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Iris Jean-Klein

Edinburgh University, iris.e.f.jean-klein@ed.ac.uk

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**Palestinian Martyrdom Revisited:  
Critical Reflections on Topical Cultures of Explanation**

**Dr Iris Jean -Klein**

School of Social and Political Studies  
Department of Social Anthropology  
Edinburgh University

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For any query or information, please contact the author:

[IrisJK@afb1.ssc.ed.ac.uk](mailto:IrisJK@afb1.ssc.ed.ac.uk)

## Connectivity: From Asset to Liability and Loss

*"This would be a scandal, if we listened to some and not to other [voices]... out of whim, habit, ... prejudice or political desire..." (Geertz 1988:6)*

In this paper I reflect on some unusual and thought-provoking patterns in the analysis of Palestinian political practices. Specifically, these patterns have materialised in response to (and indeed in explanation of) dramatically transfigured Palestinian practices of political "martyrdom" (Arabic, *shehada*)--the notion has been an "actant" (Law 1999) in processes of political mobilisations since the inception of a national liberation movement in the region (see Johnson 1982)--during the 2001-2002 period. "Local political practice" thereby crossed the Rubicon line beyond which it can no longer be imagined as keeping in line with the key imaginaries and core values of neo-liberalising "international" movements which articulate with such localised emancipatory struggles. My intention in this essay is to register the analytical postures which the new (and shocking) political practices have elicited. Specifically, I want to draw attention to a suspension of "everyday" or common anthropological practices and its effect, namely, the *obviation* of local knowledge practices which surround and undergird the line of action that is causing this frenzied search for "explanations" and in which anthropologists participate with less than their usual methodological and epistemological equipment. I set to infer from this posture that anthropology as such is fundamentally *unfit* to handle such forms of political agency which are morally repugnant in the eyes of the "international community"? Is ethnography not a method equally suited to all phenomena? Do different political situations call for different epistemologies? And if the answer is "no" to the first questions and "yes" to the second, then which and whose instrumentality is setting the agenda?

Some background is in order. During the First Palestinian Intifada (1987-1993), the main techniques of resistance against Israeli occupation of two decades had been acts of civil

disobedience, measures of national institution -building, and militant ybystone -throwing. "Martyrdom," although it had been an active ethos also during the First Intifada (which was led by the progressive party -movements), did not have homicidal or suicidal overtones. Until the first cases of suicide -bombing occurred in 1996, conferment of the posthumous honorific title of "martyr" usually had as its basis the subject's own *victimisation*, at least by external calculations of "cause" and "responsibility."<sup>1</sup> Assuch the title was a euphemisation of deaths caused by agents of the Israeli occupation and/or one of its civilian "arms" (Jewish settlers or collaborating Palestinians), and of deaths which resulted from the structural circumstance of a military occupation and the uprising against it. It was not necessary to *have been killed* in the line of "action" conceived in a formally organised and externally recognised sense; nor was it necessary to *have killed*. The fact that a person had stayed put in the territories despite the prevailing economic and political circumstances --that s/he had *resisted* the temptation to emigrate-- marked a person as a *samid*, a practitioner of "steadfastness" or *sumud*. And *sumud* counted as a weighty form of resistance activism in its own right. Thus, although persons who died in militant actions were especially honoured and commemorated, many "martyrs" had met their death not as a result of their own direct involvement in militant street actions, but as "innocent bystanders" who had stepped in harm's way as they went about their daily lives. As I elaborate later, during this phase in the Palestinian struggle, politically empathetic external analyses (like local analyses of political process by intellectual elites) found it relatively easy to work *with* select local/colloquial concepts, including that of martyrdom.

The suicide -martyrdom operations with which "martyrdom" (and indeed, Palestinian activism) has latterly become synonymous<sup>2</sup> combine an attempt to cause carnage on the "other" side with a readiness on part of the bomber to relinquish his/her own life to accomplish this. The most objectionable aspect of these emissions in all external and some critical inside views (see, for example, Hamami & Budeiri 2001; Remmick 2001; Parry 2002),<sup>3</sup> however, is that they deliberately target Israel's civilian population. The differentiation between *civilian* subjects (this category is in the "international" imaginary epitomised by "women and children") and military personnel (associated with adult men) is fundamental to a

discrimination in International Law (the Fourth Geneva Convention) between *warcrime* and the use of *legitimate means of war*. Most "global citizens" or "internationals" would not dispute that in their view, too, the extent to which this critical boundary is transgressed marks the difference between legitimate *militant* action on the one hand, and unacceptable (although possibly understandable) acts of militancy, if not *terrorism*, on the other hand. <sup>4</sup>

Thus, with this new form of exercising militancy and martyrdom, a discordance has arisen between active Palestinian values and the sensitivities of international solidarity supporters which is registered in recent epistemological moves which effectively eclipse popular local understandings, as I go on to explain. Recent calls to give greater emphasis to "other, concurrent forms of activism," where dissenting voices among the local intelligentsia are concentrated (Hamami & Budeiri 2001), are an example of a sudden desire to separate the terms of analytical knowledge from (certain) activist knowledge practice, and on one means of accomplishing it. Another, I suggest, are mechanical explanations which ventriloquise the actor's "p.o.v".

It is not the case, however, that Palestinian nationalist activists and international solidarity supporters did not previously come up against some possible limits to "international" collaboration. Not surrounding the manipulation of "martyrdom" (for which, as I go on to show, both sides had their uses), but surrounding what in retrospect appear to be "lesser" instantiations of a readiness on part of the Palestinian culture of activism (at a time when the "progressive movement" exercised great influence over it) to use "violence" to achieve national justice. Many dedicated and seasoned solidarity partners were uncomfortable, for example, with the use of coercive means to bring non-compliant shopkeepers in line with boycotts and general strikes which the UNLU (United National Leadership of the Uprising) called for. <sup>5</sup> There was even greater general unease about the strong-arm policy used against Palestinian "collaborators," which extended to execution when other measures of correction (verbal warnings, social ostracism, and destruction of property) had allegedly failed. <sup>6</sup> Yet, resident foreign nationals (or "internationals," as they have recently called themselves) many of whom supported the Palestinian cause

professionally (as employees of various NGOs and Human Rights organisations in the area) opted to turn a politically considerate "blind eye." For example, associates of various human rights organisations said they were not including acts of political violence which were perpetrated by Palestinians against other Palestinians (i.e., killings of collaborators) in their statistical counts. <sup>7</sup> When I say politically considerate, I meant to say that at the reported approach -- statistical obfuscation -- reflected the supportive foreign nationals' understanding that the Israeli -Palestinian conflict was to a great extent a public relations war and "war of representations." Since the very beginning of the Israeli -Palestinian conflict, both sides have depended on extensive moral and material support from powerful external parties -- *cum-partners*, <sup>8</sup> the flow of which was presumed (on both sides) to be influenced by the third party's views of the protagonists' moral case and conduct. This has led both sides to invest efforts in international impression management. <sup>9</sup> The damage which attention to violent streaks in Palestinian activism was expected to inflict on Palestinians' "national reputation" and to the realisation of an independent state spoke against immediate corrective interference. The foreign activists I met practised or supported the deferment of tutelage until such a time when an independent state was established (which seemed imminent). It seemed a more appropriate framework, and a fairer choice of moment, in which to encourage the adherence to global standards of justice in local political culture. Palestinian interlocutors were aware of their internationalist colleagues' political sensitivities and made efforts to keep "difficult" differences out of their interactions.

Where "martyrdom" was concerned, however, earlier analytical practices had shown themselves sympathetic to its creative uses at all levels of local practice, and were not averse to making a *iso* good analytical use of it. Even mild sceptics saw no harm in letting the notion be and "do its work" so to speak. After all, looked at from a politically empathetic view, it was doing no harm; even non-believers could appreciate it as a useful conceptual play on a dismal and desperate material circumstance which had the effect of symbolic self-redemption and psychological empowerment. A significant number of social and political science analyses even reiterated the celebratory spirit in which the phenomenon was locally

transacted.<sup>10</sup> That is to say, they used martyrdom as a *productive* analytic by means of which otherwise innocuous, if not counter-indicative datasets could be transformed into evidence of significant *changes* in social and political practice which one had *hoped* to find or to achieve by scholarly means, amongst others. <sup>11</sup> In other words, the analytic of "martyrdom" was an *asset* not only for the Palestinian nationalist project and its subsidiary agendas (e.g., the feminist "class" struggle), but also for various "internationalist" agendas which have worked "with" the Palestinian causes since the 1970s.

Internationalist feminism serves as a case in point. Feminist analyses <sup>12</sup> could manipulate "martyrdom" in its earlier guise to contrive greater "agency" for Palestinian women.<sup>13</sup> ("Active women" in turn made the national liberation movement's positive influence visible.) Even the Palestinian women's committee associations, which were handing political observers already-made case for Palestinian women's "transformed" status as a result of the popular uprising, built around "women's committee" involvement as their centre-piece of evidence, were reaching for "martyrdom" as a supplementary field of data with which to engulf (actually and representational) *the masses of rural and working-class women* active political participants. <sup>14</sup> One might well ask how Palestinian women come to have a share in the *credit* for "acts of martyrdom," in both socio-political and analytical estimations, when the majority of celebrated martyrs were male youths. One could simply gather up and reiterate analytically parts of diverse local discourses and practices which hinted at a kind of "cross-subjective" enablement of male activists (and not only those who became recognised as martyrs) by their mothers, sisters, and wives (see Jean Klein 1997, 2000). It was by applying or extending the politically active logic, not by some alternative logic, that diverse subaltern categories acquired in analytical terms a share of "direct" or "connective" authorial input into the course of events which were recognised as making a difference, an impact or a point.<sup>15</sup>

I do not mean to suggest that external analyses had previously been more interested in a systematic investigation of what Lator (1999) has called "actors' own world-building abilities," for their own sake or range of "instrumentalities." It just so happened that at that

time, fractions of "local understanding" relating to activism generally, and to "martyrdom" particularly, had the obvious appearance of a useful or instrumental analytic from the point of view of the political projects *the analysts* were pursuing. In part this was because the practical ontology of the phenomenon of this name was not (yet) morally offensive in the "international" view and global "order of things." On the contrary, Palestinian victim -martyrs occupied a moral high ground in both local/colloquial understandings and in empathetic outside analyses. But theready instrumentality also had something to do with the fact that martyrdom had already been rendered transactable in "worldly terms" through the work of activist academic and intellectual circles locally, which *otherwise* spoke mostly in the language of familiar, "global" analytical concepts and theories (see Jean -Klein, d. [a]). The agency of the "martyrs" themselves, that is, the conceptualisation of their deaths as *acts*, went without saying for all.

### **Closed and Forbidden Worlds of Understanding**

Ten years onwards, as Palestinian martyrdom has become synonymous with homicidal political suicide, the desired "co-responsibility" of the masses of "grassroots" actors and especially of women has turned from a cultural and analytical asset into a liability.<sup>16</sup> The main analytical response, I would maintain, has been to sociologically disconnect "actors" from agency and more generally to morally absolve the local/colloquial level. This manifests itself in explanatory "work" which *actively* brackets --one might even say, obviates -- the need for ethnographic expansion and respective analytical "complication." Maybe out of political consideration, or perhaps remaining true to the analysts' own political desire, serious and empathetic efforts to "explain" the phenomenon of "martyrdom" under the current circumstances have settled for a relatively simple and stable loop of mechanically interlocking "factors" or "angles" --the political, historical, psychological, sociological, and the biographic -- which constitute the unique specialisms of assorted academic disciplines and/or their methodologies. Not the missing elements: "culture" and "ethnography." It is as if under certain conditions, people's actions --their readiness to act in a certain way -- become so utterly overdetermined by their "objective historical forces" that analysis can (or is it that it

"had better"?) dispense with "actors' own" or with "local" understandings -- or whatever alternative term anthropologists nowadays use to refer (anti-) essentially to "culture" (Erickson 2002), as a relevant analytical category. It is telling that it took not time at all and little extra effort (not much fresh research) to assemble a strikingly rounded, complete and confident picture. There is no sense, in this field of knowledge production, of a shortage or a "failure" of knowledge. <sup>17</sup> Politically empathetic knowledge practices seem self-assured and focused on a different kind of failure, elsewhere: the failure of "own" available knowledge to assert itself in a drastic change of the established political order.

One can *almost* speak in the singular, but not quite. However, it is not multifarious theoretical or discipline-specific "perspectives" which caused debate. There is no academic debate, <sup>18</sup> that is one of my points. What looks like oppositional "analytical" tendencies are "practical expressions" of political opposition. In later sections I expand on the opposed modes of explanation; here I merely want to name them in accordance with my own heuristic purposes and analytical focus. I call one explanatory "movement" *hostile* <sup>19</sup> and the second *"empathetic" or "responsible."* The quotation marks around the qualifying terms for the second, which is the movement with which I am mainly concerned (because I consider it the academically more serious one), signal my contention that while constituent networks might be successfully managing, still, to exercise *political* empathy with the Palestinian cause as a whole, it does not *and cannot* also exercise *analytical* or *aesthetic* empathy in the Batesonian sense <sup>20</sup> with the actors and the processes at issue.

However, are not the politically responsible analyses, in so consistently and may I say, conspicuously by-passing "actors' own understandings," casting a shadow of an alternative way of reckoning the value of "martyrdom" which they must at least presume to be there and take to be difficult to transact internationally, even if its source and nature is not explained? The "shadow" of an (untoward) form of reckoning value in regard to militancy, including the recent suicide-martyrdom bombings, becomes very noticeable in the inordinate amount of attention given to refuting the "prior knowledge" and moral endorsement of suicide bombings by the bombers' immediate families. One could say it is about the only "culturally unique"

feature about this analytical industry. It is as if it were (still) known or claimed *somewhere* that these subjects or relationships formed a part of the "network of actants and actors" (cf. Law 1999, Latour 1999) responsible for producing activists, martyrs, and suicide -bombers. Where? Whose knowledge is this?

My aim is not to take away from the existing explanation(s), nor necessarily to add a perspective. I want to turn *the explanations*, most especially in the "empathetic" strand with its implicit claims about the nature of "correct" anthropological analysis in relation to hyper-politicised fields, as an object of ethnographic and analytical interest in its own right. The compulsion to *actively* --that is, as an act of political activism --obviate the relevance of local resources (while the intense analytical acrobatics that is performed around it pronounces them active "network components") is one curious feature of this explanatory "movement." Specifically, I mean the obviation of the militants *-cum-*martyrs' "own" agency (cf. Mahmood 2001) as well as the "connective" investment of immediate family members in the martyrdom of a loved one.

The common anthropological impulse, when an overlooked or excluded perspective becomes conceivable, has been to "retrieve" and instate it. I want to cast a shadow of what surprising thing one might find if one followed this habitual analytical movement, by cross-reading between slippages in the current "explanations" of martyrdom practices in the Second Intifada, and ethnographic data relating to Palestinian militant activism which I collected during the First Intifada. One would find that the obviation of familial, especially of maternal input into the "production" of militant subjects (including martyrs), which marks the politically empathetic analytic, is in a fashion repeated in local level discourses and to an extent (intermittently we might say) by the key actors'. Thus, if one returned to the "actors" with the hope of finding an entirely alternative perspective or analytical purchase, one would be disappointed. But here this is not a sign that the subjects and the analyst share an understanding of the practice as utterly mundane (cf. Riles, forthcoming)! Unexpectedly, a new ethnographic subject, and a different historical inflection of culture, emerges: *the self* - exhibiting or *self* -documentary self, moving through daily interactions with a view to, or

through the imaginary of, an extended trial situation in which the self is continually delivering evidence against hostile external representations; and doing so, disowns realms of "own" agency (in exchange for other anticipated gains).

Regardless of their political incorrectness, then, to the extent that hostile representation evidently influence, not to say, compel narrative practices all around -- and I am suggesting the extent is considerable -- they are analytically of some relevance. Let us then look at the concrete charges. Already during the First Intifada (when no centre of political authority could be identified which might be charged single-handedly influencing Palestinian youths "adversely"), there circulated allegations in the Israeli and the international public sphere that Palestinian *parents* were "inciting" their own children to militancy. Subsequently, in the interim period between the two Intifadas, the charge changed to allegation that the *Palestinian Authority*, via state-controlled school curricula and broadcasting media, was fanning the flames of hatred against Israel and "inciting" Palestinian children to political violence.<sup>21</sup> Finally, in reference to the Second Intifada, it is the PA along with the leaders of influential religious movements who are cast in the role of "political parents" and charged with cultivating and "sending" suicide-martyrdom bombers. The current Israeli prime minister, Ariel Sharon, this year (2002) reiterated the charge in a poignant form when he said, related to suicide/martyrdom bombings (and in defence of Israel's disproportionately violent retaliatory incursions back into the Palestinian territories): "The violence will end when Palestinian *mothers* stop teaching violence to their children!" A almost identical charge against Palestinian *mothers* was levelled by the First Lady of the U.S., Barbara Bush, when she asked in a speech during the summer of 2002, "Can I empathise with a [Palestinian] *mother* who sends her children out to blow themselves up and kill other civilians? No!" (cited in Alsous 2002, emphasis added.)<sup>22</sup> -- In all this it has gone unnoticed how unusual a state it would indeed be if mothers, and not fathers (Delaney 1997) or State-fathers (Borneman 2003), were the rightful owners of children and their sacrificial acts.

The impact of such arguments in the international arena has not been lost on ordinary Palestinian parents, including mothers. The question is, how do they position themselves in relation to the hostile "framing" of their children's and their own "agency"?

### **Double Standards?**

***time: second intifada; type of action: suicide -martyrdom bombing; narrative modality : open encouragement & claims of co-ownership***

*"We do not regret what happened. Every woman should encourage her son to do the same."*

This statement was given by the mother of Izzadinal Masri, the 23-year-old Palestinian suicide bomber who on 9 August 2001 blew himself up in a West Jerusalem pizzeria by detonating the pack of explosives he had carried in his guitar case, killing nineteen Jewish Israelis. The woman was responding to ITV News correspondent Gabi Rado, who had pressed the parent to comment on their son's "martyrdom."<sup>23</sup> (The woman's own words were buried underneath the English voice-over, so one could not make out which word she had used to urge maternal "encouragement.") Most British viewers very likely expected expressions of immense grief from the woman, maybe a condemnation of her son's action, and would have found the reply shocking. Not only was she refusing to condemn the act, she was suggesting she had actively encouraged her son and in this way had had a hand in the deed (and his death). She made it sound like she had *given*, not lost a son. In her new status as Mother of a glorious Martyr, moreover, she was calling on other mothers to do the same.

I myself felt jolted by the woman's statement, but not for *what* it disclosed. I had become aware of this kind of posture, and of the kind of cross-subjective agency it insinuated, in my observations of processes concerning the First Intifada.<sup>24</sup> My own surprise was *that* a Palestinian mother was conceding maternal "connectivity" so openly and unapologetically. It seemed a curious moment in time to suspend or reverse these self-presentation practices which had struck me during the First Intifada, which I want to recall in greater detail. Even though Palestinian militancy did not yet imply the perpetration of

violence, and many others of Martyrs were celebrated in local political culture and in politically sympathetic or symbiotic academic analyses; women's presentations of the/ir maternal contribution to the social "encouragement" of a readiness for militant action in Palestine and youths (the social category at the forefront of street clashes) were characterised by much social reserve, prudence, and indeed, semantic contradiction. As it turned out, the woman's expression in 2001 of her moral support for her son's suicide -martyrdom mission in front of foreign media cameras did not signal a reversal of this trend. It rarely presented itself again, so directly, in the coverage of the spate of suicide/martyrdom bombings which followed; a slippage, then, on someone's part.

One would have thought that the position(s) and set of connections made by mothers, fathers, siblings -- at the level of everyday relationships, more generally, and as expressed not necessarily in front of cameras but informally and "subversively," in the course of everyday life -- would at least arouse the interest of anthropologists. (And I am not suggesting that one would find necessarily a unanimous resounding of the position expressed by this one mother.) But while anthropologists have contributed to the surging industry of professional and academic explanation which has developed around the phenomenon of Palestinian suicide/martyrdom bombings, they have not commented in the terms of their own discipline's unique analytical concerns, concepts, or methods. The scenario which was briefly flashed before British news viewers, in any event, has not been given a serious and empathetic hearing. In the discourses which give it a "presence," it is integrated into a context of ethnographically unfounded (and in this sense *arbitrary*) hostile charges against Palestinians and their sense of social morality, and becomes overdetermining. Alternatively, in the discourses which are committed to assisting Palestinians in their national self-emancipation, the truth-value of such "connections," which circulate as a defamatory allegation, *need to be* vehemently denied; and ethnographic qualification is beside the point. Either way, then, the possibility features at the moment only "in the negative." The following photograph -- initially it was part of a photo essay published in *The Washington Times*, then it was circulated electronically via *The Digital Filmmaker*,<sup>25</sup> and from there was excerpted and distributed

through various informal networks (from where it came my way) -- gives a compelling demonstration of the hostile political - analytical position and its use of the trope of maternal "collusion," and of a difficult ethnographic subject:

[Insert PHOTO/Image of Web -Page]

The following message accompanied and "framed" the electronic circular of the snapshot: "Can anyone imagine a Jewish mother encouraging hers onto to explode himself like this loving Om Mohammad?"

In wanting to switch to a different ethnographic time frame, and to show the "shifting presentation practices" which I encountered during the First Intifada. I then take the creative liberty of treating these materials, pertaining to a different time and to less pernicious forms of militancy, as a close - enough ethnographic basis for postulating that actors in their own (self) knowledge practices might be *intermittently* repeating the obviating of "actors' own knowledge practices" which we see exercised in politically committed *analytical* activity related to Palestinian suicide/martyrdom operations. In the final section, I consider what evidence of a radically different but rigorously obviated form of relating to the suicide/martyrdom mission is recorded between the lines of analyses that strive to disown the martyrs and their immediate relatives of "own agency." Undoubtedly, it would be irreconcilable with hegemonic "global" sensitivities. Does that rule out a place for it in ethnography?

***time: first intifada (1990); type of action : militant activism; narrative modality: shifting (discursive denouncement & encouragement in practice)***

This section aims to show how Palestinian mothers in their interactions with each other shared an understanding of their own animatory influence, and "co - ownership," with regard to the *courage* which their male youths were displaying by participating in militant street confrontations. This influence (viewed through the optic of proud mothers) centered on their elicitation of courage from their sons (and from daughters in many cases) during everyday

child socialisation practice. Studying these practices, it appears that mothers first of all led their children to be "irritated" by the prevailing situation of political domination. From there they led them to *fear* or rather, carefully calculate confrontation with the adversary; as well as to overcome *ride* or *master fear* for their own life (this *-worldly* existence) in the active defence of a greater purpose or cause (*qadiya<sup>t</sup>*). The courage and sacrificial spirit which women displayed in their nurturing practices set an example which both already *foreshadowed* the nurtured subject's ideal future character and compelled or obliged his actualisation of it. Palestinian mothers were never suggesting, nor am I, that they were *single-handedly* responsible for the courage displayed in the current situation, or for and the forms it displayed took. Their practical presentations of their own input portrayed it as *working together with* the animatory force of the Situation, *il-wade<sup>c</sup>*, a concept which summed up the various "historical forces" which, as we will see, the "empathetic" explanation is taking into account. This way of situating their input meant that in their intermittent *obviation* of it they were not so much shifting to a different regime of "truth" as shifting representation by momentarily foregrounding other animatory influences.

This presentational alternation, between denying and downing up to own responsibility, between backgrounding and foregrounding maternal influence (which I take as testimony of how widespread the understanding was that the Palestinian movement depended on international good-will and support and what international sensitivities were), cut across differences of class and different levels of formal (academic or political) education. Moreover, these self-conscious denials were not rare or minor rituals, even though they were largely aimed at an international audience. Quite simply, the "international" was not remote enough. Various social and professional categories of "international" observers and residents with a variety of interests were, and remain, a significant presence - cum-*institution* in this field (Jean -Klein 2002). If for no other reason, the self-disclaiming discourse had become a rather permanent adjunct of daily self-presentation practices.

My first ethnographic case is a conversational exchange during an English class I taught in 1990 to a dozen girls and women who were members and friends of one of the four

progressive women's committee associations which were active at the time. We always opened the conversational practice with a "Show & Tell -- News of the Week" session. One day, a student brought to class an article from a local paper. (Radawa in her late 20s, came from an urban and professional family, had a university degree and was married to a professional; she also belonged to the high rank independent cadre of her women's committee organisation.) The article reported that the Israeli papers were condemning Palestinian parents, especially mothers, as *inhumane* because they were *sacrificing* their own children, *ordering* them to throw stones at Israeli soldiers and settlers and in this way getting themselves shot. The Hebrew papers, the women and girls educated me, were in this way questioning Palestinians' humanity: "What kind of human beings are capable of such a thing [sacrificing their own children]?" the writer was quoted to have asked, rhetorically. The whole class showed itself outraged at the accusation. In making Palestinians look like animals, the class explained, Israel was undermining the legitimacy of the Palestinian demand for an independent state. Palestinian mothers loved their children like any other mother and were *not* doing such a thing, they protested.

Several turns further along in the conversation, however, when it seemed that the concern with hostile representations had momentarily receded into the background, the same woman who had brought the article to class felt prompted to recount the following incident in which she and her three-year-old son had recently been involved. The women and girls had just done their rounds of telling which heroic feats by Palestinian youths and "strike forces" they had witnessed or heard of during the past week (something which was a common ritual or routine in every day gathering too).

I was walking with my 3-year-old son. As we walked we passed [an Israeli] jeep which was parked just outside [a] supermarket. When we passed, my son threw a little stone at it; just a *little* stone -- he has seen other boys do it too. [I.e., "It was not who I taught him to do that."] Just then one of the soldiers was coming out of the shop, and he saw my son. He then came up and offered my son a biscuit. I told my son not to take the biscuit, because the man giving it was an Israeli soldier. "Why don't you let the child have a biscuit?" the soldier asked me. I said, "Our children must learn young. The soldier called me a 'crazy woman'!"

[Not that the adult analogue of someone accepting gifts from Israeli soldiers would have been a collaborator.]

For some time afterwards my son still thought that Israeli soldiers were "sweet." Then one day, he was looking down the balcony of our flat and he saw Israeli soldiers patrolling the street. He made this sign [she indicated the boy had made the V-sign with his fingers] and shouted down, "PLO! Israel, no!" He has seen other kids do this. One soldier heard him and spun around, pointing his gun at my son. He was going to shoot, I think, but just then another ran up to him and pushed his arm down. "Well, be careful in the future!" the first soldier called to my son. "You see!? What did I tell you? Israeli soldiers are *not* sweet!" I said to him. Now when my son sees an Israeli soldier, he still only *whispers* "PLO! Israel, no!" He has learnt to be careful. And yesterday he said to me, "Yamma, the Jewish [soldiers] are *not* sweet!" after we passed a soldier. -- You see, the child has learnt.

It was other class members' reception of their colleague's tale which led me to recognise that the woman might have just "shown" her hand in eliciting the new and welcomed dispositions from her son -- resenting the occupiers but being careful (not headless) in the expression of resentment -- while working *with* the circumstances that had presented themselves. The rest of the girls and women clapped and cheered, the mother *and* the boy. The performance of the tale and its reception then suggested that despite everything, women also liked to think they were playing an important part in their sons' political mobilisation, and took creative pride in their contribution to it. (But let us remember that at the time, "militancy" still articulated productively or positively with the "value-finding" [see Bateson 1987] interests of the international solidarity movement.)

The social recognition which had been transacted in a very subtle manner during this exchange had been brought home to me more forcefully in a different context, whilst observing my friend Nuha's dealings with her sons. Nuha, 32, was married to a car mechanic (she herself was not gainfully employed), and had four sons aged one, nine, eleven and fourteen. The family lived in the Birah, near the house of Nuha's parents, and I was regularly spending time at both homes. In the initial phase of our friendship, I often asked Nuha if she

was not worried that the old persons were spending so much time outside the house without, it had seemed to me, her knowing where they were. "They know how to take care of themselves," she would appease me. Then one day, when I asked again, she elaborated. Her face lit up with mischievous excitement as she reported: "Yesterday afternoon, the old two managed to [hit] some Jewish soldiers with stones! Just outside here [she pointed down at the street below her balcony]. And they got away!" She wore a broad smile, seeming proud of their escape (they had outwitted the much stronger opponents) and teasing me with her pride. Assuming a graver face expression and tone of voice, she continued: "Last week, Hamada here [with her head she gestured in the direction of her nine-year-old who was at home that afternoon, watching TV in the living room], threw stones at some soldiers; he was not so lucky. He didn't get away on time, and one of the soldiers grabbed hold of him and slapped him across the face several times. Maybe he was lucky, because they then let him go. He came home shaking, and I said to him, "You have to take care! [*Deerbalak!*]" She paused, and for a moment I thought she might tell me that she had told the boy off for his involvement, as I occasionally heard women tell each other they were doing. (I never actually saw a mother tell her son[s] off, although mothers might tell their sons that they "feared for them" or related dreams they alleged to have had of something specific happening to them -- an arrest, a betrayal, an injury -- which boys took on board as a sign that they needed to be extra cautious and circumspect for a while). Instead, Nuh went on to report that she had given her son *concerned encouragement*, "You have to get quicker! Learn from your brothers!" She studied me closely as she related this conversation with him, as if she expected me to launch an objection.

A few weeks later, we were sitting in the kitchen where Nuh was preparing food for her one-year-old. The boy was sitting in his high chair, entertaining himself with plastic toys which he kept throwing against the refrigerator whilst we chatted. Nuh now went across to the little boy, collected his toys from the floor, and handed them back to him together with playfully fierce verbal encouragement, "Throw them, throw them at the Jews. Hit the Jews! [*Idrabal -Yahud!*]"<sup>26</sup> When she saw the vigour with which the boy obliged her she laughed.

"Eventhisoneherealreadythrowslittlestones!"shethenremarked,boastfullyalmost."Hedoes!"sheinsisted,whenshesawmyincredulouslook(theboycouldnotyetwalk)."Lastweekhethrewlittlepebblesatasoldier,fromhispushchair!Thesoldierscolded meforit,telling me tocontrolhim! Asifone could stopthem!'Insayingthisshehadjustissued denialofherown(oranythirdparty's)input;eventhoughIhadalreadybeenletinonwaysin whichshewasactivelynurturingamilitantdispositioninhersons.Butevenasshesaidthis, Nuhpickedupthethrown toysandhandedthembacktothelittleboy,continuingher instruction,"Yalla,takeanotherstoneandhit thatsoldier!"

ThewomaninmyEnglishclasshadomittedtosaythatshe,alongsideheroldersons andtheirpeers,hadtaughthertoddlertomaketheV-shape,torecitethesloganwhenhesaw Israelisoldiers,andultimatelytodistrustandfearthem. Itispossible,evenlikely,thatinthe companywehadbeeninthiswentwithoutsaying.Butwhatisonetomakeoftheexplicit (self-)denouncement?Itsuggeststhatmanyordinarywomenactedevenintheireveryday roundsonanunderstandingthatthere wasnorecognition,certainlynohonour,attachedto thisformoffemaleaccomplishmentintheinternationalarena).Insuggestingasenseofco-ownershipandprideIam *not* denyingthatwomen(liketheyouths)alsoharbouredfeelings ofapprehension,anxietyandfearfortheirchildren'sphysicalsafety(whichthey *also* expressed);or,thattheyexperiencedpainwhentheirsonsanddaughterswereinjuredor killed(whichwasthenverydramaticallyandpubliclydisplayed).They *cared*fortheir children;butencouragement--thenurtureofcourageinanother --wasoneformofcaringfor thatperson.

AsmallincidentwhichIobservedin1990inacraftco-operative shoprunbyoneof theprogressivewomen'scommitteeassociationshelpstoethnographicallyretrieveanexplicit expressionofthiscreativepride.Itisperhapsironicthatitwasagroupoffouryoung Europeanstudents --thesortofinterlocutorwhichusuallyelicitedthedenouncement --whoin thiscaseelicitedanexplicitassertionofitfromthe educatedattendantofthecraft shop.( *Ipsofacto*theepisodeshowsthatinternationalistfeministobservedrecoiled,eventhen,from formsof"women'sparticipation"whichimpliedtheirownconsignmentoftheir"life-giving"

skillstoasacrificialmartialeconomy.)Thegroupwaslookingaroundtheshopaspartof their"tourofPalestinianwomen'scommittees" 27whenatwelve -inchtallplasticstatue caughttheirattention.Itdepictedawombwhichhousedamaturefoetuswhich,itssex indeterminate,held aPalestinianflaginthelefthandandastoneclenchedtightlyinthefist ofitsrighthand.Inshort,itwasashockinglyliteralvisualrenditionofthe *batenaskeriy* or "militarywomb"motifwhichonecouldalsohearverballyexhortedbothinpolitic alrhetoric andamongwomenthemselvesinthemidstreamoftheirdailyinteractions.TheEuropean studentswerevisiblyrepulsedbytheobject,andcalledoverttheshop -assistanttoaskherwhy thewomeninvolvedintheco -operativeschememightbecraftin gsuchathing.Haditbeen theirownidea,orwasitcraftedaftersomeoneelse's?Whowouldbuyit?Theshop -assistant (wholatersaidshehadbeenaskedthisquestionbefore)explainedpolitelythat,yes,the womenhadthemselveshadtheideaforthisd esign,andthattheobjectshowedthat PalestinianwomenwereproudtobemothersofChildrenoftheIntifada,ChildrenofStones. Thevisitors exchangedmeaningfulglancesbutmadenofurthercommentsuntiltheywere outthedor,whenallusionsto"false consciousness"werefaintlyaudibleinside.Evenin thosetimes,itwasrareforPalestinianinterlocutorslikethisshop -assistant,whowas educatedandknowledgeableaboutinternationalsolidarityvisitors'sensitivities,torefuset "correct"ordisow nthecolloquialunderstandingaccordingly.Butletustakenoticeofthe Europeanobservers:inasenseitdidnotmatterthatthewomanhadconfirmedthatthe womencraftproducersweretheartisticcreatorsofthereliefandthecreativeauthorsofthe processdepictedbythispoliticalart -object.Evenifthemakersofthestatueshadbeenthere themselves,andhadtheytestifiedtotheirownauthorialauthority:theobserverswouldvery likelyhavepersistedintheirownunderstandingthatthesewomen werebeingmanipulated and"instrumentalised"inapoliticalschemeoflargelymaledesignandpatriarchalinterest. Suchistheglobalising,homogenisingeffectofanalyticformssuchas,forexample,"false consciousness."

**time:**earlymonthsoftheSeco ndIntifada; **typeofaction :**youngstersattheforefrontof militantstreetconfrontations; **narrativemodality:** denialofmilitants'own&parental

**agency(Palestinian"NGO" cum"civilsociety"leadersventriloquiseforPalestinian  
"grassroots")**

An article published by the *Media Monitor Network* <sup>28</sup> during the second half of the first year of the Second Intifada --just before the world saw an upsurge in suicide/martyrdom bombings-- suggests that the unreserved public admission by the mother of Izzadin Masri of her (self-understood) maternal encouragement, had caught a rare attitude on camera. In the opening section, sub-titled "The Loss of a Child," the report reads (all emphases are added):

Someone *draped a flag* around Mohammad Abu Rahman Mahfuz's mother as she *waited in silence* for the body of her 15-year-old son to be brought home for a final good-bye before proceeding to the gravesite.

*Deep in sorrow of mourning, she barely seemed to notice* [the honour]... Shot by Israeli soldiers during a rock-throwing demonstration in their refugee camp, her son would receive a martyr's funeral. *All she could feel, however,* was the eternal emptiness that losing a child brings. [I.e., not joy or pride, which the local and ideal view attributes to, and some analyses would say, demands from the mother of a martyr].

[...] *Families face the dual pressures of trying to keep their children safe while supporting the national struggle.* "The pressure is *greatest on women*," said Aitemad Muhanna of the Gaza Women's Empowerment Project. "Of course we all know that 'theoretically' we change our situation through 'national struggle,' *but in reality we are afraid for our children to participate in the clashes*..." [...]

*Israeli allegations that Palestinian parents push their children toward martyrdom by encouraging them to throw stones at the army particularly have angered Muhanna.* "There are many things pushing these children into martyrdom," she said, "but the idea that any mother would risk her child's life is absurd. I push my children to get an education, to raise their awareness of Palestinian history --this is our tool of struggle and the way to gain independence."

According to Muhanna, many of the young martyrs come from poorer families whose *circumstances make it difficult for parents to keep children safely at home.* She cited the example of a refugee family with 8 children, whose father works all day and whose *mother is too busy with the smallest child to keep a close eye on the older boys*, who go to throw stones after school. [... But ] Muhanna made it clear that the risk is cut

across socio-economic segments... A well-educated and relatively well-off friend [of others]... was *unable to prevent her son from taking part* in the clashes after a close friend of his was injured. [...] "I *would not tell my son to go, but she says she wants to do something*" [Muhanna says]... *"I cannot tell my children not to go throw stones, but the children will make their own decisions."*

Under the section -heading "Traumatized Children," the report continued,

... Rawia Hamam, a psychologist -social worker at the Gaza Community Mental Health Project, read from the essay of a 14-year-old boy: "In the first intifada I was five. I remember when the Israeli soldiers came into our house and lined up my father and brothers. They hit my father and I don't forget that. Now I want to revenge my father's dignity. *My father locked the door because he doesn't want me to throw stones, but I climb out the window.*" [Hamam says,] *"Some [boys] actually say they want to be martyrs... while others are afraid.* [...] One boy took his *religious brothers as role models... "I want to be a martyr like my brothers."* Another boy went to throw stones even though he was afraid. When Hamam [the social worker] asked him why he went, he explained that *he was picking olives with his family when the other boys asked him to come and throw stones. At first he told them no, but when they started calling him a coward he felt obliged to participate.*

The statement shows Palestinian professionals active in the transfer of responsibility for nurturing a militant disposition to the point of a readiness for martyrdom (it still meant only deaths resulting from involvement in street actions), away from the parents and from the injured or killed boys themselves and toward *the* *role* of direct and indirect *structural* "influences" which originate, in the final analysis, in the occupation and the occupiers' persistent and violent repression of Palestinian national aspirations.

Less than a year later, a concerned observer (Rev. Sandra Olewine, United Methodist Liaison, Jerusalem) still found it necessary to defend Palestinian mothers against the categorical attribution, in hostile counter-national narratives, of an excess of "agency" to them--now with respect to the phenomenon of suicide/martyr bombers: "One of the most painful expressions of...."inhumanity" has been the various ways in which Palestinian mothers have been portrayed as somehow less than other mothers around the world, as if

somedifferentbloodflowsthroughthe irveins."Rev.Olevinewasreferringtodamning  
commentsmadebyMrs.BarbaraBush. 29

***time:secondintifada; typeofaction: suicidebombings; narrativemodality :neo -liberal&  
right-wingventriloquismof"thelocal"***

ThereasonIcitedtheanalysisby a politically"progressive"Palestinianprofessionaland  
CivilSocietyactivistatsuchlengthisthatitdocumentstheU -turninthepoliticaland  
analyticalreceptionof"martyrdom"justbeforeitspracticalmeaningshiftedfromPalestinian  
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"empathetic."Thepromulgationofamechanicalmodelofaction -precipitationisan  
unexpectedcommonalitybetweenthem(also sharedbyarecentlymooted"third"position). 32  
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Nonehastheanalyticalinterestviz.couragetoacknowledgeactors'courageasan  
ethnographicallyandanalyticallyrelevantfact.

ThereasonIamcallingtheoppositeofthe"empathetic"explanation *cynical*isthatthis  
modalityischaracteristically dismissiveoftheidea,which to the stress is a signature of the  
"empathetic"arguments,thattheuniquehistor icalandpoliticalcircumstances --theprotracted  
andapparentlyunshakeablemilitaryoccupationbyIsrael --havebeenasignificantinfluence  
inthe"production"ofsuicide/martyrbombers.Instead,theseanalyses holdmanipulative

political leadership accountable. One might say, they favour a *managerial* and *Machiavellian* approach (cf. Law 1999) wherein "actors" are reduced to more or less ingeniously brainwashed (materially bribed as well as ideologically -spiritually manipulated, as we will see) robotic "subjects" who follow the implicit suggestions if not explicit directives from irresponsible or "insane" political and/or religious leaders. A well-known statement by current US president George Bush is a poignant example of this brand of politically instrumental and mechanical form of analytical reasoning. In what seemed an historic speech heralding the hyper-power's intervention in the region's conflict with a demand for restraint from *both* sides, also Israel, he *ordered* the Palestinian Authority and its chairman, Mr. Arafat (italic emphases added): 33

*Stop inciting violence* by glorifying terrorism in state-owned media, or *telling suicide bombers* they are martyrs. They're not martyrs. They're murderers.

Similarly, this U.S. "expert on terrorism" applied a managerial model when he declared: 34

Once upon a time, in the first years immediately following [the] first bombing in 1993, it was a challenge [for *field leaders for Hamas*] to recruit suicide bombers [...*They*] had to *cajole*--some might say *brainwash*--young men into believing that the rewards of *paradise outweighed the prospect of life on earth*. But with the breakdown of the peace process in mid-2000 and the start of the latest intifada that September, the martyr wannabes started coming to Hamas --and *they did n't require persuading*.

Based on this excerpt alone, one might think the expert recognised the mobilising force of historical processes --the breakdown of peace in 2000. But when he said the "martyr wannabes" no longer required persuasion from Hamas leaders, he meant because "the TV [started to do] that work for them;" and not because Palestinian TV stations were showing Israel forces inflicting violence on the Palestinian population, which a neo-liberal analysis might stress; because of incitement to violence by PA leadership which TV programmes (just as the PA was said to incite school children via its standard text-books).

According to reified understandings in social analysis about which analytical concepts lend themselves to political misuse (and which not), it is surprising that the stress on *culture* is actually weak in the politically hostile modality. There are reactive rebuttals by "empathetic" counter-analyses often falsely attribute a "culturalist" emphasis, or falsely attribute an "old" understanding of culture to what in vocations of culture do appear (as an essential "given"). May be this is because it is the only critique of "culture," or the only political critique, we have at our disposal? Certain is that anthropologists have grown accustomed to reciting it mechanically, and are at a loss when it does not apply. <sup>35</sup> Consider the following exchange between a proponent of the hostile and one of the "empathic" analytical modality, following the "Passover massacre" in a Natanya hotel (Ajami 2002). Under the sub-heading *Culture of Incitement*, the former wrote (the added emphasis is mine):

The man of Tulkarm [the bomber] did not descend from the sky: He walked straight out of the culture of incitement let loose on the land, a menace hovering over Israel, a great Palestinian and Arab refusal to let that country be, to cede it a place among the nations. He partook of the culture all around him -- the glee that greets those brutal deeds of terror, the cult that rises around the martyrs and their families.

Umm-al-shahid (the mother of the martyr), his mother will henceforth be known. A ual-shahid shall be the appellation of his father. Honest men and women will proclaim him and take him as their own, more sly types will equivocate but then say that the good boy had been led there, all the way to Natanya, by the Israeli occupation...

*The leaders of the Palestinian Authority, most notably Yasser Arafat, the figure at the centre of this cruel whirlwind, would issue tepid condemnation and then let the world know that "armed struggle" and the shahids, the martyrs, are writing glorious chapters in the annuals of the history of that national movement....*

[...] *By omission and commission, Mr Arafat feeds this cult of terror, this affliction ...*

There is a rebuttal by a professional "anthropologist living in Beirut" (Scheidt-Idriss 2002) read:

[The author's] willfulness [sic.] to ascribe all political action to culture is irresponsible. In waving the language of cultural description, you blatantly ignore two concepts all contemporary anthropology

necessarily includes: history and transnational interaction. <sup>36</sup>We are long past the days of analyzing "culture gardens." You cannot speak of "a culture of incitement" without discussing the neighbouring cultures of incitement, such as the ultra-fascist, Jewish -exclusivist sections of the Israeli populace. Nor can you present currently extant "ideologies" common to a group of people without looking at the events that cultivated these ideologies.... If it is shameful [for the author] to use [his] academic position to further what amounts to propagandistic writings

Surely, it is a Managerial -Machiavellian approach which we see the proponent of the hostile position wave, or at least that is the meta -framework, with various other, not necessarily compatible social science models being thrown in for good measure to account for "subsidiary" connections which the meta -frame does not account for. Thus, the seductive power of political leadership and its rhetoric, viz. the susceptibility of the "masses" to political manipulation, is explained by appeal to a combination of tangible material, socio - economic incentives and ideologically manufactured expectations of (intangible) spiritual rewards in the next world and life . For example, most analyses mention "financial bonus incentives," by which they mean the system of *dawa* (a network of mosques, schools, orphanages, clinics, youth clubs, athletic teams and libraries) which the religious movement Hamasha has funded, and the "hardship support services" of which have come to include in recent years payment of lifetime pensions (\$300 - \$600 U.S. a month) to the families of its suicide-bombers and of the health care and education costs of a bomber's children (if there are any). <sup>37</sup>As one journalist noted, cynically enough (and demonstrating the use of a confusing blend of analytical metaphors):

The job of bomber comes with established cash bonuses and health benefits for the surviving family. How else could the Palestinian boy or girl next door hope to be pictured on keychains and T -shirts?<sup>38</sup>

A Hamas activist in the West Bank added fuel (or ice) to this cold pragmatic view when he concurred with the American journalist, "These guys [not only] kill Israelis [effectively], but they also secure their families from poverty." (*Ibid.*)

The "rational choice" model of explaining the political behaviour of "leaders" and "followers" which was influential during the 1960s and 1970s, which resonates at the subsidiary level of this type of explanation, was later criticised for its obliviousness to structural constraints and power differences which are inherent in state power and/or in the class structure (see Asad 1972). This is only half true in this case, however; after all, there is considerable stress on the "force" of Palestinian leaders. It is just that some, namely, the historical forces which pre-date and surround the PA (which presumably adds significantly to the "rhetorical force" of the *dawah* system or of Chairman Arafat's oration), are left out of the equation. (The PNA is inappropriately treated as a closed and self-organising system). Historical forces such as the systematic development of the Palestinian sector under Israeli occupation (1967 - 1996), the Palestinian economy's "hostage-to-Israeli-whims" predicament still subsequently, and the massive economic destitution and general infrastructural devastation wreaked by Israeli retaliatory campaigns recently. The opposite, "empathetic" calculations of "motivation" give extensive and indeed exclusive emphasis to these conditions. (In this approach the *dawah* is not a cold-calculated system of manipulation but an commendable or at least necessary alternative network of community care and public service provision which catches the fallout from political violence, rather than precipitating it.)<sup>39</sup> The one thing the two opposed "traditions" have in common, however, is that neither leaves enough room for subjective (and cross-subjective) calculations of "agency."

Almost as a last consideration, and without belief in the analytical relevance of this level of information, hostile or "empathetic" analyses might rehearse the "potent" eschatological rewards which "are said" (by influential religious and political figures) or "believed" (by the masses), based on "Islamic" calculations, to accrue to martyrs and their families. Among them that the sins of the martyr will be forgiven instantaneously, on shedding the first drop of blood; that the martyr is assured a privileged place in paradise, at the right-hand side of God; or that seventy relatives of the martyr gain admission to Paradise with him/her.<sup>40</sup> In as far as such calculations are not taken seriously analytically, none of the modalities can be accused of using an over-determining, mechanical or essentialist view of

the influence of "Islam" or, more specifically, of Islamic scriptures, on social and cultural practice. Meaning, note even the cynical explanation is a naive freeze of old Orientalist knowledge practices; on the contrary, it finds the post-Orientalist understanding helpful in making its case. Briefly, post-Orientalist knowledge practice is a regionally-focused iteration of critical and post-structuralist theoretical activity. Its major contribution has been to refute earlier assumptions that sacred texts in and of themselves are the "cause" (and explanation) of all observable practice among people who declare themselves "Muslims," practitioners of Islam. Instead, the stress is placed on the mediatory influence of historically-specific social and indeed *political* processes, notably *interpretation* and the dissemination and authorisation of diverse interpretations. Especially in efforts to explain oppressive or violent political practices, the dominant trend in critical, including Post-Orientalist analyses has been to cast lay subjects or grassroots mechanically as unequal "partners" in textual interpretation, under the influence of manipulative, if not coercive, authoritarian political and/or religious regimes or figures. In this case, the PNA and/or (where "empathetic" explanations are concerned, it is *or*)<sup>41</sup> the leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad; but as well including, where the hostile view is concerned, parents in the category of "pedagogic leaders" (rather than as part of the manipulated masses). Without using the words, the hostile analyses attribute to the masses (the practitioners and supporters of suicide-martyrdom bombings) a "false consciousness" which combines irrational belief (in irresponsibly manipulated doctrine) with excessive economic rationality. My point is, theoretical positions or analytical concepts are not in and of themselves "hostile," "cynical," "empathetic," or "politically correct" (just as instruments can be used to play a wider range of musical styles.) Their specific political charge arises from the purpose or instrumentality for which they are manipulated, as well as from the care with which they are handled. (Might the same be said for the knowledge resources which cultural actors manipulate?)

Unusually, the providers of the politically empathetic explanation have held in check the impulse which is normally associated with formerly "left" and latterly neo-liberal and humanitarian political and social science analyses in dealing with situations where grassroots

actors exercise political violence. They have refrained from invoking their own, Foucauldian - inspired version of a managerial model that holds mostly leaders to account. <sup>42</sup> As I said, they have concentrated instead in the formative influence of the circumstance of the occupation. Even commentators who do not spare the leadership of the religious movements remain adamant that

[Primarily] *the dangerous status quo of despair* that exists in Palestinian society today -- so deep and dark that it has spawned the monstrous phenomenon of these secular suicide bombers -- is *primarily the responsibility of Israel* .. (Parry 2002, emphasis added). <sup>43</sup>

Notice that I also highlighted a reference to "despair" in this excerpt from an "empathetic" explanation. I intend to draw attention to these secondary or subsidiary tendency in this modality to *psychologise* the process of "local" and subjective mediation of structural and political factors, in an effort to render it universally rational and human(e)ly understandable. This tendency manifests itself in the formulaic invocation of a range of emotive psychological concepts such as *desperation, despair, hopelessness, frustration, understandability, or desire for revenge*. In this respect, too (as in its restrained application of the Machiavellian approach), the analytical activity surrounding the Palestinian suicide-martyrdom mission is out of character with the usual neo-liberal disposition. The following excerpt gives some examples of these terms in use:

Palestinians exist in an environment so dire that the prospects of death overshadow their prospects for life. Suicide bombings are acts of desperation and mean that people have been pushed to the brink. <sup>44</sup>

The phenomenon of suicide bombers against civilians is [undoubtedly] tragic, immoral, and insupportable. [But] a Palestinian child who watched the dreadful scenes in the camp of Jenin will probably not think much before becoming the suicide bomber of tomorrow. The state of fierce despair and the feeling that this young generation has nothing to lose anymore should immediately come to an end. <sup>45</sup>

Such claims [that Palestinians school textbooks fan the flames of hatred and violent revenge to destroy Israel] are simply an attempt by Israel to find some alternative explanation to [sic.] the *understandability*

felt by Palestinians who suffered through decades of continuing dispossession, occupation, disenfranchisement, violence, torture and humiliation at the hands of Israel. 46

Even the faint concessions in this approach to strategic pragmatism 47 are couched in these terms. Thus, John Pilger describes suicide -martyrdom as a "desperate attempt" to make up "with what means one has at one's disposal" for the vast technological superiority of the opponent. 48 The most common form of empirical evidence used to measure the influence of "rage" (leading to "understandable desire for revenge") is the frequency with which traumatic events linked to the Israeli occupation crop up in the biographies of suicide martyrs or martyr "wannabees," which are routinely searched for experiences such as the death or injury or imprisonment and torture of a close family member or of a friend in either the First or the Second Intifada; own experience(s) of humiliation and/or torture; or having generally witnessed the violence of Israeli occupation, over a long period and/or extreme cases of it (during recent campaigns such as that on Jenin). 49

Let us recall that the appeal to "revenge" as an explanation of social and political action would normally (under any other circumstances, anywhere else in the Arab World, or related to any other phenomenon in the current setting) be interpreted as either a failure to distinguish local/colloquial and academic "theories of action"; or as the insinuation of a "tribalist" or a statist style of local/national politics, laying the blame on charges of working in the Orientalist tradition. (Or both.) Curiously, this is not the case here. One might say that just as the post -Orientalist wariness of "culture" does not impede and is even helpful to the cynical analysis, what might otherwise count as a hard-core Orientalist or of local knowledge practice (the problem is, the concept is not much explained or theorised) has slipped into the bag of resources with which "empathetic" commentaries attempt to absolve the "actors" from responsibility and to redeem their moral subjectivity. (How they themselves establish their own agency and morality in relation to these and other actions remains, in the meantime, anyone's guess.)

The families of martyrs, are absolved by determined efforts to put on the record their lack of prior knowledge of a son's, daughter's, brother's or sister's suicide/martyrdom mission, whereby the lack of knowledge serves as evidence of a lack of encouragement and support from close ones. Thus, British news reports (both televised and printed versions) of the suicide/martyrdom bombing in December 2001 by Maher Habashi, a 21-year-old plumber from Nablus, made it a point to stress that the bomber's parents had said they had been unaware of their son's intentions. The father had only learnt of his son's fate, it was elaborated, when Hamass supporters came to the house to congratulate him.<sup>50</sup> However, while the father allowed himself briefly to be shown on camera (and to be "voiced over"), he did not speak to or for the camera. Generally, attempts to document parental sentiments and attitudes rarely succeeded in capturing the parents' direct speech, and relied largely on reported speech. The following report of the suicide/martyrdom bombing of a Jerusalem commuter bus on 20.6.2002, attributed to Mohammed al-Ghoul, illustrates an exceptionally forthcoming family. Note, however, that the mother and the sister, who feature centrally in the photograph (holding up a large portrait and the degree certificate of the bomber), do not speak.<sup>51</sup> The report read:

His friends and family say in the days before his attack... he showed no sign of what he planned to do. He watched the World Cup on television with his friends and his brother... Two weeks earlier he had attended the wedding of his older brother... He seemed happy at the wedding, pestering his father about when he would find a bride for him so he could marry, build his own house and start a family. Two days before he died, he returned to the subject of his plans for his own household. *That is why his family is so baffled by his decision... his father and brothers said they could not believe that he had killed himself... "If he had asked me for my advice I would have told him not to do it" [he father said]. His brother... agreed [unclear]: "I would have tried to stop him if I knew."* The story that they tell is of a studious man hoping to earn a master's degree in Islamic studies [...]" He said he did not like the idea of civilians being killed. But no one forced him to this. He chose this route. He had a good life -- a good upbringing" [said one of the brothers again.]

Both modalities, I wanted to show, are in their own theoretical fashion, and for different political reasons, perpetuating a *mechanical* explanation. Both deny agency to

"martyrs." The systematic obviating of the possibility that personal (and relational) effort, and courage, might be required to elicit what is by all accounts an "extreme action" could not be stated more explicitly than in the analytical assessment by a Gazan psychiatrist when he said, "The difficult thing is not to become a martyr; it is how *not* to become a martyr." 52

Meanwhile, however, there is considerable evidence, some of which I now want to bring into the foreground, which indicates that the martyrs themselves and a considerable segment of the Palestinian community make it a point to put the martyrs' own and specifically related subjects' agency on record.

***e. time: second intifada; type of action: suicide -martyrdom bombings; narrative modality: proclamation of agency***

Inadvertently, commentaries in both political and analytical modalities have supplied the outside with data which the accompanying analyses do not explain (or not *seriously*). Glimpses of moments when local actors assume and even proclaim agency, and claim it as a personal *asset* of sorts, transpire more often in image than in words. Moreover, they have been allowed to transpire mostly through the cynical analytic, which makes it that much more difficult to engage seriously with them if one is not intent on political deconstruction (or reconstruction for that matter).

In the background of politically empathetic reportage even, one sees that every martyr's death invited a social gathering at the martyr's family home or, when the family home had been destroyed as part of the Israeli campaign of "connective punishment," in a special funerary tent (which to erect or attend was eventually also made illegal). There the family would receive the condolences and congratulations from members of the community and from party delegates. The families' own repeated viewing and showing of the video-recorded statement of intent by their martyr with visitors are, or ought to be, a well-known ethnographic fact because they frequently formed the backdrop against which journalists were trying to interview the parents. It might stand as a fact, but what these processes stand for (or "achieve") has yet to be seriously explained. As an anthropologist, I see a parallel

between the social preoccupation with video recording evident there and that which I (and others) have noted with respect to *weddings*. Wedding videos, too, are viewed again and again by the bride's and groom's families with the very new visitor who comes to convey congratulations. Indeed, there are a series of parallels between martyr deaths and weddings (which also have in common that each renders an event or an act which is normally considered polluting -- death in one case, sexual intercourse in the other -- productive and purifying). What is more, the connection was made explicitly in local colloquial discourses (in everyday talk, political rhetoric, and in various artistic forms) during the First Intifada, as martyrs' funerals were referred to as "nationalist weddings" and (male) martyrs as "brides" in relation to the homeland or to "the cause," its liberation (see Jean Klein 1997, 2001). Other parallels that have appeared are the formal and public reception of congratulations (which in ordinary or mundane weddings may precede the marriage consummation); or the distribution of sweets and firing of guns in communal displays of celebratory spirit after the suicide martyrdom bombings,<sup>53</sup> which gestures mark the street celebrations of quotidian weddings (and which had been with political deliberations suspended during the First Intifada); or the formal (and proud?) public announcement of the person's (an family's) status change, as recorded in this cynical news report (emphases in italics added):<sup>54</sup>

These days Palestinians *celebrate* the suicides in newspaper announcements that read, *perversely*, like wedding invitations. "The Abdel Jawad and Assad families and their relatives inside the West Bank and in the Diaspora declare the martyrdom of their son, the martyr Ahmed Hafez Sa'adat," reads a March 30 notice for the 22-year-old killer of four Israelis in a shooting attack.

The analytically unaccounted-for and difficult to recount form of calculating losses and gains sometimes turns up in the most unexpected information contexts. For example, in the following assessment of women's participation in suicide bombings<sup>55</sup> as a step towards women's greater social equality as part of a special report published in a Palestinian paper on International Women's Day, authored by a progressive and feminist Palestinian professional.<sup>56</sup> The report intended to register the violence which Palestinian women were suffering from Israeli occupation and siege (the early loss of a husband or father,<sup>57</sup> or the

abysmaleconomiccircumstances)andfrom"disturbingcomponentsofPalestiniansociety"  
(pressureongirlsfromtheirfamieliestomarryyoung,theconcomitantforceddiscontinuation  
oftheirformaleducation,andtheexpectedpracticeof"marriageamongrelatives" --parallel  
cross-cousinmarriage --whichtheauthorsays"standsinthewayofawoman'sfreedomto  
chooseherlifepartner").Then,takingstockofrecent"changes,"theauthornoted:

Althoughallthesewomen[theinterviewees]agreedthattheyhaveexperiencedtremendousproblems  
andviolence,theyalsosaythatthePalestinianwomanhas provenherabilitytobearresponsibility.  
This,theyaver,isclearfromherroleinthestruggleandinsuicideoperationsagainstIsraelis.

### **Afterthoughts**

It has been said of anthropological work relating to the Arab World (see Abu-Lughod  
1989) that it was for a long time stagnant analytically because it was ensconced in the task of  
debunking the inadequate terms of knowledge production associated with an older and  
politically compromised line of scholarship known as Orientalism. Ten years on, it  
appears the debunking is never finished; "the world" keeps recharging and inventing new  
Orientalist imaginaries, and the perpetually defensive analytical posture is also a restatement.  
The ethnographic materials I have presented might suggest that a similar "inertia" <sup>58</sup> might  
have taken hold in local (self-) knowledge practice. Or perhaps the "stereopractice" -- where by  
people act "locally" but *intermittently* frame local/own action in foreign terms -- should be  
recognised as a creative movement in its own right. The fact is that while we do know that  
"agency" is in this case a negative asset and a huge liability and that this must problematise  
the social transaction of "agency" (to that extent cultural practice and cultural analysis share a  
similar problem), we know very little about how cultural practitioners attempt to resolve this  
problem. I have tried to draw attention to the way cultural analysis has handled the problem.  
My hope is that the present exercise will stimulate further reflection on everyday, activist,  
and analytical knowledge practices and their intersections in politically charged settings.

