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FROM TRANSGRESSION TO ENDORSEMENT: COMBATANT WOMEN BETWEEN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

By

Miriam Alessio, BA

Faculty of Humanities Department of Middle Eastern Studies

Master of Arts in Modern Middle Eastern Studies

Supervisor:

Dr. Noa Schonmann

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Introduction

Female fighters have surfaced through history as stories of transgressions,¹ as the exception to the rule: men. The traditional role of women as mothers and wives has established that women's place is in the household and men's role is in the battlefield to defend and honor their countries.² For this reason, women have been excluded almost universally from formally serving in combat units of national militaries.³

As of the end of 2017, the official endorsement of women in frontline combat positions in state militaries has occurred in Canada, France, Norway, Denmark, Israel, Netherlands, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Sweden, and only recently, the United States and the United Kingdom. The State of Palestine, and two of its paramilitary organizations also officially endorsed women in combat. Thus, only 8.7% of the world endorses women in combat.⁴ In five other places: Pakistan, Serbia, South Africa, South Korea, and India, women can hold positions such as fighter pilots, but they are barred from other combat roles.⁵ The low percentage of women in combat reveals that they are still a minority. Among these, the highly militarized Israel and Palestine, seemingly two opposites - one commonly defined as Western⁶ and one non-Western⁷ - which are also in conflict with each other, give the formal authority blanket endorsement for women in combat units at about the same time, at the turn of a new millennium.

In the year 2000, the Equality amendment to the Defense Service Law in Israel asserted that "[t]he right of women to serve in any role in the IDF is equal to the right of men."⁸ Five years beforehand, Alice Miller, a young female soldier, successfully petitioned

¹ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War.* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1987), 80.

² Ibid.

³ Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender : How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. (Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 10.

⁴ This number was obtained by calculating that there are 171 countries with military and paramilitary personnel, the list is sourced from the 2017 edition of "The Military Balance" published annually by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. https://www.iiss.org/

⁵ Max Fisher, "Map: Which Countries Allow Women in Front-Line Combat Roles?" *The Washington Post*, January 25, 2013, , accessed July 19, 2018, http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-34169294.html?refid=easy_hf.

^{5.//}www.nighbeam.com/doc/1P2-34169294.nitili?felid=easy_file.

⁶Ran Halevi, "The Elusive Idea of the Nation," *Journal of Israeli History* 26, no. 2 (2007):140. ⁷Ella Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 1 (1999):7.

⁸ "Integration of women in the IDF". Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 8 March 2009. Retrieved 23 January 2018.

the Supreme Court to be admitted to the combat pilot course. Since 1949, women were obliged to serve in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) but barred from combat units. Alice Miller did not complete the course and therefore, she did not become the first female combatant, but she paved the way for the Defense Law to be amended in 2000, and for Roni Zuckerman to succeed in 2001 to become the first combat pilot. In Palestine, in the meanwhile, women who were active in demonstrations during the First Intifada were asked to resume their roles in the households when the Second Intifada started in the year 2000.⁹ Then. in the morning of January 27th, 2002, Yasser Arafat, founder of Fatah and chairman of the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Movement) since 1969, addressed a crowd of women and encouraged them to become active members of the armed resistance. Arafat referred to the women as his "Army of Roses that will crush Israeli tanks."¹⁰ Later on that same afternoon, Wafa Idris carried out the first female martyrdom attack. Both Roni and Wafa laid the foundations for other women to follow in their footsteps, as the pioneers of a new era of women in combat. The puzzling proximity in time begs the question as to what triggered it to happen at the same period. What brought Israel and Palestine to legitime this transgression around the same time? Is there a specific reason that justifies it or is it the result of a mere coincidence?

Theoretical Framework

The story of Joan of Arc is a famous tale of a female warrior who picked up arms in defense of her nation, France. Her initial military success brought her fame and honor, but conspirators would later accused her of heresy and witchcraft, leading to her execution.¹¹ Joan of Arc died on May 30, 1431, and with her death, she became an archetype of the female warrior. Joan's military and political exploits stood in stark contrast to the traditional roles of women in medieval Europe, which her enemies presented as a heretical deviation from

⁹ Victor, Barbara. *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers.* (London: Robinson, 2004), 11.

¹⁰ Ibid, 19.

¹¹ Larissa Taylor, "Joan of Arc," in *Oxford Bibliographies*, last modified: July 24, 2012, doi: 10.1093/OBO /9780195399301-0124.

traditional gender norms. I will explore traditional perceptions of women in combat, asking: what social boundaries do women transgress when they engage in combat? Traditional wisdom held that women in the military threaten masculinity and that the female warrior was an oxymoron because of women's inherently peaceful nature. This prejudice, stretching back to the earliest sources describing women roles in combat, reflected and created a double standard that pushed women in contemporary society to mobilize for their "right to fight."

In her seminal book, Women and War, Jean Bethke Elshtain argues that "military combat is, in some sense, *the* defining male role, and exclusion from combat, in turn, has been one of the defining traits of femininity."¹² The presumption is that women in combat could threaten gender roles within society, roles that have established men as the defenders of national borders and women as defenders of the home. The image of women as pacifists, due to their maternal nature, has continued to fuel the assumptions that they do not belong in war or the military and that those who do are transgressors, violating the traditional values of Western society.¹³ The traditional association of all women with mothers, who nurture life, renders them incapable to end it. Masculinity, by contrast, is tested and earned in combat. Feminist theorist Cynthia Holden Enloe affirmed that military service is a means to attain true manhood: "a man is unproven in his manhood until he has engaged in collective, violent, physical, struggle against someone categorized as 'the enemy."¹⁴ Women in combat roles, therefore, subvert this traditional model of masculinity and in various ways evoke a sense of male submission, where femininity "tramples the male ego."¹⁵ Consequently, women have played largely an auxiliary and pacifistic role during war: "men are the historical authors of organized violence and women have been drawn in."¹⁶ Women's assertion of their right to fight in the military has historic origins, which developed and reacted to the privileged link between manhood and combat develop over time.

¹² Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1987), 80.

¹³ Tami Amanda Jacoby, *Women in Zones of Conflict Gender Structures and Women's Resistance in Israel* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 113.

¹⁴ Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You?: The Militarization of Women's Lives* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989), 13.

¹⁵Ibid., 154.

¹⁶ Elshtain, *Women and War*, 164.

Feminists' quest for equal rights stems from the need for equality that Western democracies had fostered in theory, but had failed to provide in practice. Liberal citizenship, the leading contemporary political philosophy that developed in Europe,¹⁷ identified military service as the ultimate obligation of a citizen to the state. In return, citizens obtain "equal social, civic, and political rights."¹⁸ Based on this theory of government, Carole Pateman identified some feminists who argued that women's exclusion from combat roles prevented them from claiming the privileges and rights that men enjoy.¹⁹ Without full access to all the rights and obligations of a citizen, the inequality between the two sexes would persist. Therefore, institutional recognition of the right of women to join the military has become one of the primary ambitions of some feminists. The feminist demand for women's "right to fight" encountered opposition not just from men, but also women and sparked different opinions about the dichotomy of women and war that feminists and scholars in the Western and non-Western worlds have tried to explain.

Jean Bethke Elshtain described the long-standing dispute over the significance of women and war in the West, explaining that contemporary feminist discourse has fragmented into a convoluted dilemma: "from its inception, feminism has not quite known whether to fight men or join them...whether to condemn all wars outright or to extol women's contribution to war efforts."²⁰ On the one hand, the feminist movement embraced the image of women as mothers and pacifists. On the other hand, it celebrated the exemplary female warrior, such as Joan of Arc. These two strands of feminist theory created two separate feminist traditions. The first tradition adopted a pacifist view and campaigned against women's interest in joining the military, claiming that women have been connected to peace campaigns and to anti-war sentiment since the Greek Tragedies in the 6th century BCE.²¹ The main proponents of this view were Jane Addams and Virginia Woolf, who endorsed pacifist

¹⁷ Iseult Honohan, "Liberal and Republican Conceptions of Citizenships," in *The Oxford Handbook of Citizenship*, ed. Ayelet Shachar, Rainer Bauböck, Irene Bloemraad, and Maarten Vink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1.

¹⁸ Thomas Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (London: Pluto Press, 1987), 100.

¹⁹ Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 11.

²⁰ Elshtain, *Women and War*, 231.

²¹ Ibid., 233.

feminism. Addams affirmed that feminism and militarism were in unequivocally opposition; women and their maternal nature represented the "ultimate supremacy of moral agencies."²² Woolf affirmed that men and women are fundamentally different; whereas men are drawn to war, women are drawn to a more pacifistic stance.²³ This tradition tried to raise women to a higher moral standard than men, positing that if men's need to prove themselves as protectors drew them to war, women's ability to give life should draw them to bring peace to the world. In contrast to Addams and Woolf's pacifist feminism was liberal or individualist feminism.²⁴ Proponents of this movement included feminists who argued for the full inclusion of women in the armed forces as part of their claim to equal rights (and obligations) with men.²⁵ This is the current stance of one the most important feminist organization in the United States, the National Organization for Women (NOW), which filed a legal brief in 1981 beginning with the claim that "if women are to gain 'first-class citizenship', they, too, must have the right to fight."²⁶ To their minds, universal and compulsory service in the military is pivotal component of citizenship in a democracy. The leaders of some Western countries have pridefully included women in combat. Carolyn Becraft, who directed the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL), the equivalent of NOW for the more conservative women, has stated that "[t]he United States is far and away ahead of other nations in making use of women in the military."²⁷ The "right to fight" soon expanded beyond the borders of the United States, encouraging countries all over the world to integrate women into their armies and combat units, thus transforming the traditional role of combatant women as transgressors. For these reasons, I will explore this second branch of individualist feminism in this study, the branch that embraces the image of the female warrior.

²² Jane Addams, *Peace and Bread in Time of War* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1922), 20.

²³ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1938).

²⁴ American independent scholar, Karen Offen (*European Feminisms 1700-1950: A Political History*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003), coined the term "individualist feminism."

²⁵ Laura Miller, "Feminism and the Exclusion of Army Women from Combat," *Gender Issues 16*, no. 3 (1998): 37, doi: 10.1007/s12147-998-0021-1.

²⁶ Elshtain, *Women and War*, 239.

²⁷ Ibid., 242.

On the other side of the spectrum, non-Western feminists claim that globalization produced "a universal dominant discourse that promotes Western values as being superior and desirable for all women."²⁸ It has become the norm in the West that Non-Western women are portrayed as the oppressed sex that needs to obey men.²⁹ However, Western feminism has created an idea of women's needs and desires that do not necessarily belong to those of non-Western feminists. Danielle Dunand explains that measuring feminism by Western standards is wrong because "Muslim women cannot be understood in reference to mainstream feminist models; instead, there is a need to incorporate Muslim feminist perspectives and models centered on women from developing societies."³⁰ The critique is that Western mainstream feminist models aim to paint all women with the same brush.

In the Muslim world, the history of female warriors goes back to 625 AD, when Nusaybah bint Ka'ab, fought in the Battle of Uhud becoming one of the greatest female legends. Nusaybah is portrayed as a fearless woman equipped with a shield and a sword ready to defend her nation under attack.³¹ Similarly, the threat posed by ISIS from its ascent in 2011 forced women in the Middle East to take up arms. The role of Kurdish Women who covered combatants positions to fight against ISIS, inverted the traditional Western perception of Middle Eastern and specifically Muslim women as fragile, passive and oppressed.³² Western scholar Marco Nilsson advances the idea that Kurdish women, similarly to Western women, have been joining the fight because they "see their participation in the war as a chance to increase their agency and improve equality in society."³³ According to Nilsson, these women were provided with the opportunity to demonstrate that as female combatants they could

- ³¹ Rafia Zakaria, "Women and Islamic Militancy." Dissent, 2015.
- https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/why-women-choose-isis-islamic-militancy
- ³² ROLA EL-HUSSEINI, RADICAL ISLAM'S WAR ON WOMEN,
- https://www.newsweek.com/radical-islams-war-women-312323
- ³³ Marco Nilsson, "Kurdish Women in the Kurdish–Turkish Conflict perceptions, Experiences, and Strategies." *Middle Eastern Studies* 54, no. 4 (2018): 638-51.

²⁸ Danielle Dunand Zimmerman, "Young Arab Muslim Women's Agency Challenging Western Feminism." *Affilia* 30, no. 2 (2015): 148.

²⁹ Sara Salem, Feminist critique and Islamic feminism: The question of intersectionality. The Postcolonialist, 1.

³⁰ Danielle Zimmerman, "Young Arab Muslim Women's Agency Challenging Western Feminism.": 148.

change perceptions of women's social roles in a traditionally patriarchal society.³⁴ This underlying motivation pushed one-third of the Kurds fighting against ISIS, to become female fighters.³⁵ However, Kurdish women are not the only example of female fighters in the Middle East. In other parts of the non-Western world, women joined guerrilla movements including Jabhat al Nusra, Al-Qaeda, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, ISIS,³⁶ and various paramilitary organization in Palestine. Yet, whereas Kurdish women were praised for their courage to fight against ISIS, an enemy of the Western world,³⁷ and deemed as "pro-Western in orientation"³⁸ other female fighters received the opposite treatment from the media. For example, Palestinian female fighters were called "female terrorist"³⁹ by *The Times of Israel*, a well-respected Israeli newspaper. The British The Times used the derogatory term "suicide bombing"⁴⁰ to refer to female martyrdom, and the known American newspapers The Washington Post described Palestinian women as "female suicide bomber."⁴¹ These are just a few examples to illustrate that Palestinian women were not depicted as fighters but as helpless female, stripped of their agency to make their own choices, and probably pushed by their husbands or their misfortune in life to commit jihad.⁴² In opposition to Western media outlets, Palestinian female martyrs viewed themselves as legitimate militant female actors.⁴³ This

³⁴ Amal Grami, "Islamic Feminism: A New Feminist Movement or a Strategy by Women for Acquiring Rights? (Article)." *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 2013, Contemporary Arab Affairs, 2013, 263.

³⁵ Nilsson, "Kurdish Women in the Kurdish–Turkish Conflict – perceptions, Experiences, and Strategies." : 638-51.

³⁶ Jessica Trisko,"Assessing the Significance of Women in Combat Roles." *International Journal* 70, no. 3 (2015): 454.

³⁷ "Hundreds of us will die in Raqqa: The Women Fighting ISIS" The Guardian. April 30, 2017.

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/30/hundreds-of-us-will-die-in-raqqa-the-women-fighting-isis ³⁸"The Kurdish Women Fighting ISIS", CNN. March 15, 2015.

https://edition.cnn.com/2015/03/12/world/cnnphotos-female-peshmerga-fighters/index.html ³⁹ "Female Terrorists in Gaza threaten Intifada after trump announce". The Times of Israel,

December 12th, 2017. https://www.timesofisrael.com/female-terrorists-in-gaza-threaten-intifada-after-trump-announcement/

⁴⁰ "Husband took wife to suicide bombing", The Sunday Times. January, 18, 2004.

https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/husband-took-wife-to-suicide-bombing-j25mjxbtvgc

⁴¹ ["]Female Suicide Bombers: The New Factor in Mideast's Deadly Equation", The Washington Post. April 27, 2002.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2002/04/27/female-suicide-bombers-the-new-factor-in-mideasts-deadly-equation/52b4e38e-0798-4746-929c-5664d7f49004/?utm_term=.841290062fd4

⁴² Laura Sjoberg, "Women Fighters and the 'beautiful Soul' Narrative." *International Review of the Red Cross* 92, no. 877 (2010): 62.

⁴³Frances Hasso,"Discursive and Political Deployments By/of the 2002 Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers/martyrs." *Feminist Review*, no. 81 (2005): 28.

reveals that the Western world commonly has a double standard about what women in the non-Western world are supposed to do. If they fight against the enemy of West they are women to support, if they do not, they are labeled as oppressed with no agency of their own.

Contrary to recent literature on the subject of women's roles in armed forces, that primarily focuses on attempting to understand the underlying motivations of women's decisions to join combat, or that focuses on women as martyrs and/or on women as activists for peace,⁴⁴ this research emphasizes the timing during which a formal authoritative decision was taken to allow women combatants in the military. Specifically, the study will delve into the Israeli armed forces, the IDF, and the paramilitary organizations such as the al-Aqsa Brigades, the Islamic Jihad, and Hamas. Once the organization's leadership take the choice to blatantly recruit women in combat positions, women stop being the transgressors to become the law.⁴⁵ My study does not examine the Israeli–Palestinian conflict directly, nor does it claim to debate all feminist perspectives on the issue of women and combat roles, but rather, focuses on the narration of events and reasons that enabled women to become combatants. Furthermore, it will seek to understand if a correlation between Israel and Palestine exists in this respect.

Literature Review

There is extensive research on women in the military. According to Joshua S. Goldstein During World War II in the Soviet Union, 80,000 women were involved in the war and few thousands were in combat positions. It happened during the Second World War because "war propaganda exaggerated women's exploits to cheer on a devastated society and shame men into fighting harder."⁴⁶ However, when the war ended, women were pulled out of the Red Army. During the American Gulf War in 1990, women were permitted to launch patriot missiles, automatically transforming them from observers to active decision makers.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Ayelet Harel-Shalev and Shir Daphna-Tekoah, "The "Double-Battle": Women Combatants and Their Embodied Experiences in War Zones." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 9, no. 2 (2016): 315.

⁴⁵ Reed M. Wood and Jakana L. Thomas, Women on the frontline: Rebel group ideology and women's participation in violent rebellion, 2016, 33.

⁴⁶ Goldstein, "War and gender: How gender shapes the war system and vice versa." 64–72.

⁴⁷ Jean Vickers, *Women and War, 19.*

Additionally, women participated to efforts to end colonial rule or in wars of liberation to gain freedom from oppression. In the last decades, women were involved in 20 wars in the figure of soldier and/or as military support force in South Africa, Mozambique, El Salvador, Palestine, Guatemala, Peru, Sri Lanka, Philippines, and Iraq.⁴⁸ Simona Sharoni, who studied closely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in relation to gender, concluded that "[w]omen in varying sociocultural and political contexts have worked throughout history for the right to participate fully in the social, political, and economic life of their communities."

According to Zeev Rosenhek, Daniel Maman, and Eyal Ben-Ari, scholarly literature about Israeli women in combat is still lacking and women in the IDF have been studied "in terms of their proximity to, or distance from, combat."⁵⁰ The few studies dealing with Israel's authoritative decision to allow women in combat units have formulated different hypotheses as to why it happened in the year 2001, attributing it to three different factors: manpower shortage, an increase in military funds, and geopolitical influences. Van Creveld and Sasson Levy claim that women in combat are the result of a quest for manpower. After the Lebanese War in 1982, Israel experienced a wave of conscientious objectors amplified the already expanding women's role in the military form the last 1970s.⁵¹

In addition, Van Creveld affirms that the IDF did not previously have the funds to open a new course and unit for female combatants since the army had other priorities. According to Edna Lomsky-Feder and Orna Sasson Levy, Israel's decision was influenced by global and geographical processes, and it "reflects the permeation of global social discourses on human rights and feminism into the Israeli military."⁵² Moreover, according to Tami Amanda Jacoby, parliamentary activity since the 1970s has been a crucial component of women's efforts and struggle to promote their inclusion in the Israeli army. A combination of mainstreaming and independent strategies from both inside and outside the army

⁴⁸ Elshtain, *Women and War*, 231.

⁴⁹ Simona Sharoni, *Gender and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Politics of Women's Resistance*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995, 12.

⁵⁰ Zeev Rosenhek, Daniel Maman, and Eyal Ben-Ari. "THE STUDY OF WAR AND THE MILITARY IN ISRAEL: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION AND A REFLECTIVE CRITIQUE." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 3 (2003): 476.

⁵¹ Van Cravel (2000) and Sasson Levy (2003).

⁵² Edna Lomsky-Feder and Orna Sasson-Levy, *Women Soldiers and Citizenship in Israel: Gendered Encounters with the State*(Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 16.

establishment is what eventually lead to the amendment to the Defense Service Law in the year 2000.⁵³

The majority of studies dealing with Palestine's official endorsement of women fighters given by Arafat's speech in 2002 and Sheik Yassin's fatwa in 2004 conclude that it had to do with four different factors: political competition and propaganda, security reasons, religious beliefs, and geopolitical influences. Barbara Victor claims that Yasser Arafat's speech aimed at women on January 27th was an attempt to counterbalance the popularity that the Islamists, Hamas in particular, were gaining amongst the population. Speckhard and Stack also conclude that women are deployed as fighters because they produce "public sympathy" and "publicity" for the paramilitary organization.⁵⁴ O'Rourke, Speckhard, and Di Faegheh Shirazi affirm that social prejudices about the role of women help them get more easily through checkpoints since Israeli police borders strengthened security and scrutiny of young Palestinian men. Nelly Lahoud explains how Islamic texts such as the Quran and the Hadith allow women to participate in jihad. She also affirms that because of the special circumstances that Palestine holds, a few Islamist scholars have encouraged women to take part in Jihad pushed by the Islamic principle that it is the duty of every Muslim man and woman to go out to fight in defense of their territory when attacked.⁵⁵ Reed Wood and Jakana Thomas claim that the so-called leftist or Marxist-oriented ideology boosts the commonness of women in armed forces while Islamist ideologies provoke the opposite effect.⁵⁶ Hanna Herzog claims that from 1995 the DFLP (Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine) developed the reputation of a "women's front" encouraging women to become active because of the fear of being left behind and therefore the need to "catch up with the rest of the world.⁵⁷

⁵³ Tami Amanda Jacoby, *Women in Zones of Conflict Gender Structures and Women's Resistance in Israel.* Canadian Electronic Library. Books Collection. Montreal [Que.]: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005, 116.

⁵⁴ See Anne Speckhard, *The emergence of female terrorism* (2008) and Alisa Stack, *Zombies versus black widows: women as propaganda in the Chechen conflict* (2009).

⁵⁵ Nelly Lahoud, "The Neglected Sex: The Jihadis' Exclusion of Women From Jihad." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 5 (2014): 780.

⁵⁶ Reed M. Wood and Jakana L. Thomas, "Women on the frontline: Rebel group ideology and women's participation in violent rebellion", 2016, 33.

⁵⁷ Hanna Herzog, "Homefront and Battlefront." *Israel Studies* 3, no. 1 (1998): 61-84.

Scholars who have approached the subject of women in combat have found that throughout history women have been almost universally barred from formally serving in combat units of national militaries.⁵⁸ As previously mentioned, today only a few places allow women full access to military occupations and units. Israel and Palestine are two of those countries. In both cases of Israel and Palestine, it is clear that females who enter into armed units constitute a real challenge to the social order, and the need to have their actions reframed or justified is based on the fact that society still has difficulties accepting these females. Despite different scholar hypotheses, the root cause of authoritative decision making in 2000 and in 2002 by both Israel and Palestine remains a matter of speculation and some studies advance one or more factors.

The studies mentioned above have offered little or contradictory evidence in support of their hypotheses; they engage with the unilateral studies either about female fighters in rebel groups or female fighters in state armies. Those that engage with women in both nations simultaneously, such as Simona Sharoni, mainly focus on Palestinian and Israeli women's movements.⁵⁹ Talat Assad compares female fighters in Palestine to Jewish female fighters prior to the establishment of the state of Israel⁶⁰ but no research examined contemporary Palestinian and Israeli female fighters in comparison with each other. This is also due to the fact that relatively few studies consider female suicide bombing from a military viewpoint.⁶¹ Scholars have offered different reasons that brought women in combat in both Israel and Palestine, but no previous studies tackle the issue of timing. This research tries to fill this gap. The starting point for this article, then, is the need to substantiate in historical evidence claims about the cause and significance of timing in order to understand if it happened coincidently or not.

⁵⁸ Joshua S. Goldstein, War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 10.

⁵⁹ Sharoni, Gender and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Politics of Women's Resistance.

⁶⁰ Talal Asad, On Suicide Bombing. Columbia University Press, 2007, 34.

⁶¹ See Bloom (2005), 37–39; Brym and Araj (2005)–06; Skaine (2006), 121–49; Eager (2008), 184–94.

Research Question

The current research will seek to answer the following question: How can we explain the formal authoritative decision by military and paramilitary organizations to endorse women combatants? The analysis will focus on the formal decision-making authority that allowed women to be at the forefront of the fight in Israel and Palestine and will analyze the direct causes that influenced the decision-making body in both Israel and Palestine in the years 2000 and 2002. This study will not look into women's personal opinions and reasons that convinced them to join combat units, but rather, it will examine the timing and the factors that led the formal authority to women join combat positions from the year 2000 onwards. The research will also test the hypothesis that there is a chain effect between the two nations.

Conceptual Framework

Choosing the right terminology has been a pivotal task for this study as combatant women in Israel and Palestine have often been labeled with different terms which are politically charged. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a combatant is a person or a nation "engaged in fighting during a war" or a person engaged in "a conflict or competition with another."⁶² When approaching women in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as part of the respective organizations, combatant women in the IDF are called by Western media "combatants", "fighters" or "armed soldiers" or in Hebrew "lohamot." For example, the headline of the Telegraph on June 8th, 2001 reads "Female fighter pilot joins Israel's top guns"⁶³ referring to Roni Zuckerman's achievement in becoming the first female combat person of the IDF.

⁶² Oxford English Dictionary, definition of "combatant".

⁶³Tom Gross, *Female fighter pilot joins Israel's top guns,* 08 Jul 2001, The

Telegraph.https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/1333264/Female-fighter-pilot-jo ins-Israels-top-guns.html

⁶⁴Israel Defense Forces Official Website. *Breaking Barriers Alice Miller's story.* December 2, 2015.

https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/soldiers-of-the-idf/breaking-barriers-alice-miller-s-story/

scholars who reside in the West or in Israel, who talk about "women in combat" or "women soldiers."⁶⁵

On the other hand, Palestinian female combatants are often described in Western media as "suicide bombers", "human bombs" and, on a few occasions, "martyrs" or "kamikaze." The New York Times' headline was "Israelis Declare Arab Woman was, in fact, a Suicide Bomber"⁶⁶ referring to the attack on January 27th, 2002 by Wafa Idris. However, Wafa Idris was described by Arab and Muslim media as the first Palestinian female pioneer fighter, a modern Joan of Arc. ⁶⁷ Scholars have been using the same type of language, ⁶⁸ with the exception that few among them noted that, especially for the Palestinian case, women would not call themselves as such. Israeli women who are part of combat units in the IDF call themselves *lohamot*, ⁶⁹ the female version of *lohamim* which has been commonly translated as combatants. Palestinian such as Hamas or the Islamic Jihad, would refer to themselves as *shahida* the female version of *shahid*, which is commonly translation from Arabic as martyr. *Shahidas* represent "a woman, a symbol of the army of women who are ready to die for the cause."

In order to encompass both what they stand for and how they are represented, this study will use the terms combatants and fighters for both Israeli and Palestinian women and at times, the term "martyr" for Palestinian women. This choice stems from the desire to represent women on both sides as equal fighters, even if one belongs to a state military and the other to a paramilitary organization. There is a common perception that while women in the Israeli army are combatants because they are conscripted, Palestinian women are not because they are just exploited by men's patriarchy and are only "sent to blow themselves up." However, Ganor affirmed that if women's acts of martyrdom seem to be singular acts of rage, it is actually the tip

⁶⁵ See Sasson-Levy(2003), 440-65; Berger and Naaman (2011), 269-86; Simons (2001), 89-100.

⁶⁶James Bennet, *Israelis Declare Arab Woman Was in Fact a Suicide Bomber,* Feb 09, 2002, The New York Times.

https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/09/world/israelis-declare-arab-woman-was-in-fact-a-suicide-bo mber.html

⁶⁷Raphael Israeli, "Palestinian Women: The Quest for a Voice in the Public Square through 'Islamikaze Martyrdom.", 86.

⁶⁸ See Berger and Naaman (2011), 269-86; Bloom, Bloom 2005, 37–39; Skaine 2006, 121–49.

⁶⁹ Orna Sasson-Levy,."Feminism and Military Gender Practices: Israeli Women Soldiers in "Masculine" Roles." *Sociological Inquiry* 73, no. 3 (2003): 442.

⁷⁰ Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses*, 6.

of an operational collective effort consisting of recruiters, intelligence gatherings, bomb-makers, and trainers.⁷¹ Shay and Sprinzak say that "suicide terror is an organizational phenomenon", not an individual act⁷² and Barbara Victor affirms that there is a highly selective process of recruitment and a challenging psychological training.⁷³ Moreover, if according to Sasson Levy, in Israel being a combatant in the military is the "winning card" to full citizenship and female equality,⁷⁴ in Palestine, martyrdom has been equally advanced as an "equal opportunity employment" where active participation meant for women both nationalism and social liberation and the possibility to challenge and change the long-standing treatment of second-class citizens in their own Palestinian communities.⁷⁵

Therefore, on the Israeli side, a female combatant is a woman serving in one of the combat units of the IDF. On the Palestinian side, since no official army exists, a female combatant is a female fighter backed by secular or jihadist organizations engaged in the armed Palestinian resistance movement.

Methodology

In order to identify the factors that brought both Israel's and Palestine's authorities to endorse women participation in combat positions and understand if a correlation between the two exists, I will survey various hypotheses already put forward in existing literature in order to provide evidence for or against these competing hypotheses⁷⁶ and ultimately, craft my own. In process tracing, the researcher explores "the chain of events or the decision-making process by which initial case conditions are translated into case outcomes."⁷⁷ In this article, both the decision-making processes that authorized women in combat units in Israel and Palestine will

⁷¹ Rohan Gunaratna, *Combating Terrorism*. Regionalism & Security. Singapore [etc.]: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005, 135.

⁷² Ehud Sprinzak,. "Rational Fanatics.(analysis of the Effects of Suicide Bombers)." *Foreign Policy*, 2000, 66..

⁷³ Victor, *Army of Roses*, 7.

⁷⁴Sasson-Levy,."Feminism and Military Gender Practices: Israeli Women Soldiers in "Masculine" Roles.", 442.

⁷⁵ Victor, *Army of Roses*, 10-11.

⁷⁶ James Mahoney, "Process tracing and historical explanation." Security Studies, 24(2), 200-218.(2015), 200.

⁷⁷ Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Cornell Paperbacks 053887972. Ithaca, N.Y. [etc.]: Cornell University Press, 1997, 7.

be analyzed and tested to understand if there is a link or an influence between them. The cause-effect relationship that associates independent variables and conclusions is untangled into smaller steps. Both Israel's and Palestine's decision-making process to endorse women in combat will be unwrapped to understand the most plausible causal factors that lead to the same outcome on both sides. The premise of this method is that if the process can be traced, then the causal mechanism can also be determined. Bennett and Checkel also affirm that process tracing is "the examination of intermediate steps in a process to make inferences about hypotheses on how that process took place and whether and how it generated the outcome of interest."⁷⁸ Therefore, I will trace causal mechanisms applying a within-case empirical analysis of how a causal process develops in the case of Israeli and Palestinian women in relation to timing. It will contribute to both outline social and political phenomena in Israel and Palestine and to assess causal claims on both sides. Last, I will attempt to craft a reasoning for the historical outcome of both countries making the authoritative decision about women in combat in close proximity- in the years 2000 and 2002. I will provide a careful description and analyze trajectories of change and causation starting from prior to 1948 to the year 2000 relating to women in combat.

Analysis draws on a pool of Israeli and Palestinian primary sources, including legal documents that reference women in combat units from the Knesset (Israeli government's legislative branch) and the official amendment to the Defense Service Law. I will analyze the official documents provided by the Supreme Court about the case of Alice Miller and use the official website of the Israeli Defense Forces and their official data to get a fuller picture of women in combat units up through the first months of the 2018 year. I will also make use of the State Comptroller's Report and the Palestinian Public Opinion Poll Report to look into specific data. Primary sources will also draw on Hamas' Original Charter, news reports such as the interview of Hamas' spiritual leader, Yassin, and the interviews of journalists with parents of Palestinian martyrs. Memoirs, such as the one by Leila Khaled, a notorious Palestinian female fighter, will also be included for the analysis. This research will also use secondary sources for the historical background recorded in peer-reviewed articles. In terms

⁷⁸ Andrew Bennett, and Jeffrey T. Checkel. *Process Tracing : From Metaphor to Analytic Tool.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 6.

of methods, I will use a mixed method approach that will include both qualitative and quantitative data. I will analyze the number of newspaper entries about the research topic to understand the way women in combat are described on both sides. Lastly, this study will not seek to compare or contrast women on opposites sides but rather to understand why they were both able to access combat roles around the same time.

Limitations of this study include language, in particular of the Arabic language. Collecting data, especially sources and documentaries which were available in Arabic only, constituted a limitation for my study. The language limitation has not allowed for the Palestinian side to be fully explored, as it forced to rely on sources translated into the English language or which required the need of a translator. Not being able to access documents in Arabic also meant to rely on English vocabulary and translations, which, especially for politically charged words used to describe women, did not leave much room for nuances. The need for translation of Arabic data into English may raise issues of reliability and accuracy. As for the documents in Hebrew, in this study, researcher and translator are the same person. Therefore, the translation is not completely neutral, even if all attempts to stay true to the original meaning have been made.

Expected Conclusions

The current study hypothesizes that Israeli and Palestinian authoritative blanket endorsement of women in the year 2000, 2002, and 2004 are not a mere coincidence, but a chain of events that influenced each other. The timing between 2000 and 2004 was pivotal for women in Israel and Palestine because their stories were not just lone voices but were legitimately authorized by their governments or leaders. On both sides, women were officially sent to the battlefield for the first time. Scholars and historians have provided different reasons why it happened, ranging from manpower need, to geopolitical factors, propaganda, funds increase, security, and religious ideals. Furthermore, the study hypothesizes that on the Israeli side, geopolitical influences will reveal to be the most determining factor, overruling increase in funds and manpower need claims. On the Palestinian side, political competition and geopolitical factors are expected to overrule security and religious claims. One may find it puzzling to discover that Israeli and Palestinian combatant women were able to become equal to men with such a small time difference. Israel gave its authorization in 2000, with the amendment to the Defense Service Law and with Roni Zuckerman becoming the first combat pilot in June 2001. Arafat's secular party, Fatah, together with its military wing, the Al-Aqsa brigades, sent out the first martyr on January 27th, 2002- the same afternoon Arafat gave a speech to encourage women to take up the fight. Hamas embraced the same tactic in 2004. My hypothesis is that this chain of events demonstrates a congruous number of actions that are linked together, resulting in the same outcome.

Structure

This study will analyze the narrative of the events that led up to the Israeli Law which allowed women to access combat units in the IDF in the year 2000, as well as Arafat's statement in 2002 and Yassin's fatwa in 2004. The narrative will account for the decision that triggered this change in the first place and analyze the reasons for its occurrence on this specific time. Chapter one will delve into the rising visibility of women combatants in both Israel and Palestine and will cover the historical background and the careful description of the status of Israeli and Palestinian women prior to 1948 and then after 1948 up to the year 2001. Chapter two will explore the reasons that brought Israeli authorities to pass the amendment to the Defense Service Law and will substantiate the claims with historical evidence. Chapter three will attempt to understand why in 2002, women in the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza became combatants in the resistance against the Israeli occupation and establish the chain of events and mutual influences on both nations.

Chapter I - The Road to Endorsement

Thanks to the women's feminist movement of the 1970s, women in the first world came closer to gender equality in most areas of employment, status, and opportunities.⁷⁹ However, according to a study done by the United Nations Development Program in 2016, women in the Middle East still suffer inequality.⁸⁰ Women's active participation in armed forces is not a new phenomenon and women have been involved and participated in insurgencies, revolutions, and took part in pivotal roles in the past in the Narodnaya Volya in Russia in the nineteenth century, the Republican Army in Ireland, the German Baader-Meinhof organization, and the Red Brigades in Italy.⁸¹ Some groups have ceased to exist, others have morphed into full state armies, and others have remained the same or adjusted to different periods in time. Yet, for many years, women have still been portrayed as transgressors and not as official soldiers. Western countries such as Denmark, Sweden, and Norway officialized women's full participation in all units of their militaries in the 1980s⁸² while others, such as Israel, the US, and the UK waited for the new millennium. In the highly militarized societies of Israel and Palestine, women in combat have been perceived as transgressors until the years 2000 and 2002, respectively. However, after these years, both Israel and Palestine have witnessed an increase in visibility of women's participation in combat units in the Israeli Defense Forces, as well as an increase involvement of Palestinian women in the resistance movement for the liberation of Palestine from both secular, the al-Aqsa Brigades and religious parties, such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas. This increasing visibility was matched by major newspapers in Israel, such as the Times of Israel, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Israel Hayom, and Yediot Ahronot, which from 2001 to 2017 published at least 42 articles on women's role as combatants in the IDF and at least 10 articles about what they describe as "female suicide bombers."⁸³ Al - Jazeera English dedicated in the past

⁷⁹ Bloom, *Dying to kill: The allure of suicide terror*, 142.

⁸⁰ UNDP Arab Human Development report 2016. <u>http://www.arab-hdr.org/</u>. Accessed February 26th, 2018.

⁸¹ Mia Bloom, *Female suicide bombers: a global trend* (Daedalus, - MIT Press, 2007), 94.

⁸² Meytal Eran-Jona and Carmit Padan, *Women's Combat Service in the IDF: The Stalled Revolution* (Strategic Assessment 25, 2018), 95.

⁸³ See endnotes/bibliography for a full list of all articles found on this topic.

few years at least 4 articles and 1 documentary to the phenomenon of female combatants in Palestine. This visibility echoes the anomaly of the phenomenon of women in combat in both Israel and Palestine.

History of Israeli Female Combatants

Israel has a long history of women's participation in the army; a history that is even earlier than the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. During Ottoman rule, the first small Jewish settlements, Yishuv, developed a form of self-protection through hired guards who protected their lands. This defense organization was called Hashomer and it included women since its foundation in 1909.⁸⁴ However, even if a few women carried arms for self-defense, they did not participate in combat as men did.⁸⁵ During the British Mandate of Palestine (1921-1948), Hashomer transformed into the Haganah, a Jewish paramilitary organization which later became the core of the IDF. In its early days, the Haganah did not see many women involved, and women only fought in few extreme cases for self-defense when attacked. Later, with the beginning of 1941, the political leadership of the Jewish community established a full-time force of volunteers known as the Palmach, (the acronym for *Plugot Mahatz*) where women had equal status to men and had, in theory, equal rights and equal duties.⁸⁶ Even though theoretically, women participated in many courses, only a few women took part in battle.⁸⁷ According to a research done by Baruch Nevo and Yael Shur at the Israel Democracy Institute in 2002 women comprised 20 percent of the military organization and at the outbreak of the War of Independence women took on combat roles and command positions.⁸⁸ In 1950, shortly after the Arab-Israeli war, the first Knesset of the newly established state of Israel passed the Defense Service Law, that declared that women

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⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Martin Van Creveld and Eugenia C. Kiesling, Armed but Not Dangerous (War in History, 2000),

⁸⁶ Netanel Lorch, *Spotlight on Israel*, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official Website, 1997. <u>http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/state/pages/the%20israel%20defense%20forces.aspx</u>

⁸⁷ Netanel Lorch, *Spotlight on Israel*, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official Website, 1997. <u>http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/state/pages/the%20israel%20defense%20forces.aspx</u>

⁸⁸ The Army and Society Forum, Women in the Israel Defense Forces, 8. <u>https://en.idi.org.il/media/6221/armywomen.pdf</u>

were to be drafted for two years in the IDF. In 1952, however, the Defense Service Law (DSL) specified that women's service was to be confined to non-combat roles.⁸⁹ More specifically, three types of positions were closed for women: combat roles, tasks that are labeled as unsuitable for women because of the possible physical conditions endured, and positions where recruits are supposed to be highly physically fit.⁹⁰ The reason, as described by the government, was "the very real possibility of falling into enemy hands as prisoners of war. It was fair and equitable, it was argued, to demand from women equal sacrifice and risk; but the risk for women prisoners of rape and sexual molestation was infinitely greater than the same risk for men."⁹¹ Hence, it was a matter of protecting women from greater dangers. In 1987, restrictions on the service of women in the IDF were removed by the DSL,⁹² but no objectives for women's integration were defined and few differences were still present between men and women: first, the duration of army service; 30 months for men and 24 months for women; second, the length of reserve duty, until the age of 38 for women and 54 for man; third, married women and pregnant women were exempted from the service in addition to "grounds for exemption from security service available to men."93 According to the Supreme Command Order (2.0701), as a rule, women could not be placed in combat roles, but they could volunteer. The removal of the legal basis for women's service highlighted the fact that it was the IDF's policy and not the law that did not grant women access to combat roles.⁹⁴ The first person to challenge this law was a young girl by the name of Alice Miller, whose dream to join the airforce as a combatant pilot. This inspiration brought her to sue the IDF in August 1994 and turn to the Israeli Supreme Court to seek justice. Alice Miller was

⁸⁹ Defence Service Law -Consolidated Version 5746-1986, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official Website, 1986

http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/mfa-archive/1980-1989/pages/defence%20service%20law%20-consoli dated%20version--%205746-1.aspx

⁹⁰ The Army and Society Forum, Women in the Israel Defense Forces, 9. <u>https://en.idi.org.il/media/6221/armywomen.pdf</u>

⁹¹ Lorch, *Spotlight on Israel*, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official Website, 1997. <u>http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/state/pages/the%20israel%20defense%20forces.aspx</u>

⁹²Defence Service Law -Consolidated Version 5746-1986, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official Website, 1986

http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/mfa-archive/1980-1989/pages/defence%20service%20law%20-consoli dated%20version--%205746-1.aspx

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴The Army and Society Forum, Women in the Israel Defense Forces, 10. <u>https://en.idi.org.il/media/6221/armywomen.pdf</u>

answered by her commander that "women were not to be assigned to 'combat professions'; and since aviation was classified as a combat profession, the army does not accept women for aviation courses."⁹⁵ The official document of the petition to the Supreme Court sitting as the High Court of Justice affirms that "the army refused, since it was an established policy not to train women as pilots."⁹⁶ The reason offered by the IDF was based on the length of service and declared that "the huge investment involved in training a pilot could not be justified for women, and planning for the deployment of pilots in the air force units would be complicated by the integration of women pilots who could be expected to be absent for significant periods of time because of pregnancy and childbirth."⁹⁷ Hence, there was not sufficient reason to allocate money to train women as pilots due to their potential roles as mothers. In addition, the response of Air Force Commander, General Herzl Bodinger was recorded in the official Supreme Court document, according to which he said:

"The question of integrating women into combat professions is problematic, and ultimately it is also a social, cultural and ethical question that has been pondered in many countries. It also arises from time to time in Israel and the solution to it is not merely in the hands of the defense establishment. Until now it was accepted, in the security situation prevailing in Israel, that men are the ones who go to the front, in view of the element of danger involved in the combat professions, the risk of combat against the enemy and the danger of falling into captivity. Obviously, weight was given to public opinion on this matter, since the decision is one of life and death in view of the dangers prevailing in the daily security reality, which even with the passage of time have not yet disappeared."⁹⁸

⁹⁵Miller v. Minister of Defence, HCJ 4541/94, Petition to the Supreme Court sitting as the High Court of Justice, 1995, 1.

https://supremedecisions.court.gov.il/Home/Download?path=EnglishVerdicts\94\410\045\Z01&fileName= 94045410_Z01.txt&type=4

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Miller v. Minister of Defence, HCJ 4541/94, Petition to the Supreme Court sitting as the High Court of Justice, 1995, 10.

With this declaration, General Herzl Bodinger affirmed that it was not just a matter of length of service but a deeper cultural and ethical question that simply did not think of women as capable of being combatants in the IDF, and was, therefore, a discriminatory justification based on her gender. The decision on Alice Miller's petition was granted by majority by Justices E. Mazza, T. Strasberg-Cohen, D. Dorner, and Justices Y. Kedmi, Ts. E. Tal dissenting. The Supreme Court ruled in Alice Miller's favor saying that "the budgetary and planning considerations did not justify a general policy of rejecting all women from aviation courses."⁹⁹ This marked the first gender equality achievement in the military and paved the way to the decision to amend the Defense Service Law in January 2000, stating that:

"1) Every female inductee has the same right as a male inductee to fulfill any military service role. 2) The exclusion of a female inductee from any particular role will not be seen as an infringement of her rights if the nature or characteristics of that role demand it. 3) The law applying to a female inductee serving voluntarily in a role determined by the minister of defense and approved by the Knesset Foreign and Defense Committee will be identical to the law applying to a male inductee."¹⁰⁰

In the year 2000, the amendment to the Defense Service Law was initiated by MK Naomi Chazan from the left-wing party of *Meretz*,¹⁰¹ officially opened all military professions, including combat to women. Women could now become part of the police force in the border police, border patrols, and post inspectors, anti-craft units, and all land-based units, such as the armored corps, artillery, engineering, and infantry, from which they were previously banned.¹⁰² Therefore, many units and combat roles that were once only accessible to men

⁹⁹Ibid, 1.

https://supremedecisions.court.gov.il/Home/Download?path=EnglishVerdicts\94\410\045\Z01&fileName= 94045410_Z01.txt&type=4

¹⁰⁰The Army and Society Forum, Women in the Israel Defense Forces, 11. <u>https://en.idi.org.il/media/6221/armywomen.pdf</u>

¹⁰¹Eyal Ben-Ari, *Military, State, and Society in Israel : Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives.* (Milton: Routledge, 2018), 117.

¹⁰² Ibid.

were now open to women as well¹⁰³ and it took one year for the IDF to put the law into effect since Alice Miller did not succeed in passing the course to become a pilot. However, Roni Zuckerman did it in June 2001, becoming the first woman combat pilot in the IDF. As of 2018, according to the IDF's official website, women can access 85% of the units accessible to men, 5% of which were previously only open to men,¹⁰⁴ in comparison to over 55% in the 1980s.¹⁰⁵ The last statistics say that women make up 5.7% of the IDF's combat manpower, a number that has increased by 350% in the past 5 years.¹⁰⁶

In Israel, women's involvement in combat positions seems to be clear-cut. They were involved in the Mandate Period, they were barred from entering combat roles after the establishment of the state of Israel, and then they were reintroduced in the year 2000. Why it happened at this specific period in time is something that I will discuss in the second chapter of this study.

History of Palestinian Female Combatants

Palestinian women have been involved in resistance movements since the first decades of the 20th century with the growing immigration of the Jews to Palestine.¹⁰⁷ Palestinian women were not politically unaware or passive, but organized in militant movements and engaged in social, political and national affairs.¹⁰⁸ After the creation of the State of Israel, resistance movements became more radicalized and were mainly separated from secular-nationalist and religious. The term "jihad" translated from Arabic as "struggle" has acquired through the years different meanings, depending on who was to use the term. While in the West the term

¹⁰⁵ Meytal Eran-Jona and Carmit Padan, *Women's Combat Service in the IDF: The Stalled Revolution* (Strategic Assessment 25, 2018), 95.

¹⁰³Meytal Eran-Jona and Carmit Padan, *Women's Combat Service in the IDF: The Stalled Revolution* (Strategic Assessment 25, 2018), 95.

 $^{^{\}rm 104}$ ldf.il, , accessed July 1, 2018,

https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/soldiers-of-the-idf/tackling-gender-issues-in-the-idf/

¹⁰⁶ ldf.il, , accessed July 1, 2018,

https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/press-releases/150-recruits-draft-to-idf-s-newest-coed-combat-unit/. ¹⁰⁷Ellen Fleischmann, "The Emergence of the Palestinian Women's Movement, 1929-29." *Journal*

of Palestine Studies 29, no. 3 (2000): 16-32. ¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

jihad has been often linked to terrorist activities, mainstream Muslims commonly understand "jihad" as "spiritual struggle". Jihadis, on the other hand, articulate and understand the term jihad as military combat.¹⁰⁹ For women, jihad has been for many years confined to the spiritual righteous pilgrimage to Mecca, and they were forbidden from waging jihad as militants.¹¹⁰ In order to understand why women were forbidden from participation in jihad, we need to take a look at the holy scriptures. The influential Persian Islamic scholar Imam al-Bukhari, who authored what is regarded by Sunni Muslims as one of the most authentic and respected hadith collections *Sahih al-Bukhari*, reads the following on the matter of women and jihad:

"The Messenger of God would enter into the house of Umm Haram daughter of Milhan, and she would feed him (Umm Haram was married to 'Ubada b. al-Samit.). So the Messenger of God went into her, and she fed him and began to pick the lice off his head. The Messenger of God fell asleep and then woke up, laughing. She said: Why are you laughing? He said: People from my community [Muslims] were shown to me fighting in the path of God, sailing in the midst of the sea like kings on thrones. She said: O Messenger of God prayed for her . . . and she sailed the seas during the time of Mu'awiya b. Abi Sufyan [661–80], and fell from her mount when she disembarked and perished."¹¹¹

From this account, Umm Haram daughter of Milhan was granted permission to fight alongside with men and sail the sea to join the war. However, one episode of the hadith does not suffice to determine whether or not women were combatants and a closer look into the way women behaved around the Prophet Muhammad throughout his life is necessary to have a better picture. 'Aliyya Mustafa Mubarak, a modern Muslim feminist has tried to gather a list

¹⁰⁹ Lahoud, "The Neglected Sex: The Jihadis' Exclusion of Women From Jihad, Terrorism and Political Violence," :798.

¹¹⁰David Cook. "Women Fighting in Jihad ?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (2005): 376. ¹¹¹'Abdallah b. Isma'il al-Bukhari (d. 869), *Sahih* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1991), III, p. 265 (no. 2788).

of women that in her opinion participated and fought in the wars of the Prophet Muhammed or immediately afterward. Mubarak, suggested 67 names.¹¹² However, the actual role of these women during the wars is less known and David Cook argued that Mubarak's women fighters actually served in supporting and assistance whether few of them actually fought in the battlefield. Even though Cook admits that there are examples of women companions fighting in the jihad in both classical and contemporary accounts he concludes that women fighters are, because of the little evidence, considered in contradistinction to the classical sources. Therefore, it has been rejected for all these years by Muslim conservatives.¹¹³ As such, even the meaning of jihad for women has changed and has been confined to a supporting role. As Umm Badr says in the *Obstacles in the Path of the Jihad Warrior Women*:

"A Muslim woman is a female Jihad warrior always and everywhere. She is a female Jihad warrior who wages Jihad by means of funding Jihad. She wages Jihad by means of waiting for her Jihad warrior husband, and when she educates her children to that which Allah loves. She wages jihad when she supports Jihad when she calls for jihad in word, deed, belief, and prayer."¹¹⁴

Women have been participating in fights in the Muslim world, but only to a certain extent and in only certain regions of the Middle East. There is a long and established history of women's involvement in various organizations. The first ever female successful suicide attack happened in Lebanon, on April 9th, 1985. A 16-year old Lebanese young woman by the name of Khyadali Sana member of the secular Syrian Social Nationalist Party drove a vehicle into an Israeli Defense Force convoy in southern Lebanon, killing two soldiers and wounding two others. Her motive was to "avenge the oppressive enemy."¹¹⁵ Sana paved the way for many other women in Lebanon, Turkey, and Chechnya, but it was not until January 2002 that

¹¹² Aliyya Mustafa Mubarak, *Sahabiyyat mujahidat* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya)

¹¹³Cook, "Women Fighting in Jihad ?" 383.

¹¹⁴ Umm Badr, Obstacles in the Path of the Jihad Warrior Women.

¹¹⁵Clara Beyler, "Chronology of Suicide Bombings Carried out by Women." *International Institute for Counter Terrorism*, February 12, 2003. http://www.ict.org.il/Article/855/Chronology of Suicide Bombings Carried out by Women#gsc.tab=0.

the first Palestinian women followed through her first attack in Israel. Palestinian women took up the arms against the British in the 1930s and then continued their involvement in the movement to restore Palestinian land.¹¹⁶ Between 1948 and 2002, women have been most active in peaceful resistance in Palestine and have led peaceful demonstrations and numerous acts of resistance including pivotal participation in the first and second Intifada.¹¹⁷ Women were key actors in the resistance but were not initially allowed to wage jihad if they were part of secular or religious organizations such as the Al-Aqsa Brigades, Islamic Jihad, or Hamas. Therefore, some women who wanted to actively participate in the fight against occupation accepted supporting roles in operations. One of the most notorious female Palestinian combatants was Leila Khaled, who shot to fame with plane hijackings in 1969 and 1970. Leila was praised and regarded as a hero in Palestine but no formal legitimization of her acts was backed by authority voices. Leila was still a transgressor and not a law-abiding combatant. It will take a few more decades for the Palestinian authority to endorse female armed struggle against the Israeli Occupation "But still, due to the strictures in the conservative circles of Palestinian society, women did not feel they got their due in terms of recognition, though as they were contributing their share to the national struggle."¹¹⁸ Up until January 27th, 2002 the Israeli–Palestinian conflict witnessed over 150 martyr missions, but none of these 150 attacks had been carried out by females¹¹⁹. Yasser Arafat, leader of the PLO, who had initially been reluctant to embrace martyr missions, changed his mind on January 27th, 2002 when he addressed a crowd filled with women and encouraged them to join the armed resistance against the occupation.¹²⁰ On that same afternoon, Wafa Idris was the first of many other Palestinian women that succeeded to carry out their combat operation. Idris' action was framed by the West as "terrorism" and "suicide bombing" and she was the

¹¹⁶ Cindy D. Ness , "In the Name of the Cause: Women's Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (2005): 364.

¹¹⁷ Ronit Lentin, "Palestinian Women from Femina Sacra to Agents of Active Resistance." *Women's Studies International Forum* 34, no. 3 (2011): 166.

¹¹⁸ Raphael Israeli, "PALESTINIAN WOMEN: THE QUEST FOR A VOICE IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE THROUGH "ISLAMIKAZE MARTYRDOM" 1." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 1 (2004):80.

¹¹⁹ Cindy D. Ness , "In the Name of the Cause: Women's Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (2005): 364.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 365.

first of many other Palestinian female jihadists to come. As previously mentioned, when looking at the case of Palestine, a distinction needs to be made between Gaza and the West Bank, religious and secular groups. When Wafa Idris committed her act of martyrdom, few believed that religious organizations such as Hamas or the Islamic Jihad would have claimed the attack; because their conservative ideology did not allow women to join the battlefield with men.¹²¹ In fact, it was the al-Aqsa Brigades that claimed it a few days later, a nationalist secular coalition of Palestinian armed groups in the West Bank. In May 2003, Hiba Da'arma's operation killed three people and injured about 70; she claimed to have done it in the name of Islamic Jihad and in cooperation with the al-Aqsa Brigades, marking a turning point for religious organizations to overcome the initial reluctance to allow women in combatant operations and enable them to take over the missions.¹²² On January 2004, Hamas sent the first attacker as well, her name Reem Saleh al-Riyashi, twenty-two years old, married, and mother of two children.¹²³ Reem Saleh al-Riyashi's attack came after Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, founder and the spiritual leader of Hamas, approved women's active involvement in the struggle against Israel, affirming that "Hamas views women as the reserve force... when the military wing of the Hamas saw it necessary to use a woman to carry out an attack, it did so."¹²⁴ Even if Yassin had initially objected the involvement of women in suicide bombing¹²⁵ it seems that out of necessity it was fine to include women as well. According to Israel's reports, Yassin was the person responsible for the terrorist attacks on Israel "Yassin was the leader and mentor of Hamas in the territories, and the authorizing and initiating authority for all Hamas terrorist attacks emanating from the West Bank and Gaza Strip."¹²⁶

http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/terrorism/palestinian/pages/ahmed%20yassin.aspx

¹²¹Claudia Brunner, "Female Suicide Bombers – Male Suicide Bombing? Looking for Gender in Reporting the Suicide Bombings of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict." Global Society 19, no. 1 (2005): 29-48

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¹²⁴ "Ahmed Yassin, leader of Hamas terrorist organization", Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official Website, 2004.

¹²⁵ Naaman, "Brides of Palestine/Angels of Death: Media, Gender, and Performance in the Case of the Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers.", 946.

¹²⁶"Ahmed Yassin, leader of Hamas terrorist organization", Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official Website, 2004

http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/terrorism/palestinian/pages/ahmed%20yassin.aspx

In the history of Palestinian female combatants, it is possible to see that although women seemed to be able to access some combat positions in the holy scriptures, their participation on the battlefield has been limited to mainly supporting roles. Even the notorious Leila Khaled who hijacked an Israeli plane did it without formal permission and since then women have been denied active access to combat positions. What or who allowed this shift to take place will be analyzed in the third chapter of this study.

Chapter II- Israel

Due to the Israeli-Palestinian/Arab conflict that endures in the region since 1948, Israel has become one of the most militarized democratic societies in the world.¹²⁷ Established in 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel, the IDF was founded on the ethos of a "people's army" that "serves the universalistic and egalitarian ideology of the modern nation-state."¹²⁸ According to Hanna Herzog, professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Tel Aviv University, in Israel, gender inequality is present and manifests at all levels of life. Despite Israel's definition as a "Western country", gender equality, has still a long way to go. In the military, this gap is even more amplified and as Herzog affirms "[i]n military terms, the social dichotomy is characterized as 'home front' and 'battle front'; in sociological terms, the separation between the family and the military epitomizes the public/private split. In Israel, security, the army, and soldiering dominate the public sphere and are the bastions of male discourse."¹²⁹ In the IDF, there is a clear distinction between non-fighters and fighters, those in combat are called in Hebrew *lohamim* for males and *lohamot* for females. The IDF is not just an army in Israel, it represents the most highly esteemed public institution among the Israeli-Jewish public.¹³⁰As such, being a combat soldier is the most prestigious role a person could serve. Due to its small dimensions and the fact that it is surrounded by Arab countries which are, at least in part, enemies, the concept of protecting the only Jewish state, has become the main purpose of the IDF and its combat soldiers.¹³¹ With these premises, it is possible to understand why women may also want to be involved in combat positions. The most significant implication of the importance and centrality of national security within Israeli society is that the IDF has become an essential institution in Israeli society.¹³² In Israel,

¹²⁷ Ayelet Harel-Shalev and Shir Daphna-Tekoah, "The "Double-Battle": Women Combatants and Their Embodied Experiences in War Zones." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 9, no. 2 (2016): 315.

¹²⁸ Edna Lomsky-Feder, Orna Sasson-Levy, *Women soldiers and citizenship in Israel* (Routledge 2018), 14.

¹²⁹ Hanna Herzog, Homefront and Battlefront: The Status of Jewish and Palestinian Women in Israel (1998), 61.

¹³⁰ Meytal Eran-Jona, Carmit Padan, *Women's Combat Service in the IDF: The Stalled Revolution*, 2018.

¹³¹ Uzi Ben-Shalom & Yizhaq Benbenisty, A *Time of War': contextual and organisational dimensions in the construction of combat motivation in the IDF,* 2017, 5-7.

¹³² Sharoni, Gender and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 41.

military service at the age of eighteen is compulsory for both men and women, and combat positions are far more prestigious than regular roles, especially for women who are still rarely seen in combat units.¹³³ Because of the centrality of the IDF in Israeli society, the campaign for women's "right to fight" in Israel has been linked to the struggle for equal opportunity of women: "the logical outcome of this struggle would undoubtedly be the equal opportunity for women to bear and use arms, fight wars alongside with men, and engage in direct combat with enemy forces."¹³⁴ Liberal feminism in Israel is represented by the Israel Women's Network (an advocacy group for women in Israel) and the Parliamentary Committee on the Status of Women in the Israeli Knesset. They attempt to promote women's full participation in practices of war, although they focus on the inclusion of women in male-dominated domains, such as the army, to promote gender equality.¹³⁵ Since 1948, until Roni Zuckerman was employed by the IDF in 2001, women were excluded from combat units. Later on, after the summer of 2001, female recruits have become included in two more units, the anti-chemical warfare and routine security maintenance units.¹³⁶ The struggle for the right to fight was, and for many aspects still is, a crucial part of the struggle for gender equality. Women's inclusion in the Israeli military in 2000 was attributed to three main factors: manpower shortage, an increase in military funds, and geopolitical influences.

Scholars have claimed that the expansion of women's role in the military in 2000 was the result of the Israeli Defense Force's desperate quest for manpower,¹³⁷ a quest that started in the 1970s after a full-scale war and continued after the first Lebanese war in 1982, when for the first time in its history the IDF was confronted with numerous soldiers who refused to serve for conscientious reasons. According to this hypothesis, the Israeli Defense Force has since 1982 been steadily shrinking, adding that in Israel, as well as in the American military, the influx of women was paired with the reluctance of men to serve in the All-Volunteer

¹³³ See Lomsky-Feder and Sasson-Levy (2015); Harel-Shalev and Daphna-Tekoah (2015).

¹³⁴ Daniel Maman, Eyal Ben-Ari, and Zeev Rosenhek, *Military, State, and Society in Israel:*

Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives(New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 112. ¹³⁵ Ibid, 114.

¹³⁶ Laura Sjoberg, Sandra Via, and Cynthia Enloe, *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives* (California: Praeger, 2010), 81.

¹³⁷ See Sasson Levy (2003); and Van Creveld (2000).

Force then being established.¹³⁸ However, this claim is not fully convincing- was there a significant amount of men refusing to serve in combat units that they had to resort to women? Israel's manpower shortage in the late 1970s, which opened new opportunities for women, did not include combat units until the year 2000. Why did it take unusually long? In order to provide a fair comparison, two groups of data available to the public were taken into consideration: the first ones, published in 2003, were provided in the State Comptroller's Report of the previous year ¹³⁹ and the second ones, provided by the IDF in 2002, are data from the Israeli Army Society Forum.¹⁴⁰ Both data deal with the years 1880s and 1990s which are relevant to determine if a changed occurred leading up to the year 2000. Once the results were combined it was possible to conclude that non-service in the IDF is not a new phenomenon and that indeed, the rates of non-service have been steadily increasing over the years. In 1980, the non-service rates stood at 12.1 %, in 1990 at 16.6 % and in 2002 at 23.9 %. However, although the numbers seem to have risen, a closer look will prove otherwise. The numbers demonstrate that a large percentage of non-draftees in the year 2002 were ultra-orthodox Jews who are increasing in numbers every year due to their exponential demographic growth.¹⁴¹ In 1980, the ultra-orthodox constituted 3.7% of those people that failed to be recruited and hardly increased to 4.6% in the year 1990. However, in the year 2002, that number rose to 9%. Therefore, a large portion of that 23.9% that refused to enlist in 2002 included 9% of the ultra-orthodox population. Hence, the decrease in military service rates is not a determining factor to conclude that young Israeli men were refusing to serve in the army since ultra-orthodox Jews have consistently resisted to the draft. The last group comprises of 14% of the total pool. These were not people rejected solely because of a crisis of motivation but because of different reasons such as criminal record and physical incidences or deaths. Those determined as unfitting due to criminal record constituted in 2002, 3% of non-draftees, a portion that has doubled since 1990. Instead, a figure that remained stable over

¹³⁸ Creveld, *The Great Illusion: Women in the Military*, 435.

¹³⁹ State Comptroller's Report for 2002. (no. 53a, pp. 118-9)

¹⁴⁰ Women in the Israeli Defense forces, The Army and Society Forum held on Nov. 21st 2002 at the Israel Democracy Institute https://en.idi.org.il/media/6221/armywomen.pdf

¹⁴¹Maya Choshen, Gilad Malach, and Lee Cahaner, "Statistical Report on Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel," *The Israel Democracy Institute*, December 31, 2017, 1, https://en.idi.org.il/articles/20439.

the years is the 2% of physical incidences or deaths. Potential recruits who resided abroad consisted of 4% in 2002, a decrease from 4.6 % since the late 1990s. The rest, which in 2002 accounted for 5 % of the total pool of non-draftees, consisted of young men not drafted for reasons of psychological incompatibility. Those that reside in the incompatibility category are usually young men who opposed the military service for conscientious reasons. This category stood at less than 4% of the total pool of people not drafted during the years 1980s and 1990s, which means that in the year 2000, when the Defense Service Law was amended, the percentage was even lower than 5%. Hence, it has risen in less than 1% from the 1980s. Therefore, the overall picture remains unaltered and the data indicates that conscientious refusal to serve remains a minority phenomenon. These figures reveal that the larger part of young men, from all societal segments and classes, responded positively to the call to service. On the surface level, the number of non-draftees seemed to be increasing but in reality, the percentage of people in combat units has basically remained unaltered over the years.

The second claim relates to the increase in funds for the IDF or rather, the lack of funds to institute a course for female combatants. According to Van Creveld, the IDF did not have enough funds to create a female only combat course and, since most men were physically capable of performing well in combat, while only a few exceptional women could it was until then counterproductive to allocate military budget to "experiment" with women in combat.¹⁴² Hence, the claim was that IDF was simply unable to afford it. When Van Creveld claimed this in 1992, he did not know that women would have accessed combat units less than ten years later. According to data present in official document of the Defense Expenditure in Israel 1950-2014 by the Central Bureau of Statistics of the State of Israel, which presents an estimate of the total cost of defense, between 1990 and 2000 the budget has slightly oscillated but have started at around 45 million NIS in 1990 and around 45 million NIS in the year 2000.¹⁴³ The numbers have slightly decreased during the decade but never went under 40 million NIS demonstrating that it was higher before the year 1990.¹⁴⁴ The table

¹⁴² Martin Van Creveld, *Women of Valor: Why Israel Doesn't Send Women into Combat. (Policy Review*, no. 62 1992), 67.

¹⁴³ Defence Expenditure in Israel 1950-2014 by the Central Bureau of Statistics of the State of Israel http://www.cbs.gov.il/publications16/1651/pdf/e_print.pdf

¹⁴⁴ See table at page 10. http://www.cbs.gov.il/publications16/1651/pdf/e_print.pdf

also illustrates that in recent years it has increased by 7% in 2014, and oscillated between 3.4% in the years 2012–2013, and 0.6% in 2011. However, according to the report, expenses done of the Israeli government towards defense was, compared to the years 1973-1975, 10.5% lower. According to these official data defense consumption amounted to 14.1% of the GDP of Israel from 1986 to 1990 and was at 10.2% of the GDP in the years 1991-1995. Then, between the years 1996–2000, Israel experienced an economic growth with directly translated into an increase in defense expenditure.¹⁴⁵ These data prove that after the introduction of women in combat units, expenses did not drastically grow and the increase in 2017 was "influenced by the increase in most of the consumption items."¹⁴⁶ Hence, it was a matter of finding the right reasons to divert and allocate the budget for female combat units. But Van Creveld was not alone in his claim, the same argument was given by Air Force Commander, General Herzl Bodinger in the court case of Alice Miller in 1995 where he claimed that "[t]he training of a pilot is a lengthy process, and the financial investment in funding it is huge."¹⁴⁷ However, it seems that the budget was allocated before. In the years 1970s, the IDF accepted women in the role of cadets for a course in the IAF (Israel Aviation Forces) but it was an exception and was at no time repeated in the following years.¹⁴⁸ By claiming that the financial investment was significant, the Commander implied that women do not serve in the army for a protracted time because of possible exemption from service for causes of marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth. Hence, for the army, it was simply cost-ineffective. This claim was dismissed by the Supreme Court as it did not provide a valid reason to exclude women from combat roles: "The majority held that the budgetary and planning considerations did not justify a general policy of rejecting all women from aviation courses," and therefore, instructed to "involve the necessity of adapting existing military facilities for the inclusion of

¹⁴⁵ Defence Expenditure in Israel 1950-2014 by the Central Bureau of Statistics of the State of Israel http://www.cbs.gov.il/publications16/1651/pdf/e_print.pdf

¹⁴⁶lbid.

¹⁴⁷Miller v. Minister of Defence, HCJ 4541/94, Petition to the Supreme Court sitting as the High Court of Justice, 1995, 12.

https://supremedecisions.court.gov.il/Home/Download?path=EnglishVerdicts\94\410\045\Z01&fileName= 94045410_Z01.txt&type=4

¹⁴⁸ N. L. Goldman & K. L. Wiegand, 'The Israeli Woman in Combat', The Military, Militarism and the Polity, The Free Press, N.Y., 1984, 220-221.

women."¹⁴⁹ Even if an additional cost was to be allocated to open a female combat unit, which is highly possible, it did not constitute a reason or a sufficient impact to justify the exclusion of women based on their gender.

The third important factor that would explain Israel's decision to include women in combat in 2000 has to do with global and geopolitical processes. According to Daniel Maman, parliamentary activity has been a pivotal component to this problem. Efforts to support more inclusion for women in the army started in the 1970s and have employed both mainstreaming and independent strategies, with combined campaigns from inside and outside the army establishment.¹⁵⁰ Edna Lomsky-Feder and Orna Sasson-Levy affirm that together with local geopolitical processes, global processes have circulated discourses of human rights that questioned the status of militaries in the Western world. Israeli society has been influenced by these processes since the 1980s, causing the deconstruction of a status of military service that was taken for granted.¹⁵¹ Various social groups evaluate military service today in terms of its financial, political, or symbolic rewards and not exclusively in terms of its contribution to the nation.¹⁵² These global and geopolitical processes had a significant impact on the place of women in the Israeli military. Jean Vickers expands on this matter of geopolitical influence. Since its foundation in 1945, the United Nations has taken various measurements who have contributed to "the efforts at the national, regional, and international levels to achieve political, economic, and social equality of women."¹⁵³ This period described as the International Decade for Women, took place from 1975 to 1985, during which three conferences were held in Mexico City in 1975 and in Copenhagen in 1980, culminated in the World Conference of Women held in Nairobi the adoption by consensus of the Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women stating in paragraph 1 (and also,

https://supremedecisions.court.gov.il/Home/Download?path=EnglishVerdicts\94\410\045\Z01&fileName= 94045410_Z01.txt&type=4

¹⁴⁹Miller v. Minister of Defence, HCJ 4541/94, Petition to the Supreme Court sitting as the High Court of Justice, 1995, 12.

¹⁵⁰ Maman, Ben-Ari, and Rosenhek, *Military, State, and Society in Israel: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*, 116.

¹⁵¹ Lomsky-Feder, and Sasson-Levy, *Women Soldiers and Citizenship in Israel: Gendered Encounters with the State.* Routledge, 2017, 15.

¹⁵² Orna Sasson-Levy, "Contradictory Consequences of Mandatory Conscription: The Case of Women Secretaries in the Israeli Military." *Gender & Society* 21, no. 4 (2007): 481-507.

¹⁵³ Vickers, *Women and War*, 95.

paragraphs 44 and 11) that there was "the awareness that women's reproductive roles were closely linked to the political, economic, social, cultural, legal, educational, and religious conditions that constrained the advancement of women..."¹⁵⁴ During the 1985 World Conference, they drew a distinction between equity, which emphasizes access of all groups to the economic benefit of society, and equality, which stresses the social and legal rights of an individual.¹⁵⁵ After 10 years, on its 10th anniversary in 1995 in Beijing, 99 states agreed to:

"take all appropriate measures to eliminate discriminations against women in the political and public life of their countries and in particular to ensure to women, on equal terms with men the right: a. To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for elections to all publicly elected bodies; b. To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof, and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government, and c. to participate in non-governmental organizations concerned with the public and political life of the country."¹⁵⁶

Among those 99 states that agreed to ensure equal rights to women that were present in Nairobi in 1985 and ten years later at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing- was the state of Israel.¹⁵⁷ In 1995, at the same time the Supreme Court gave a verdict in favor of Alice Miller's case, which the IDF barred from entering combat. Moreover, during the milestone court case of Alice Miller, which paved the way for the amendment to the Defense Service Law in 2000, the judges demonstrates that in order to achieve the verdict, they looked at women's army roles in other countries and moments in time which reveals that the Red Army, during the Second World War, or contemporary Canada and Australia had

<u>pdf</u>

¹⁵⁴ UN Nairobi Conference Decision, 1985.

 $[\]underline{https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/otherconferences/Nairobi/Nairobi%20Chapter%201.}$

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, paragraph 11.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷UN Digital Library, Documents and Publications - Draft Resolutions and Decisions <u>https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/201767?In=en</u>

successfully integrated women in combat positions in the military aircraft.¹⁵⁸ This points out that the influence of what other nations did in regards to women was in fact influential to make a decision. Israel had the opportunity to join few other countries in the world which authorities already endorsed women in combat such as Canada, that had from the year 1989 ordered full integration of women in the Canadian Armed Forces.¹⁵⁹ In 1988, Denmark created a policy of "total inclusion,"¹⁶⁰ and in 1988 Norway became the first country to integrate women in all positions of its military, including combat.¹⁶¹ Moved by these achievements, efforts have also been initiated within the Israeli military. These changes were designed to promote greater efficiency, although they also encouraged gender equality and opportunities for women to reach a broader range of positions in all services and units. Former chief officers of the Women's Corps, Orit Adato and Israela Oron, were actively involved in seeking change in military policy and attitudes toward women from within the system.¹⁶² A major organizational process was initiated in 1997 in relation to the system of women's service; its motivation was to improve "the management of issues unique to women's service in the IDF by upgrading the level responsible for these issues to Women's Corps officers at the command and corps levels."¹⁶³ On August 1, 2001, the Women's Army Corps was dismantled and replaced by Chen, a body headed by the Advisor for Women's Affairs to the IDF Chief of Staff. Backed by Alice Miller's victorious court case a few years earlier, on the wave of Western militaries inclusion of women in combat roles and slow changes in favor of women within the military, Israel women's "Right to Fight" movement represented by the Israel Women's Network (IWN) sought it to be the ideal timing to advance

¹⁵⁸Miller v. Minister of Defence, HCJ 4541/94, Petition to the Supreme Court sitting as the High Court of Justice, 1995, 17.

https://supremedecisions.court.gov.il/Home/Download?path=EnglishVerdicts\94\410\045\Z01&fileName= 94045410_Z01.txt&type=4

¹⁵⁹ Ellen Symons, "Under Fire: Canadian Women in Combat," *Canadian journal of women and the law* (1990) 4:477-511

¹⁶⁰ Anna Mulrine, <u>"8 Other Nations That Send Women to Combat"</u>. *National Geographic*. National Geographic. 25 January 2013. Retrieved 27 May 2018.

¹⁶¹ Elisabeth Braw, <u>"Norway's Radical Military Experiment"</u>. *Foreign Affairs*. 19 January 2017.Retrieved 27 May 2018.

¹⁶² Laura Sjoberg, Sandra Via, and Cynthia Enloe, *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives* (California: Praeger, 2010), 81.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

their feminist agenda to the government in the year 2000.¹⁶⁴ The Parliamentary Committee on the Status of Women, which is present in the Israeli Knesset (Parliament), started the advancement of women in the international arena, a gender equality fight initiated by Knesset member Marcia Freedman in the 1970s. The amendment to the Defense Service Law was initiated by MK Naomi Chazan from the Meretz Party who declared that "Women went from instructing men in these courses to being fully prepared to engage in battle themselves."¹⁶⁵

The first and the second factors were proved to be non-pivotal causes to influence the Israeli Knesset to pass the law in the year 2000. However, the third factor- geopolitical influences, seems to be the most plausible cause. The demand of Israeli women fueled by the acknowledgment of the international community of women's rights and the endorsement of different Western militaries of women's roles in combat units were a significant instigator. In addition, this was the ideal occasion to reaffirm Israel's Western image around the world of "last European country"¹⁶⁶ by following in the footsteps of other Western militaries and societies and impress foreigners with a 'modern' image. In chronological terms, Israel was the first authority voice to give the blanket endorsement for women in combat units- and Palestinian leaders will soon to follow.

¹⁶⁴ Laura Sjoberg, Sandra Via, and Cynthia Enloe, *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives* (California: Praeger, 2010), 81.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 83.

¹⁶⁶ David Tal, "David Ben-Gurion's Teleological Westernism." *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*10, no. 3 (2011): 351.

Chapter III - Palestine

When in 1988 Palestine proclaimed its own independence, it also committed the country to national goals grounded in women's human rights. Article 9 of the Basic Law in the Declaration of the Independent Palestinian State provides commitment to equality and nondiscrimination on the basis of gender.¹⁶⁷ However, a gap between reality and the law exists and in practice, the personal status law does not implement the principle of equality in all areas.¹⁶⁸ For this reason, women have fought to receive those rights. Palestinian women have been mildly politically active after the creation of the State of Israel, but it wasn't until 1964, after the funding of the PLO, that an increasing number of organizations were established¹⁶⁹ and women became more engaged against the occupation culminating with the First Intifada in 1987.¹⁷⁰ Women in the first Intifada, between 1987 and 1992, were involved in public demonstrations along with men throwing stones at Israeli tanks and checkpoints. The role of women in the Palestinian territories drastically changed after the Oslo Accords where the grassroots organizations were transformed into NGOs with a liberal agenda.¹⁷¹ After the signing of the Oslo Accords and the formation of the Palestinian Authority, many women believed the right moment to promote women's agenda and ensure women's active participation in the formation of a future state of Palestine has come. They thought it was the right time to pursue a feminist agenda of both national and equal rights.¹⁷² Whereas women were previously politically involved, these NGOs marginalized women to the peacemaking role and could virtually not contribute nor participated in decision or policymaking.¹⁷³ Women had the ambition to develop a women's rights agenda to "improve the legal, social,

¹⁶⁷ Lynn Welchman, 1999. "Islamic Family Law, Text and Practice in Palestine," report published by the WCLAC, 23.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Gelvin, James (2011) *The Modern Middle East: A History*. NY: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷⁰ Hamas and the Women's Movement: Islamism and Feminism Under Occupation

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¹⁷¹ Islah Jad, "The NGOization] of the Arab Women's Movements," *Review of Women Studies*, 2004, 50.

¹⁷² Amal Jamal, "Engendering State Building: The Women's Movement and Gender Regime in Palestine." 2001, 260.

¹⁷³ Jad, "The NGOization] of the Arab Women's Movements,": 50.

educational, occupational, and political status of women in all areas of Palestinian society."¹⁷⁴ In January 2002, Wafa Idris became the first Palestinian *Shahida*, a hero for her nation. Until then, no other woman had successfully done so in Palestine. She was the first woman that was encouraged by Palestinian authorities, in this case Arafat, to carry out an attack. Idris actions sparked a strong reaction from the public which quickly used the labels "martyr", "hero", and "terrorist" to describe her. As Dorit Naaman puts it, "the reactions all highlight junctures of ideological crises in the perceived roles of women in armed struggles, religion, and traditional gendered settings. Particularly in the Arab world these actions were not simply hailed but actually debated—pragmatically, morally, and, most notably, religiously."¹⁷⁵ Four different factors were identified as the reasons that brought Arafat to give a "green light" speech on January 27th, 2002: political competition and propaganda, security reasons, religious beliefs, and geopolitical influences.

The first factor identified was political competition. The emergence of Hamas in 1987 as a powerful opponent to Fatah and the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000, provided women with a new opportunity to get back on the battlefield.¹⁷⁶ According to Barbara Victor, the failure of the Oslo Accords put Arafat and the Fatah organization once more under the spotlight. The Islamists organization had previously successfully used male martyrs to disrupt the peace talks with Israel, and Yasser Arafat understood the potential of this new strategy to fight the Israeli occupation. The new method was efficient since there was no fear that perpetrators could be caught and interrogated and it created for the martyr a status of instant superstar in Palestine.¹⁷⁷ For Arafat, who was perceived as a leader who was willing to make unreasonable concessions, it was the ideal opportunity to redeem his authority at risk. Islamists organizations were gaining the ground that Arafat was losing with empty promises. This thesis was also supported by Jonathan Schanzer who affirmed that in 2000 and 2001, a series of Palestinian choices, such as the rejection of the Taba plan by Yasser Arafat - the last

¹⁷⁴ Barron, Andrea. "The Palestinian Women's Movement: Agent of Democracy in a Future State?" Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies 11, no. 1 (2002): 73.

¹⁷⁵ Naaman, "Brides of Palestine/angels of Death.": 933.

¹⁷⁶ Rula Abu Daho, "The Second Intifada : The Women's Movement at a Crossroads," CETRI, Centre Tricontinental, , accessed August 01, 2018,

https://www.cetri.be/The-Second-Intifada-The-Women-s?lang=fr.

¹⁷⁷ Victor, *Army of Roses*,16.

effort to save the Oslo peace process - ended up being an "unmitigated disaster"¹⁷⁸ plunging the Palestinians deeper into an uprising and an "internal upheaval that eventually led to civil war."¹⁷⁹ According to the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, a pool made in December 2001 reveals Arafat's declining popularity reached 36% in December 2001 weather in July 2000, it stood at 46% and at 71% in January 1996. Ahmad Yasin was right after him with 14% in December 2001. Support for Fatah reached 28% in December 2001 compared to 29% in July 2001 and 37% in July 2000. Support for the Islamists reached 25% in December 2001 compared to 17% in July 2000.¹⁸⁰ These data demonstrate that Arafat and Fatah support were in fact declining and that the Islamists were gaining ground. This political environment pushed Fatah to embrace women's activism with a "tacit approval"¹⁸¹ that would have saved Palestine from a militant Islamic Regime. The speech given on January 27th, 2002 was the result of a mere political strategy that Arafat thought would have helped to "control his detractors and elevate his standing within the community"¹⁸² and that had nothing to do with women's rights and equality. That same afternoon, in what seemed to be a normal day in Israel, Wafa Idris, a Palestinian woman from the West Bank decided to attack the streets of Jerusalem killing herself and two Israelis. Wafa Idris will be framed by Israel and the West as the first female suicide bomber of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and as an absolute superstar in Palestine. This claim of political rivalry with the Islamists factions was supported by other scholars as well,¹⁸³ but it did not include the fact that women had tried before, in few isolated cases to become martyrs, but simply did not succeed either to be recruited for the operation or in the attack.¹⁸⁴ What it is worthy of consideration is that after Arafat's speech, a wave of women offered themselves to carry out the ultimate nationalistic and faithful act against Israeli occupation¹⁸⁵ and that the chairman of Fatah, gave them not only the official

¹⁷⁸ Jonathan Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah : The Struggle for Palestine*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 9.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No (3). Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research. 19-24 December 2001. <u>http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/252</u>

¹⁸¹ Victor, Army of Roses, 16 - 17.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ness, "The Rise in Female Violence." 84-93.

¹⁸⁴ Victor, Army of Roses, 17.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

permission but also legitimacy, and set an example that was copied by the reluctant Islamists only few years later. Similarly, Sheik Yassin Fatwa was proclaimed and reversed to counterbalance the popularity that Fatah was receiving with this new tactic. Both Arafat and Yassin quickly succumbed to the public's demands, even if in the case of the Islamists, it went against religious rules. The rivalry between Fatah and Hamas was proven real, and Arafat's concerns about losing ground to Islamists was reflected in the 2006 elections, in which Hamas won, taking 74 of the 32 seats, in an election that was deemed fair and square by the international observers.

The second major factor was propaganda and the attention that women's attacks received by the media compared to men's. This attention that young women attracted to the Palestinian cause seemed to play an important role in choosing women over men. "Young women combating Israel by blowing up their bodies is a powerful image that generates more press"¹⁸⁶ which directly translated into more potential for women to be involved and an increasing interest among Palestinian groups in recruiting women. The idea of women fighters departed from a long-lasting assumption that Palestinian militant groups are religious fanatics or archetypes of the patriarchal image of oppressors having the females locked up behind their veils, which has been constructed for years.¹⁸⁷ Palestinians Shahidas have managed to break a cultural sets of rules that stood for a long time to depict and restrict gender roles, rules that have confined Muslim women within the private space of the home. By putting themselves in the front lines, Palestinian fighters have placed themselves alongside men, convincing them of their valid contribution to society. In the personal account of Leila Khaled, she explains her rationale behind her role of combatants and her fight against Israel. Leila's perpetration of violence was the chance to finally testify to the world that women were as committed as men and ready to fight for the cause on equal terms:¹⁸⁸ Through violence, women have placed themselves on the frontlines, in public, alongside men to whom they are not related. This has resulted in a double trajectory for militant Palestinian women."¹⁸⁹At the

¹⁸⁶ Bloom, *Dying to kill: The allure of suicide terror*, 144.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Leila Khaled, My people Shall live: the Autobiography of a Revolutionary. London:Hodder and Stoughton, 1973.

¹⁸⁹ Bloom, "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend." : 99.

same time, women were also used strategically, being able, as explained before, to access areas barred to men thanks to the conviction that Palestinian women were second-class citizens in their own societies and therefore, incapable of planning such operations.¹⁹⁰ According to Bloom, women were recruited by secular and religious paramilitary organizations because there were restrictions on Israel's checkpoints in the West Bank and since the 1990s, it was challenging for an unmarried man under forty-years-old to receive a permit to enter Israel. Therefore, it was a matter of passing security as women were less suspicious and could easily cross the border to perpetrate attacks.¹⁹¹ Mohammed Dahlan, former head of Yasser Arafat's security force, affirmed that "the leaders of various factions also realized that as long as women were dressed in the proper attire, they could be used more effectively to penetrate security and transport weapons."¹⁹² However, although this claim was mentioned by different scholars such as Mia Bloom, who claimed that extreme groups found women useful because they could easily pass Israeli's restrictive security at the borders checks,¹⁹³ Brig. Gen. (Res.) Shalom Harari quickly rushed to discredit this theory, affirming that security rules in Israel did not change because the actions perpetrated by women were minor. It did, however, shift the way Israeli leaders understood how "the Israeli soldiers did not view women as big a threat as men."¹⁹⁴

Scholars have claimed that women were pushed to combat moved by deeply religious beliefs, following the duty of every man and woman to defend Muslim territory when attacked. There is a misconception that what they do is regarded as suicide for Muslims too. Suicide is banned according to Islam as it is written in the hadith and in the Quran, and regards someone who commits suicide as despairing and powerless. The word that the West uses to describe "suicide bombers" in the Muslim world are referred to as *shaheeds* for male and *shahidas* for female and are men and women which are considered brave warriors in

¹⁹⁰ Leila Khaled, My people Shall live: the Autobiography of a Revolutionary. London:Hodder and Stoughton, 1973.

¹⁹¹ Bloom, *Dying to kill: The allure of suicide terror*, 143.

¹⁹² Victor, Army of Roses, 14.

¹⁹³ Bloom, "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend.": 99.

¹⁹⁴ Victor, Army of Roses, 15.

jihad.¹⁹⁵ The arabic word (al-intihar) which is translated in English as suicide is rarely used in discussions about suicide operations that is because suicide in Islam is a sin, while martyrdom is a sign of devotion to God.¹⁹⁶ Dorit Naaman claims, that this is reason why clerics in the Islamic world are to be able to offer a religious justification and even a fatwa (religious ruling) to it.¹⁹⁷ It is God that chooses the person either a man or a woman, to carry out jihad, is it not a matter of free will. For Muslims martyrdom, simply constitutes a "choice of the manner in which he seeks to die."¹⁹⁸ According to Ghassan Hage "[i]n this unequal struggle. the Palestinians are frequently imagined on the verge of being squashed and with them all the Arab masses' aspirations of a dignified life. The suicide bombers become a sign that Palestinians have not been broken."¹⁹⁹ Hamas only sent out the first female bomber in 2004 after Sheikh Ahmed Yassin who was the spiritual leader of Hamas, agreed to it although he had initially objected the involvement of women.²⁰⁰ In the beginning, martyrdom was a new tactic in Palestine that was planned by extreme Islamist groups and implemented by man only.²⁰¹ Religious organizations were in fact opposed to women being on the battlefield, since, as explained before, women's role is just that of supporters to men fighting and their place is in their households. Nelly Lahoud explains, how women's role in jihad is confined to a supporting role and not to the one of protagonist. Only in the event of exceptional circumstances women can actively participate alongside men in combat. Hamas' original Charter exemplifies the woman as "the factory of men"²⁰² and caretaker of the household.²⁰³ Yet already in July 2002, only 6 months after Wafa Idris' attack, the Islamists were quick to change their minds about it. Sheik Ahmad Yassin, influenced by the opinion on the streets

¹⁹⁵ Naaman, "Brides of Palestine/Angels of Death: Media, Gender, and Performance in the Case of the Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers.", 946.

¹⁹⁶ Nadia Taysir Dabbagh, *Suicide in Palestine : Narratives of Despair*. London: Hurst, 2005, 83.

¹⁹⁷ For example of fatwas see the 2002 fatwa by Sheikh Ali Abu Al-Hassan, chairman of the Religious Ruling Committee at Egypt's Al-Azhar university on female martyrdom.

¹⁹⁸ Sheikh Naim Qassem, quotedi in Reuter (2004), 64.

¹⁹⁹ Ghassan Hage, "'Comes a Time We Are All Enthusiasm': Understanding Palestinian Suicide Bombers in Times of Exighophobia." Public Culture 15(1): 64.

²⁰⁰ Naaman, "Brides of Palestine/Angels of Death: Media, Gender, and Performance in the Case of the Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers." *,* 933-55.

²⁰¹ Victor, *Army of Roses*, 16.

²⁰² Hamas' Original Charter, Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for

Special Studies (C.S.S) (1988: Art. 17). <u>https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/pdf/PDF_06_032_2.pdf</u> ²⁰³ Ibid, (Art. 18).

affirmed that they were "men of principles" and that according to Islam "a Muslim woman is permitted to wage jihad and struggle against the enemy who invades holy land. The prophet would draw lots among the women who wanted to go out with him to make jihad. The prophet always emphasized the women's right to wage jihad."²⁰⁴ This clearly demonstrates either that there was a certain flexibility in the minds of Islamists, which they are definitely not known for, or that, given the extreme popularity and the positive reaction of the people to this new strategy to deter Israel, they have decided that women too, could wage jihad, even if they vehemently opposed to it when women first came forward to offer themselves. This also sheds light on the role of religion and its flexibility in relation to political interests. Moreover, it reveals that the endorsement of women in combat was not about religious ideology, but more about political competition.

The last factor is geopolitical influences. Scholars have argued that geopolitical influences had a significant impact on the advancement of women in combat in Palestine. According to fundamentalist Islam, women and girls were initially not "pure enough" to become shahidas in Islam.²⁰⁵ However, in the Muslim world, this concept started slowly to change "Chechen women were the first Islamic females to engage in militancy following this virtual moratorium and have helped clear the way for other Islamic females to engage in jihad."²⁰⁶ In the year 2000, Hawa Barayev, a Chechen women, committed an act of martyrdom. Her act spurred the support of religious scholars that issued a special fatwa in her support, forging an important milestone for female combatant in more traditional Muslim societies. The message was explicit, Chechen women, backed by religious endorsement, were fighters and no longer transgressors. The fatwas were aimed to evoke a reaction and slowly familiarize Islamic societies with women seeking martyrdom.²⁰⁷ Barayev's act was just the tip of the iceberg. In 2001, when Wafa Idris followed through the first attack by a Palestinian woman, backed by the example in Chechia, the High Islamic Council in Saudi Arabia, probably one of the most conservatives muslim institutions, issued its own fatwa in support of

²⁰⁴ Victor, Army of Roses, 32-33.

²⁰⁵Cindy Ness, "In the Name of the Cause: Women's Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (2005): 359.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Cook, "Women Fighting in Jihad ?", 380.

Palestinian shahidas.²⁰⁸ Lastly, Israel, Palestine's worst enemy and neighbor, also officially endorsed women in combat in the year 2000. Therefore, when in 2002 Yasser Arafat endorsed female fighters, he did not do something unprecedented, it was a practice already accepted and supported by few Muslims leaders and Western countries.

The Chain of Events

Whether security reasons and religious beliefs play minor roles in Arafat's and Yassin's decision to officially endorse women in combat, political competition and geopolitical influences seem to be pivotal. Therefore, the question that rises is- is the proximity in time between Israel's authorities, Arafat and Yassin's decisions the result of mere coincidence? After the analysis of Israel, Arafat and Yassin's factors, it is plausible to say that it is not a coincidence, but rather, a chain of events that caused them to influence, willingly or unwillingly, each other. Even if more than one factor contributed to the authorities' decision to formally endorse women's participation in combat, they all succumbed to public pressure and women's demand. Israel's Knesset, in the first place, pressured by a combination of geopolitical external factors and feminist internal factors, passed the amendment to the Defense Service Law in 2000 officially opening all units to women. Then, two years later Yasser Arafat's iconic speech to a crowd of women, formally endorsed women participation in the Palestinian struggle against Israel. Women, who have been wanting to become fighters for a long time and that have until then only participated in supporting roles, celebrated Wafa Idris' martyrdom attack in 2002. Women's response was immediate, indicating that the demand was high.

According to Raphael Israeli, a Jordanian columnist blamed Western human rights activist "of robbing women of their rights to be human, and viewed them as bodies without

²⁰⁸ Cook, "Women Fighting in Jihad ?", 380.

souls"²⁰⁹ stressing that shadidas "never dreamt to own a BMW or a cellular phone, and never carried makeup in their bags, but rather explosives to fill the enemy with horror."²¹⁰ The Jordanian columnist proceeded to accuse the West for demanding non-Western women equality to men, concluding that martyrdom was how "Muslim female martyrs understood equality.²¹¹ Raphael Israeli describes, how Egyptian member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Afaq Arabiya, affirmed that the West tried to "disrupt the consciousness of the Muslim women and make them believe that their bodies and needs were most important."²¹² Israel incidentally felt responsible for those accusations for the proximity to Palestine and became considered around the world "as the agents of the Western drive to corrupt Muslim women." Simona Sharoni as well, noted that it was Israel's intention from the beginning to radicalize women and play in the patriarchal culture that exists in Palestine to break Palestinian families.²¹⁴ Hence, it was plausibly Israel's official endorsement of women in combat units paired with the Western idea of equality to men that drove women in Palestine to participate in the fight and pushed them from just supporting roles to combat roles. The demand was met in January 2002, when Arafat, who understood the sentiments of women, specifically gathered them and addressed them on January, 27th. Wafa Idris became "the first woman to fight and kill the enemy on an equal basis to the men in her society"²¹⁵ and the beginning for women who believed to have become full and equal part of the struggle against the occupation "prepared to die in equal numbers to the men."²¹⁶ Two years later, Yassin, spiritual leader of Hamas, who until then, had some reservations about women and martyrdom, changed his mind. Initially, Yassin stated that women had to be accompanied by men as part of the rules of traditional Muslim societies²¹⁷ thus, making female martyrdom

²⁰⁹ Raphael Israeli, "PALESTINIAN WOMEN: THE QUEST FOR A VOICE IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE THROUGH "ISLAMIKAZE MARTYRDOM" 1." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 1 (2004): 68.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 80.

²¹¹ Al-Dustour (Jordan), 5 February, 2002.

²¹² Raphael Israeli, "PALESTINIAN WOMEN: THE QUEST FOR A VOICE IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE THROUGH "ISLAMIKAZE MARTYRDOM" 1." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 1 (2004): 68.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Sharoni, *Gender in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*.

²¹⁵ Victor, *Army of Roses*, 34.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 31.

²¹⁷ Al-Sharq al-Awsat (London), 31 January, 2002.

impossible. However, he later succumbed to women's demand in Gaza to participate in the fight,²¹⁸ and followed in the footsteps of Arafat who itself followed Israel, completing the chain.

Conclusion

Israel and Palestine's decisions to enable women combatants resonated in the world and influenced other countries and paramilitary organizations to incorporate women in their armies. In the years that followed, different opportunities have opened for women. As of 2018, in the IDF, women make up 33% of soldiers and 51% of them are currently serving officers. Of all the positions that the IDF offers to its soldiers, 92% are open to women, including eight combat units. The increasing demand of women to access combat positions is breaking new barriers each year. In June 2018, four women finished the course to become tank commanders, the first female tank commanders in the IDF.²¹⁹ Since 2000, once the authorities gave the official endorsement, women have flooded to combat units, demonstrating that a high demand has always existed and will increase with time. It would be interesting to establish now, 18 years after the amendment to the Service Law, what the status of women is in terms of equal citizens. In a militaristic society such as Israel, the advancement of women in the military should translate into better conditions in civil life. Yet, some scholars have already concluded that the dream of equality fell short because women need to mimic masculine behavior in order to fit in combat.²²⁰ Yet, I believe it to be somehow early to draw conclusions since new combat roles, promotions, and units open yearly. Hopefully, future research, will be able to provide better estimates on whether or not the

²¹⁸ Al-Sharq al-Awsat (London), 31 January, 2002.

²¹⁹ "Thank Commanders Break Gender Barriers." 28 June 2018. https://www.idf.il/en/ldf.il. Accessed July 01, 2018.

https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/soldiers-of-the-idf/tank-commanders-break-gender-barriers/.

²²⁰Orna Sasson-Levy, "CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES AT THE MARGINS: Masculinities and Citizenship in the Israeli Army." *Sociological Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (2002): 357-83.

status of women changed in the Israeli society thanks to the combat roles they fulfilled during mandatory military service.

In the case of Palestine, once the Second Intifada ended, the martyr attacks by women came to an end but women kept their involvement in the armed struggle. In 2014, Haaretz headline reported that women had joined a Palestinian commando unit in West Bank for the first time in a move that was meant to break gender barriers.²²¹ Certainly, this decision was influenced by previous official endorsement of women to fight by both Araft and Yassin, secular and religious leaders. In fact, it was thanks to Arafat's rule that new security branches grew in size and Palestinian female in recent years have been able to push the boundaries more and more, to make up today 3% of 30,000 members of the police. Last year, in 2017, female Presidential Guards were picked to be trained as future officers and Hamas, introduced 400 women in the 16,000 security forces.²²² It would be interesting to research if another parallel exists between the two nations and if there have been other recent influences in terms of women's rights on the two sides of the border.

In retrospect, Israel's, Arafat's, and then Yassin's official endorsements did pave the way for women to challenge previously established misogynist gender norms and not just in Israel and Palestine, but worldwide. Women in combat shocked the world, the transgression was not as such anymore and continued a conversation on women and equality. For liberal feminism, it meant conquering a long-lasting fight and asserting that "men do not have a monopoly on patriotism, physical ability, desire for adventure, or willingness to risk their lives."²²³ However, women in the military in both Israel and Palestine also spurred questions from pacifist feminists, who believe in different role models for women to follow. Ultimately, should women pursue equality in the most masculine and misogynist realm of society? Shouldn't people collectively discourage any forms of violence? Is the fervent need of equality for women used as an "excuse" by governments to have its citizens encourage and

²²¹The Associated Press, "First Women Joining Palestinian Commando Unit," Haarezt, April 7,

^{2014, ,} accessed July 1, 2018, https://www.haaretz.com/22-women-join-elite-palestinian-force-1.5244255.

²²³ American Civil Liberties Union 2016, INTERNATIONAL FEMINIST JOURNAL OF POLITICS,

support the armed forces as opposed to focus on non-violent resistance? It would be interesting to include these questions in future research.

In terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the findings of this research render a hitherto puzzling historical event intelligible and consequential, by revealing that two very different societies, labeled as ultimate opposites, may have more in common than what we think. If Israel plays into the image of a Western liberal country and prides itself to be advanced in terms of women's rights, Palestine, the patriarchal un-democratic society, could potentially do the same. In this research, it appears clear that Palestinian women were officially endorsed as well and that it was plausible that it was Israel's "fault." Further research into personal memoirs of Arafat and Yassin, or narratives of their close collaborators in Fatah and Hamas, may shed more light on this connection. However, the clear response by women on both sides reveals that the change was long-awaited and that leaders simply succumbed to a popular request. This demonstrates that much more than just an intractable conflict is shared between the two nations. At least on the official lever however, neither Israel nor Palestine will overtly admit a link exists, and while Palestine was celebrating Wafa Idris as a warrior, Israel was depicting it as the unhappy transgressor that had no way out but "blowing herself up". Even if Israeli and Palestinian female fighters were pushed to their acts by the same underlying motivations such as patriotism, honor, and equality, Israel did not see it that way. As a result, Western media and scholars amplified the double standard and transformed what could have been an important point in common and a celebration of gender equality, to an excuse to further the nations even more apart.

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