity of the agents who create it. Henri Lefebvre was among the first to emphasize space as a dimension subject to social power relations and as an object of ideological activity, so that the image of space and the symbolic aspect of space are understood as crucial to and inseparable from the material nature of space. Lefebvre linked patriarchy to space as an ideology driving a normative process that makes use of space to preserve the shape of mass society. Lefebvre's theory of the construction of space permits an analysis of the production of space as dependent on the patriarchal nature of Arab society, but also as dependent on broader political, religious and social exchanges.<sup>22</sup> Arguably, then, the creation by fathers and mothers of various commemorative spaces in Palestinian society takes place to a great extent in spatial arenas already shaped by patriarchal power relations. The latter have an impact on the physical, mental and social dimensions of Palestinian memorial spaces, and to some extent on the creation of different memorial spaces aligning with the binary roles based on which women are identified with the private sphere and men are responsible for the public sphere—thereby maintaining a given reality and preserving certain power relations. In the act of commemoration, there is a process of shaping the collective and public memory.<sup>23</sup>

As I understand it, the exclusion of women from the national public space in the course of the struggle of Palestinian society for its independence reinforces their traditional role in the private sphere, i.e., in the home. The binary perspective that has grown out of the recognition of space as a focal point for male action is extremely comprehensive and it determines the relations between the various objects in a space.<sup>24</sup> This is so, despite the illusion that leaders of both the Intifadas created about the role of Palestinian women, who are apprehended as active and equal partners in the national struggle. In Palestinian history, and throughout the entire course of the Palestinian national struggle, women have not taken an active part in shaping the Palestinian national memory, despite the commonly accepted notion in Palestinian society that Palestinian mothers are to be seen as

<sup>22</sup>Lefebvre (1991).

<sup>23</sup>Gershuni (2006 [Hebrew]).

<sup>24</sup>Bluman (2005 [Hebrew]).

“mothers of the nation.”<sup>25</sup> In this context, al-Maranisi points out the connection between sexuality and territory in Muslim culture, and clarifies how norms of preserving the modesty of women relate to the establishment of the space or its symbolic appropriation by the local culture. Thus a prohibited or public space emerges, in contrast with the private or protected space, and the associated boundaries and supervision are tools employed by the society to control feminine space, as Fenster has explained.<sup>26</sup> For the most part, the boundaries between these spaces are clear and inflexible.

In contrast to the women, Palestinian men are perceived as revolutionary, as most of their political and nonpolitical activity alike takes place in the public sphere. Conveying messages via commemoration is done mainly by men, who have taken ownership of the public space with the emplacement of monuments, tombs and cemeteries and the organization of memorial days; although these include a personal statement, their purpose is to shape and perpetuate a national memory. In the context of this issue, Gershoni argues that the individual has the ability to create and shape a unique memory, a memory that is the product of the circumstances of his life. At the same time, that unique memory is part of the collective memory because everything written, every artifact made, whether seemingly attached solely to a particular individual or not, leaves behind an ongoing memory, so long as the individual is linked with the thoughts of other individuals.<sup>27</sup>

The Palestinian national narrative is documented mainly by men. Masculine memory and masculine experience were the foundation on which the Palestinian national narrative was built. Noah argues that the masculine gaze is exclusive and totalitarian in shaping the collective culture, history and memory.<sup>28</sup> Palestinian women are excluded from this process. In consequence, as I have tried to highlight through the foregoing descriptions of the processes involved, the Intifada in the context of commemoration bore a revolutionary character from a political standpoint but a traditional character from a social-gender perspective. The revolutionary political quality and the conservative social-gender quality have been evident in the preservation of the interrelation of public space and private space around the issue of commemoration in Palestinian society. The act of commemoration has

<sup>25</sup>Tzorf (2004 [Hebrew]) and Hammami (1990).

<sup>26</sup>Al-Maranisi (2007 [Arabic]) and Fenster (1999).

<sup>27</sup>Gershuni (2006).

<sup>28</sup>Nave (1998).

been characterized by the maintenance, even reinforcement, of the existing gender structure. This separation between the private and the public serves masculine interests and assures their control in both spaces, public and private.

In conclusion, in the final chapter of this study we have examined the interrelations between gender, nationality and religion and considered how these components influence the shaping of the content and space of commemoration and memory among bereaved Palestinian parents. Palestinian society collectively has shown support for the parents of shaheeds and for the bereaved Palestinian family and has displayed a sense of responsibility regarding their loss. This has led to a Palestinian memorialization project, the core of which rests on the bestowing of immortality to the shaheed; this is intended to lessen the grief of those who mourn him. Palestinian society has accomplished this through a reliance on religious principles that offer a basic framework and support for the memorialization processes. Commemoration of the shaheeds has become an essential part of the Palestinian collective memorial undertaking. The process that has made the shaheed immortal has also afforded Palestinian society a new collective identity. The present study further identifies gender differences in various aspects of commemoration among Palestinian parents. There are obvious differences in the way in which Palestinian mothers commemorate their children as compared with the way fathers do. Palestinian mothers have chosen to memorialize their children mainly in the private space, whereas the fathers memorialize their children mainly in the public space. These differences produce masculine commemorative spaces expressing social power relations and comprising an arena for ideological activity; that space is abstract, homogeneous and distant from feminine human existence, and the patriarchal hierarchy makes use of it to preserve and stabilize its control.

Arguably the culture of commemoration created by Palestinian society during the al-Aqsa Intifada imparts a collective national character to the loss of these children. The memorialization of the Palestinian shaheeds has a hidden mission to magnify the awareness of the sacrifice of the shaheeds in the service of a national-political purpose of the first order. Commemoration establishes a collective national identity in Palestinian society and transforms the personal sacrifice of Palestinian parents into a sacrifice for the collective and for the homeland.



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