

Banat, Bassam Yousef Ibrahim* Palestinian Suicide Martyrs (Istishhadiyin): Facts and Figures. Department of Sociology, Faculty of Political Sciences & Sociology, Granada University, Granada, Spain. (PhD. Dissertation - March, 16th, 2010).

Abstract

The current thesis explores the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) and the martyrdom operations from the point of view of their families and relatives. The study has tackled the issue of martyrdom operations as a multi dimensional phenomenon addressed by both theoretical and applied researches. The thesis addressed a new social phenomenon which spread in the Palestinian society in all its groups, youth and social classes. The Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) were able to implement two hundred qualitative martyrdom operations that rocked Israel and raised a large scale wave of reactions locally and internationally; they constituted a turning point in the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; it is rare to find a similar phenomenon to this one with this huge number of Palestinian suicide martyrs in any other place in the world. They have their own psychological, social, religious and national features which qualified them to do this strategic action. Besides, the thesis focuses on identifying the main motives which drove the Palestinian youth to carry out such operations and the relationship between the emergence of these operations and Israeli crimes committed against the rights of the unarmed Palestinian people.

Words written in blood and light by the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) in their wills:

“How beautiful for the splinters of my bones to be the response that blows the enemy up, not for the love of killing, but so we can live as other. We do not sing the songs of death, but recite the hymns of life. We die so that future generations may live”. The suicide martyr (Istishhady) Mohammed Al-Ghoul, Jerusalem operation, 18 June 2002.

“I wish I had so many lives to avenge time and time again and respond to the many massacres and many insults perpetrated against the Palestinian people”. The suicide martyr (Istishhady) Maher Habisheh, Haifa operation, 2 December 2001.

“The nation that masters the death industry is unbeatable”. The suicide martyr (Istishhady) Fouad Al-Hourani, Jerusalem operation, 9 March 2002.

“We, the martyrs, may talk less, since we have realized that blood talks louder”. The suicide martyr (Istishhady) Samer Shawahna, Hadera operation, 29 November 2001.

“What is the use of life if death chases us from all directions? We will go to it before it comes to us and revenge for our selves before we die”. The female suicide martyr (Istishhadiya) Ayat Al-Akhras, Jerusalem operation, 29 March 2002.

The current thesis is considered the first survey study of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin). It is expected that its results would add new scientific knowledge to its field in particular since it discusses a new and important topic in the history of Palestinian struggle. The thesis will be an important source of reference to those concerned in the area of martyrdom operations especially in the information it will reveal on the phenomenon, which crossed beyond the borders of Palestine to become a world phenomenon. The researcher is honored by this national duty to be the first performer of this duty within his own potentials as being one of the researchers of the topic of Palestinian suicide martyrs in a scientific survey.

The suicide martyr (*Istishhady*) which crystallized in the field of the Palestinian struggle defined in the thesis as a Palestinian term with religious and popular significances given to the person who is with premeditation and full conscious fitted an explosive belt on his body, carried an explosive satchel bag or drove a suicide car bomb in order to cause a blast and harm among the enemy and did not have any chance of going out of it alive. It is important to separate the western concept of suicide from the Islamic concept martyrdom. The focus here is on martyrdom, the involves using one’s death in a defense of one’s holies, homeland, money and children by inflicting losses on an enemy, not on suicide which is the self-inflicted intentional act designed to end one’s own life. This kind of Martyrdom is called for by the collective Palestinian mentality, and it is reinforced by the Palestinian societal culture; this is a social, respected and acceptable behaviour since it is the title of sacrifice for the sake of others, lifting of injustice and regaining of Palestinian lands and rights.

The present thesis used the descriptive quantitative and qualitative approaches since both of them are considered to be the most suitable research approaches to study the characteristics of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) from the perspective of their families and relatives. The study population consists of all the families of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for the martyrdom operations in the years 1993 till the end of 2008, which includes two hundred martyrdom operations: 151 in the West Bank and 49 in Gaza Strip.

The thesis used the approach of comprehensive survey, questionnaire and interview as tools for data collection. The content analysis method for the wills of the Palestinian suicide martyrs was also used. The questionnaire was validated by being reviewed by a group of referees and expert arbitrators, and statistically by both factorial analysis and Pearson correlation, findings indicate that they all combined measured the characteristics, motives and behavioral changes of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) in light of the theoretical framework which the tool of study is based upon. Besides, the questionnaire was pre-tested on fifteen Palestinian suicide martyrs families and five relatives of the suicide martyrs. In regards to the questionnaire reliability, it was tested by calculating the internal consistency of the questionnaire sub-scales using the Cronbach Alpha Formula; findings indicate that the questionnaire with its different dimensions is highly reliable. Following the data collection, it was reviewed in preparation for the statistical procedures which took place through obtaining numbers, percentages, means, standard deviations and graphics. In addition, the following statistical tests were used: Pearson Correlation, Cronbach Alpha, and Factor Analysis, using SPSS. The thesis main findings are as follows:

- The majority of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) were males while only few were females.
- The majority of them were single and young (less than 25 years old), well educated and deeply religious.
- The majority of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) came from middle birth rank, middle households and nuclear families.

- The Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) had a good physical structure in terms of weight, height, skin color and external appearance in which the majority of them did not look like Israelis.
- The Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) enjoyed life. This was reflected through the big number of friends; the preference of different colors, and the preference for Friday Muslim holiday.
- The majority of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) came from the West Bank, then Gaza Strip. They came from all regions: cities, villages and camps. Nablus is the city of suicide martyrs.
- The majority of them were refugees from what is now called Israel.
- Regarding the economic situation of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin), findings showed that mostly they are from middle-class. They were working as employees in different professions, with a moderate average monthly income, and the majority were not the family bread winners.
- The majority of the families of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) were exposed to various forms of Israeli violence, mostly, land confiscation, uprooting of trees, land bulldozing, insults and swearing, detention, home raids, and not obtaining a work permit. The same also was for nearly half of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) themselves mostly, insults and swearing, bad treatment at checkpoints and surrounding environment, beating, the martyrdom of a dear person, and detention.
- The majority of the Palestinian suicide martyrs belonged to Hamas Movement with its military wing Ezzedeen Al-Qassam Brigades and to the Islamic Jihad Movement with its military wing Saraya Al-Quds. Hamas is the spiritual father of the Palestinian martyrdom operations.
- The way of martyrdom for the majority of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) was explosive belt.
- The majority of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) had carried out their martyrdom operations in all Israeli cities and regions, especially, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and in other Israeli targets in the West Bank and Gaza Strip settlements.
- The majority of them had carried out their martyrdom operations during the daylight hours particularly in the morning especially in Sundays.

- The Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) had carried out their martyrdom operations over the entire months of the year. There is no single month in which no suicide martyr attacks have occurred.
- The Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) had carried out their martyrdom operations in the years before and after the signing of Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority (September 13, 1993), while the majority was during the Al-Aqsa Uprising, especially in the year 2002.
- The majority of them had left a will which varied between written and visual. The wills had been directed mostly to their families, Palestinians and Israeli leadership. The majority of the suicide martyrs were dressed in a military uniform during the reading of the wills.
- The vast majority of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) didn't leave any signals prior to the operations indicating their intention to carry out the martyrdom operation, and they didn't disappear from their homes, so their families didn't have any prior knowledge of their intention to implement the martyrdom operation. The mass media was their main resource to know about the implementation of the operation.
- Israelis had taken different measures against the martyr's family following the implementation of the martyrdom operation, mostly, not getting a work permit, home raids, job loss, ban from traveling, house demolition, abuse and insults and detentions. Besides, the majority of the Palestinian suicide martyrs bodies have not yet been delivered, and they are still in the hands of Israelis.
- The Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) were ordinary people who enjoyed life. They were sociable, religious, national and had a high degree of psychological stability.
- The Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) had the following motivations behind the carrying out of their martyrdom operations: for the sake of one's country, follow suit of martyrs, in retaliation for the daily Israeli massacres against Palestinians, sacrifice with one's life for the sake of a decent life to Palestinians, destruction of the Israeli Security Theory, feeling of insecurity, feeling of loss of dignity, for the sake of God, the spread of martyrdom culture among Palestinians, feeling of injustice in life, sending out a message to the Israelis, loss of hope in having a peaceful solution for the Palestinian question, winning the other life, follow suit of friends, to revenge for the martyrdom of a dear

person, in response to closure on Palestinians, sending out a message to Arab and Muslim nations, indignation at the lived reality and honoring ones family. On the other hand, the motivations for the fulfillment of the call of the political party and in response to the Separation Wall had little impact on the implementation of martyrdom operations.

- The Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) had some behavioral changes that had taken place on the martyr two weeks before the execution of their martyrdom operation as follows: listened to patriotic songs, looked happy, talked about martyrdom, pretended that they do not intend to be a martyr, had more visits to family and friends, had more intimacy towards the family, sought forgiveness of others for any wrong done to them, had frequent visits to mosques and tended to remain silent.
- The majority of the families of Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) support martyrdom operations against the Israeli occupation. In spite of this, the majority say that they would have stopped them if they previously knew of his/her intention to implement a martyrdom operation, some say that they would have encouraged them for such action, while others say that they would have gone with them or even instead of them.
- Besides, the thesis has a lot of wills and stories of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin). In addition to, their Personality Profile in a color poster of 100*70cm.

To sum up, if we wish to examine the real lives of those Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin), we would find that they had lived a normal life in the midst of their social medium, family and society members. They were producers and contributors like others towards the building and development of the Palestinian society and defending it. They studied at its schools and universities, went to mosques and lived its cause. They considered that God and homeland deserve this martyrdom act. The Palestinian suicide martyr (Istishhady) Suliman Tahayna executor of Jerusalem operation on 5 November 1998 expressed himself as he was telling his wife one day prior to his martyrdom, “My children are not dearer to me than God and homeland”.

Martyrdom operations have been developed within the framework of the Palestinian resistance to defeat occupation. This resulted in the huge number of Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) from all Palestinian territories who decided with determination and strong will to sacrifice their

lives for the common good which the liberation of Palestine. Thus, martyrdom has become a social public phenomenon exceeding the limits of individual work in order to melt into the entire society after the Palestinian suicide martyr (Istishhady) offers his soul and body for the sake of God, homeland and people. The strangling Israeli siege, starvation policy, assassinations and military assassination and inhuman scenes which Palestinians are subjected to at the checkpoints and others are all reasons that had neutralized life and death and transformed all Palestinians into a martyr producing cell which was no longer confined to one faction, trend, gender, population cluster or other, but they belong to the entire Palestinian people. All segments of the Palestinian people, Islamic, national, left-wings, men, women, youth and old people have practiced this form of resistance. It is an expression of a Palestinian popular awareness of the depth and nature of the conflict with the Jewish existence in Palestine. It is also a logical extension of the Palestinian struggle which has been ongoing for more than a hundred years.

The Palestinian people who were exposed since 1948 and are still being exposed to all sorts of elimination, persecution and occupation have resorted to resistance and martyrdom operations for the liberation of their country from occupation and to defend itself, and its human rights and dignity; it chose the approach of resistance to practice its right to return, self determination, sovereignty, and independence based on the UN charter and the rest of international charters and conventions, principles of international law and international legitimacy decisions. Accordingly, the resistance strategy holds fast to a fixed title which indicates that as long as there is occupation there is resistance. This simply means its continuation on the long run besides other forms of resistance until the expulsion of occupation. To sum up, the Israeli aggressions on the Palestinian people like continued assassinations, closure and siege have led the Palestinian sectors and forces in the society to carry out martyrdom operations.

The Palestinian people were forced to adopt martyrdom operations in order to create deterrence equivalence. The battle in facing the Israeli aggression which depends on the supremacy in military equipment and gear is uneven. If the Palestinian people had a counter weapon to that of the Israeli or close to it, they would fight with it the traditional conventional way. However, they are defending themselves with the available means; I do believe that if the world community was fair with the Palestinians and stopped the occupation, we would not be in need for martyrdom

operations. It is irrational to ask the Palestinian people to stop resistance and martyrdom operations while it is still under the yoke of the Israeli occupation. Within this context, the Palestinian suicide martyr (Istishhady) Hisham Hamad executor of Netzarim settlement in Gaza Strip on 11 November 1994 wrote in his will, “The battle is imposed on everybody, do not wait at the doors of tomorrow which you do not have of it anything but humiliation”. In the same context, the suicide martyr (Istishhady) Mahmoud Marmash, Netanya operation on 18 May 2001 wrote in his will, “The Palestinian people are passing through the most difficult days; they are constantly suffering from killing, bombardment, immigration and the harshest kinds of violence. Everyday the suffering of the people increases; then there should be a group who is willing to sacrifice themselves and fight for the sake of God and for the sake of defence of this peoples’ dignity and honor to raise its banner high; the only solution to this vicious campaign is Jihad and Istishhad which are (*Fardh ‘ayn* – an individual obligation) on every Muslim”.

Key words: Martyr, Martyrdom, Palestine, Conflict, Motivations, Suicide, Istishhadiyin.

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