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Communicating Desperation: Palestinians' Suicide Bombing in Hallaj's Novel *Refugee without Refuge*

Ebrahim Mohammed Al-Wuraafi¹

Abstract

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the thorniest conflicts in the world. The life of the Palestinians in refugee camps under occupation is very difficult. Curfews, checkpoints, detention, and violence permeate all aspects of their daily life. Striving against poverty, their vicious enemy, and the constant struggle to survive are daily nightmares. However, they are often perceived as terrorists and war criminals. Dixiane Hallaj's *Refugee without Refuge: A Novel of One Palestinian Family* is an attempt to highlight the problems Palestinians face in the refugee camps in occupied Palestine. The novel engages in establishing the relationship between the horrendous living conditions of the Palestinians and the aggression of the Israeli occupation forces on one hand and the violent reaction of the Palestinians on the other. It demonstrates that suicide bombing committed by the Palestinians is a rebounding of the Israeli violence and atrocities exercised against the Palestinians and that such lethal acts have no relation to religion or politics. They are personal decisions and acts taken after a long tragic suffering under the yoke of occupation. This article argues that Hallaj's novel challenges the familiar notions and preconceptions of Palestinians as violence agitators, suicide bombers, and terrorists, which are propagated by western media and literature. The article focuses on Hallaj's depiction of the Palestinian suffering and their final determination to get rid of their persecutors using violence after all nonviolent means become impossible. Psychoanalysis theory is applied to the novel to criticize the protagonist's motives to attempt suicide bombing.

Keywords: Suicide bombing, Israel, Palestine, Desperation, Refugee camps.

¹ Dr., Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Science and Art, Al-Baha University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5537-7548> E-mail: ebrahimwarafi@gmail.com

Introduction

The present article explores Dixiane Hallaj's novel *Refugee without Refuge: A Novel of One Palestinian Family* and attempts to highlight the problems Palestinians face in Palestinian refugee camps as depicted in the novel. It argues that Hallaj's novel challenges the familiar notions and preconceptions of Palestinians as violence agitators, suicide bombers, and terrorists, which are propagated by western media and literature. The article focuses on Hallaj's depiction of the Palestinian suffering and their final determination to get rid of their persecutors using violence after all nonviolent means become impossible. The paper also argues that identifying the forces that compel the Palestinians to commit suicide is necessary to understand the nature and magnitude of such acts. The paper neither vindicates nor propagates suicide bombing; it just explains the motives that drove the main character to commit such an act.

Suicide Bombing: Beginnings and Causes

Actually, suicide bombing is a recent phenomenon in Palestine. The first suicide attack occurred on 6 July, 1989. Since then, it has become a crucial issue to many writers and researchers throughout the world. It has been condemned as a barbaric act of terrorism and glorified as a new form of jihad and condoned as a legitimate method of resistance. The question that arises when dealing with suicide bombing is: Why does one become a suicide bomber? What are the motivations of suicide bombers? The answer is not easy. However, scholars have tried to answer these questions.

Some writers argue that suicide bombers are motivated by religion. Those who commit suicide attacks believe that killing one's self among unbelievers is a form of jihad. Due to the teaching of Islam regarding the life after death and the honor of dying for Allah's sake, some people have found suicide bombings as a short cut for reaching the eternal life. It is also considered as the surest road for going to paradise (heaven) and marrying the virgins. In his study of Muslim suicide bombers, Ivan Strenski proposes that suicide bombing is better understood "within the discourse of jihad, but also within that of 'sacrifices' and 'gifts'" (2003, p. 1). Those who attribute the motive to religion cite the last declaration or proclamation made by suicide bombers before the operation as an evidence because the proclamation "uses a religious vocabulary" (Asad, 2007, p. 42).

Other scholars opine that religion has nothing to do with suicide bombings. They argue that such acts are motivated by politics. "Religion," write Dzikansky, Kleiman, and Slater "is merely the tool that terror leaders and facilitators use to entice candidates into the program, and to attain political ends. Politics, therefore, is the ultimate objective of suicide bombers" (2012, p. 44). This statement has been echoed by Robert Pape:

MOST SUICIDE TERRORISM is undertaken as a strategic effort directed toward particular political goals; it is not simply the product of irrational individuals or an expression of fanatical hatreds. The main purpose of suicide terrorism is to use the threat of punishment to compel a target government to change policy, and most especially to cause democratic states to withdraw forces from land the terrorists perceive as their national homeland (2005, p. 27).

May Jayyusi (2004) argues that suicide bombers must be understood in relation to politics and resistance. Roxanne Euben (2002) believes that suicide bombing should be seen as a form of political action.

Others believe that suicide bombers are driven by personal motivations. They may be avenging individual grievances or grievances against relatives or friends. An individual may feel "desperate" due

to extreme poverty; another may commit it as an act of revenge after a relative has been killed and so on (Dzikansky et al., 2012, p. 44). Here neither politics nor religion can be considered as the uppermost motive. However, it can be said that there is not a single motive for suicide bombings. Different people become suicide bombers for different reasons. Sometimes bombers are driven by a combination of reasons.

Communicating Desperation in *Refugee without Refuge*

The tragic life of the Palestinians in refugee camps under occupation is a unique psychic experience that has not been explored. One way of doing the exploration is through the literary production of people who lived or witnessed the sordid condition of the Palestinian refugees. One of these novelists is Dixiane Hallaj whose novel *Refugee without Refuge* (2011) explores the Palestinians' life in the refugee camps. Hallaj vehemently counteracts perceptions of Palestinians as terrorists and war criminals and presents them as humans leading a life over which they have little control in their own land. The paradoxical title of the novel sheds the light on the Palestinians' dilemma. The novel dives deep into the plight of the Palestinian refugees. It is a dark novel in which death becomes the last refuge from the harsh realities of the camp.

Refugee without Refuge is an attempt to highlight the Palestinian question and the problems Palestinians face in the refugee camps inside occupied Palestine. The novel engages in establishing the relationship between the horrendous living conditions of the Palestinians and the aggression of the Israeli occupation forces on one hand and the violent reaction of the Palestinians on the other. The Palestinians in 1948 were displaced, oppressed, and dispossessed. Today in the refugee camps, they are abused, harassed, denied of the basic rights. Striving against poverty, their vicious enemy, and struggle to survive are their daily nightmares. The novel is an articulation of the situation of all Palestinians in the refugee camps and it presents a vivid image of the suffering of the Palestinians and acts as a reminder for those who have forgotten the Palestine problem altogether. Hallaj introduces each chapter with quotes from actual newspapers throughout the world reporting on similar events that were happening at the time of the novel. This helps authenticate her stories and the incidents she relates. In this sense, her stories become a living record of the suffering of the Palestinian people, an important mission that allows readers, who have not witnessed either the catastrophe, the diaspora or the horrendous state of refugees, to learn about these events and the conditions in the camps.

The novel opens with grandmother sitting on her bed and listening to the "sporadic sounds of the machines guns" (Hallaj, 2011, p. 1). The narrator immediately moves outside the house where "trucks carrying loudspeakers, with their inevitable escort of jeeps full of heavily armed soldiers, were patrolling the streets of the refugee camp, announcing and enforcing the curfew" (p. 1). In one sentence Hallaj has been able to give the reader a complete view of the scene outside. Again the narrator moves inside to register the pain and the anguish that Muhammad, her son, feels when new curfews are announced. This movement between the public and the private hemispheres is very significant and it becomes a motif throughout the novel—the private life of the Palestinians in the refugee camps is shaped and determined by what happens outside. It shows how the private lives of those living in the refugee camps are shaped and reshaped by the outside world. Due to the hardships and difficulties that the Palestinians face at the hands of the Israeli soldiers, they have to readjust and, like chameleons, change the color of their skins to suit the new circumstances. This is clearly seen in the case of Muhammad, one of the major characters in the novel and a representative of Palestinian refugees. Although he is an artist who "always thought of [his] hammer as an artist's tool" and to whom

“people used to come from Jerusalem and even from Bethlehem and Nazareth to commission pieces of [his] handcrafted furniture (p. 20), he ends up “using a hammer to build frames for pouring cement...to help make the ugly buildings that creep over our land...to pound ugly nails” (p. 20). He has become “a beast of burden instead of a skilled craftsman” (p. 2). He sees ‘no pride in the workmanship’ and feels frustrated to do something the ordinary man can do: “There is no more pride in the workmanship than there is a beauty in the finished product—inside out” (p. 20). Muhammad is a craftsman and his obsession is creation: “I thought that if I got a job as a carpenter at least I would be working with wood and creating” (p. 20). However, his passion for this craftsmanship is thwarted by forces beyond his control, by forces whose chief aim is destruction and not creation. He is not able to work due to continuous curfews imposed on Kalandia, the refugee camp where he lives.

Muhammad does not like his new job because it lacks creativity. His dissatisfaction with the job is expressed in his sarcastic way: "Hell, if they could breed a donkey with opposable thumbs he could do the work—and sometimes I think that's how they think of us" (p. 20). The feeling of humiliation that he has doing this job generates anger inside him. Despite the fact that he is not satisfied with his job, he is afraid of losing it: “I’m trapped in a job I hate, and I am terrified of losing it. I am so frightened of what will happen if I do lose my job” (p. 20). The Zionist colonialism has reduced his dreams to earning enough to buy food for his family. His aspirations and dreams have shrunk to a loaf of bread. This is what Israeli colonists want. As Sari Hanafi writes: the Palestinians are “Often stripped of their political existence and identity and reduced to their status as individuals in need of shelter and food” (2014, pp. 263-4).

Due to the continuous curfews, Muhammad is unable to work. For weeks and sometimes months, he stays at home without a job. Without a job, he is dependent on his brothers who bring food and help sustain his family. He feels trapped by his circumstances: “What am I supposed to do? How can I keep my job if every few days they declare a curfew? Who is going to hire me to work on his house if he never knows when I will show up for work?” (p. 2). Uncertainty and fear of the unknown are expressed by the rhetorical questions that Muhammad asks and the conditional sentences that follow. He fears a future that is beyond expectations and planning. Describing the effect of curfews on Muhammad and his family, Hallaj writes:

Curfew was always difficult in the small house, but when Muhammad was depressed, it made things much worse. Sometimes the tension seemed to fill the air like a fog. She felt her son’s frustration and anger. She prayed for him all the time; she prayed that he would find enough inner peace to accept what his life had become, that he could find some way to direct his energies away from the anger that was becoming a permanent part of him (p. 4).

In these lines, Hallaj sets up the relationship between curfews and depression. They also give the reader a glimpse of Muhammad’s feeling of frustration and desperation.

Losing his job, however, is not the only reason behind his disappointment and desperation. What adds insult to injury is the treatment of the workers by the Israeli soldiers at checkpoints. Every day he is harassed at every checkpoint. Between his house in the refugee camp and his workplace outside the camp there are checkpoints, and he has to submit for search at each and every checkpoint. Therefore, getting to work becomes “so damned hard...Just getting to work gets harder and harder. Every day I have to cross the checkpoints; I have to submit to any search the soldiers decide to conduct; I have to stay quiet if they insult me. By the time I get to work my blood is boiling—and then the work

itself is so...so...so ugly" (p. 2). The angry tone of his speech with his wife reveals his deep feelings of frustration, agitation, and discontent. Bringing in such feelings to the foreground in the first few pages of the novel is very significant; it indicates that such feelings will be a major theme in the novel.

Checkpoints form another challenge for the Palestinians living in the refugee camps. Kalandia and other occupied territories have become a world of checkpoints and constant fear of detention. Describing the large number and the inescapability of the checkpoints, Hallaj writes: "Asking for occupation without curfews and checkpoints is like asking for a pomegranate without seeds" (p. 35). Palestinians have to adapt to frequent checks, waiting for hours, showing their documents, dreaming of permission to pass. They are subject to body searches, aggressive language, intimidation, beating and sometimes detaining. By the creation of such checkpoints the Israelis attempt to achieve two goals. First, to humiliate the Palestinians, as Riaz Hassan writes:

The occupation is characterized by policies and practices that seek to devalue the cultural codes of honour and shame of the subject group, creating widely felt experiences of humiliation. Such societal conditions are conducive to the rise of altruistic sacrifice for the honourable survival of one's community; they also encourage the growth of social movements that are non-institutionalized, spontaneous social alliances of people protesting about widespread grievances (2011, p. 35).

Second, the Israelis think that by such violence they can stop resistance but it is the other way: "This kind of pervasive atmosphere of violence, rather than breaking down the resistance and spirit of the population, in time creates resistance and defiance, particularly in the youth. Thus within each breast would grow, small at first, a rage, hate which could transform into a militant. Thus these kinds of counter-insurgency policies and strategies would spawn a whole generation of rebellious youth" (Somasundaram, 2010, p. 16). This statement vividly explains Muhammad's transformation from a man of placid temperament into a violent suicide bomber.

Life in the refugee camp is very difficult. Muhammad's house lacks the basic comforts of life. A family of seven members living in a two-room house is something beyond imagination. The furniture is old and very simple and necessary things such as a fridge becomes a dream. Their food particularly during the curfews is just lentils. Describing the refugee camps, Julianne Ivory reported that: "there is garbage and sewage scattered all over due to lack of proper infrastructure; the streets are so narrow and winding that they might more appropriately be called passage ways; everywhere you walk you are covered overhead by a blanket of electrical wires; most edifices are crumbling and riddled with bullet holes; the buildings are so close together that you don't know where one ends and the other begins and when you turn a corner you might accidentally have stepped directly into someone's living room" (as cited in Hanafi 2010, p. 5). However, Muhammad and his family continue living there in such dire circumstances. It is a vicious cycle. They have more curfews in the camps because the resistance is greater, but the curfews make holding a job nearly impossible so they cannot move to better housing. Most refugees are not refusing to leave, but have no resources to do so. Only Ali stays when he could move out of the camp, and he does so to take care of his brother's family.

Furthermore, checkpoints, detention camps, and curfews are meant to humiliate the Palestinians. Explaining how humiliation psychologically affects people, Riaz Hassan writes:

Humiliation is a complex and intense, emotional and personal experience that occurs when historically and culturally grounded definitions or perceptions of self-worth,

self-respect and dignity are destroyed and revealed as apparently false and illegitimate affectations. Thus, feelings of lowered self-respect are created, which in turn inspire an unwillingness to obey humiliating authority, overt rebellion or simmering resentment. The available evidence suggests that violence, the everyday degradations of occupation, harsh repression, a sense of collective grievances, torture, the violation of culturally grounded codes of honour and shame, massive economic and social dislocations, anxiety and helplessness are powerful means by which to inflict humiliation (2011, p. 88).

Here, humiliation plays a major role in motivating Muhammad to commit suicide attack. Muhammad is subjected to most of these if not to all. The stripping of human dignity and the constant experience of humiliation appear to become a way of life in Palestine. The maltreatment that Palestinians receive at the hands of the Israeli soldiers is the main reason behind the resentment that gives rise to rebellion.

Curfews, checkpoints and unemployment are not the main reason of Muhammad's frustration and anger; such feelings are partly caused by his inability to provide his wife the happy life she deserves: "Deena, my love, this was not what I wanted for you when we married. I wanted to fill your life with beautiful things. I never dreamed you would have to worry about where we would get the money for the next meal" (p. 20). Muhammad is a young man who extensively loves his wife and his dream is to fill her 'life with beautiful things'. His love can be seen very clearly in his reaction when Hanan tells him what the doctor said regarding his wife: his "face paled...[he] sat motionless, frozen with fear. Long seconds passed before his body forced him to breathe. The silence stretched out into minutes...[a] cold shiver ran down [his] spine" (p. 59). He is ready to sacrifice his daughter so that his wife lives. Though it is a curfew, he sends his daughter, Amal, outside to get an ambulance when his wife starts having seizures. He dares to go home in the middle of the curfew. Furthermore, one of his aims to commit suicide bombing is to be rejoined with Deena: "He would be doing something worthwhile with his life, and he would soon be with his beloved Deena again" (pp. 188-9). However, his dreams and expectations are dashed and seemed beyond his reach simply because he is a Palestinian living in a refugee camp. Muhammad's dream of a better life, his dream to live with dignity and peace is shattered by alien forces coming from the other half of the world. And instead of filling her life with beautiful things, he now struggles to provide his family with "the most basic needs" (p. 20). Instead of being a craftsman, he is now ready to "clean toilets...scrub floors...sweep the streets...collect garbage" (p. 20). Under the pressure of poverty and impoverishment, the Palestinians are forced to dismiss and denounce their dreams and accept the most humiliating jobs so that they can provide for their families. This reduction of one's ambitions and aspirations is one of the most demonic tools used by the colonists—Israelis included—to subjugate peoples. The Israeli forces have filled the lives of the Palestinians with hardships and obstacles; they have made a hell of their lives. So, they will constantly think only of the basic needs—food, shelter and clothes. They will never think of freedom and independence. To renounce and abandon your dreams and goals in life due to external forces is something which cannot be swallowed easily.

Feeling of frustration and anger are mingled with a feeling of guilt. The conversation between Muhammad and his wife is of significant importance; it reveals the intensity of love that sparkles in their hearts in spite of the gloomy surroundings. It exposes their frustration at the silent world outside and reveals the anxiety, worries, and poverty that keep eating at their bones. Further, a feeling of guilt dominates the conversation between him and his wife. He feels guilty for his failure to provide his wife with the comforts and luxuries of life that he once dreamt of. Such a feeling of guilt is integrated with

a feeling of uncertainty and insecurity—he worries about where he would “get the money for the next meal” (p. 20). Uncertainty, insecurity, frustration, anger, and guilt are all psychological forces that transform Muhammad from a normal human being dreaming of love and life into a suicide-bomber planning death and destruction.

The critical moment in the life of Muhammad is yet to come. His wife is to give birth to their new child. She has been suffering from seizures. In spite of the curfew, his young daughter manages to bring the ambulance and he takes his wife to the hospital. However, something unexpected happens on the way. When they arrive at the checkpoint, they are stopped. The soldiers ask for papers which Muhammad gives politely. However, the soldiers detain the driver because he has “a record of prior offences...He has broken curfew before, and we have been forced to detain him for questioning” (p. 68). Muhammad appeals to the soldier to let them go as his wife is dying, but all his pleas are rejected by the soldier who claims to be obeying the orders and regulations. This is a quote from an article about a study published in *The Lancet* (2011), a respected British medical journal:

Halla Shoaibi of University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in the United States estimates that in the period she studied (2000-2007), 10 percent of pregnant Palestinian women were delayed at checkpoints while travelling to hospital to give birth. One result has been a dramatic increase in the number of home births, with women preferring to avoid road trips while in labor for fear of not being able to reach the hospital in time.

Their fears are well-founded. Shoaibi said 69 babies were born at checkpoints during those seven years. Thirty-five babies and five of the mothers died, an outcome which she considered to amount to a crime against humanity (*The Electronic Intifada*, para 4-5).

The conversation between Muhammad and the Israeli soldiers at the checkpoint is very short. The soldier asks the papers and Muhammad politely gives him. When Muhammad enquires about the delay, he is informed that the driver has “a record of prior offences” (p. 68). When he attempts to persuade the soldier that his wife is in a critical situation, the soldier does not reply. He just “placed his hand lightly on his gun” (p. 68) and orders him not to leave the ambulance again. When his wife starts having seizures, he gets out of the ambulance in an attempt to get permission to leave. He even tells the soldiers that if the driver has a problem, he can drive the ambulance to the hospital. But unfortunately, his offer is rejected. The soldier tells him: “Get back in the ambulance or your sick wife will have a dead husband” (p. 70). What is clear is the inequality between the Israeli menacing soldiers and Muhammad. Muhammad wants to speak, to explain but the soldiers are always ready with their guns. They do not converse; they just shoot. The end of the dialogue between Muhammad and the soldiers is signaled not by words but by signals, a soldier releasing the safety on his gun. This reminds one of Jean-Paul Sartre’s (1963) statement: “If he [the colonized] shows fight, the soldiers fire and he's a dead man” (p. 15).

The aggression and heartlessness of the Israeli soldiers is very clear. Even though Muhammad’s wife is dying, they refuse to allow him to take her to the hospital. He attempts to convince them—and they know very well—that his wife is dying but they refuse to grant him leave. Actually, there is no reasonable excuse for detaining the driver because he is an ambulance driver and it stands to reason that he should be out when needed even if a curfew is going on. The lame excuse becomes clear when Muhammad offers to drive the car himself. The death of his pregnant wife is symbolic. It is the death of fertility, death of life and death of a generation of Palestinians.

The ambulance scene between Muhammad and his wife is very passionate and horrifying. He tells his wife "I love you". The words "filled Muhammad with a fierce mix of emotions that roared in his ears...love, protectiveness, frustration and helplessness" (p. 68). He struggles to save his wife but in vain. Desperately he attempts to push air to her lungs. Despite his attempts to save her, the seizure was very strong. Blood trickles from her mouth. The scene is portrayed in the novel as in the following:

Again and again he tried to force oxygen into her lungs and push air out of her lungs. He got more and more desperate the longer he worked. Sweat began to roll down his face and mingled with tears as she did not respond. He put his hand on her neck as he tried to share his breath with her. He did not feel a heartbeat. Fear changed to terror. He didn't know what else to do, so he kept trying to force air into her lungs. He had no idea how long he worked, but the oxygen ran out and still he kept trying to breathe for her.

How long was it before he admitted defeat? It felt like a lifetime, and, like a lifetime, he felt it end in death—his as well as hers. He sat in shock, feeling a cold void grow within him, eating his soul, until there was nothing left but a shell. He held his wife's lifeless body and stroked her hair (p. 71).

By making the reader envision the dying woman in the ambulance, the novel creates a narrative of the innocent victim versus a guilty perpetrator. The exposure to shameless atrocities transforms Muhammad from a submissive man into an enraged fighter.

The death of his wife marks a turning point in Muhammad's life. In the ambulance, "Muhammad was sitting with vacant eyes" (p. 71). At the hospital he "sat, unseeing and unthinking" (p. 71). Describing his condition, Hallaj writes: "People came and went like shadows. Words had no meaning...Deena was gone. The thought exploded inside his brain. Deena was gone! A cry of agony wrenched itself out of his very soul and sent cold shivers through the people who heard it" (p. 72). After the death of Deena, Muhammad is increasingly silent and alienated from the world with which all forms of establishing any avenues of communication have been broken down. He used to go walking in the empty hills beyond the camp. He knew that he sometimes got lost in his own thoughts when he was walking alone. He leaves the house and disappears for days and nobody knows where he goes. He used to leave the house in the morning and returns in the afternoon. When he is home he spends very little time with his children because he is always lost in his own thoughts. He "was living in a thick black fog of anger and pain—and not seeing or feeling anything else" (p. 177). In another place Hallaj writes: "His grief had blocked all other senses; it had filled his head to the exclusion of all other thoughts" (p. 148). The kind of silence that follows the death of his wife can be seen as a direct result of the horror caused by violence and injustice. He is traumatized by the horror of his wife's death as well as by the gruesome act of violence which render his mind and senses disabled beyond any point of repair. The incomprehensibility of the vicious treatment at the hands of the Israelis is chiefly responsible for his psychological trauma. The impact of trauma deepens with his agonizing realization that he is helpless to do anything to avenge. His pain in no way seems to be radically different from the anguish of the society eaten deeply by the Israelis. The death of Deena opens his eyes to the injustices suffered by the Palestinians. Therefore, he experiments that the true redemption of one's suffering should come from some other's suffering. His silence is often caused by a compelling reason to sever every form of communication with the world. His wandering in the hills is an attempt to create his own world. This

turning away from the existential reality, either out of sheer disgust or sense of horror is also a central theme in the novel.

Muhammad is traumatized by the memory of his wife's death. So hapless and helpless in the face of trauma, he cannot put up with the severe shock. So, subconsciously he attempts to hide the consequences of the terrible events in what Freud and Breuer refers to as "repression." He becomes a shell of a man. Though a very hard worker, he loses interest in work. Speaking to his daughter, he says: "there are a lot of things I could learn to do. But I have lost the will and the desire to keep going. I know you can't understand this yet, but I am not a whole man. Your mother and I had become one being, and without her, I am only a part of a being" (p. 182). He has lost the living part of himself and what remains is a living body with a dead spirit.

The contrast between his life before and after the death of his wife is very striking. In the beginning of the novel we see him ready to do any job, however mean it may be, to feed his children. Though his new job is "so...so...so...ugly," he does not stop working and more than this he is afraid of losing it because it is the only source of family income. And what worries him more is how to keep his job. He knows very well that, due to the checkpoints and the constant curfews, one day he will lose his ugly job and must find another job: "I must find a job. I cannot stand seeing you do without even the most basic needs" (p. 20). However, after the death of his wife, he loses that interest in work.

All these events have their psychological toll on him. Left with no other option but to register his protest against the perpetration of brutality of the Zionists, Muhammad decides to take revenge. When Muhammad is lost in his own thought, he is thinking of a way to take revenge for the death of his wife. He makes up his mind and goes to an organization called "Friends of Palestine" which helps and trains people become suicide bombers. This form of response, Muhammad believes, is the most befitting answer to the oppression, brutality and violence which he has been a victim of. Denied of the right to live peacefully, Muhammad finds himself having recourse to violence not merely as the one of the possible means but as an effective alternative to all possible existing discourse of the dominating order.

Muhammad's anger at the Israeli soldiers increases. He cannot bear their sight. Speaking to his daughter about his animosity of the Israeli soldiers, he says:

I decided I needed to go back to work, but I couldn't do it. I got in a car to go look for work, but when it got close to the checkpoint I could feel my blood rising. I felt the anger so strong that I knew if a soldier spoke to me, I would try to kill him with my bare hands. Ever since the night your mother...Ever since that night I haven't been able to stand the sight of a soldier. Just looking at one from a distance makes me feel a rage that is barely controllable (p. 177).

Expressing his anger at the soldiers at checkpoints, he adds:

I can't provide for you by going to work every day. I just can't do it; I can't work anymore. I can't provide for you that way. I am a carpenter. That is what I know how to do, but the only place where there is enough work to keep me employed is on the other side of the checkpoints. I can't go there without flying into a rage and throwing my life away in the dust—so I can't work. I know that path is closed to me forever. I feel such a deep anger and a rage and a need to make someone pay for our loss that

every time I see a soldier I want to make him pay for the life he took from me—yet he has the gun. It is like living through the Catastrophe all over again (pp. 178-9).

Revenge become a vivid motif in Hallaj's novel. The death of his wife "evoke an intense desire for revenge. Revenge here is a response to the continuous suffering of an aggrieved soul. There are many studies of suicide bombers which "reveal that the main motivating force for the suicide bombers seems to be a desire for spectacular revenge" (Hassan, 2011, p. 91). Margalit (2003) claims that the chief motive of many suicide bombers in Israel is revenge for acts committed by Israelis. Hence, there is nothing bizarre about this. It is a human instinct. Hannah Arendt, in her discussion of the human response to perceived injustices, takes an even stronger stance. She argues that human beings react with rage and resort to violence. "Rage is by no means an automatic reaction to misery as such...Only where there is reason to suspect that conditions could be changed and are not does the rage arise. Only when our sense of justice is offended do we react with rage, and this reaction by no means necessarily reflects personal injury" (1970, p. 63).

The death of his wife has a tremendous psychological effect on Muhammad. His conversation with his daughter reveals the deep injury inside him. It reveals the intense pain that he has been enduring since his wife's death:

I am empty now. I have nothing inside me. Without your mother I am only a husk of a man with no soul...I didn't feel like a whole man anymore, and that is all I know. I'm empty inside, and it hurts. It hurts every minute of every day. It hurts to turn over at night and not feel your mother next to me. It hurts to get up in the morning and not see her in the kitchen. It hurts to go through the day knowing she is not waiting at home for me. I can't work; I can't sleep; I'm not good for anything (p. 177).

Undoubtedly, Muhammad begins to have the idea of suicide due to the suffering. By killing himself, he can achieve two goals: he could avenge the death of his wife and at the same time be with his wife again: "I could be with your mother forever. I would be whole again. It wouldn't hurt to wake up; I wouldn't hurt to go through the day; it wouldn't hurt to lie down at night on an empty mattress" (p. 180). Muhammad's fits very perfectly in Jean-Paul Sartre's description of the reaction of the colonized to the colonizers' violence. He writes:

this new man begins his life as a man at the end of it; he considers himself as a potential corpse. He will be killed; not only does he accept this risk, he's sure of it. This potential dead man has lost his wife and his children; he has seen so many dying men that he prefers victory to survival; others, not he, will have the fruits of victory; he is too weary of it all. But this weariness of the heart is the root of an unbelievable courage. We find our humanity on this side of death and despair; he finds it beyond torture and death. We have sown the wind; he is the whirlwind. The child of violence, at every moment he draws from it his humanity. We were men at his expense, he makes himself man at ours: a different man; of higher quality (1963, pp. 23-24).

Frantz Fanon's (2004) *The Wretched of the Earth* is very illuminating when discussing Hallaj's *Refugee without Refuge*. The book and the novel try to explain the colonial violence and its ramifications.

Muhammad becomes a suicide-bomber because he has nothing left for him in this world. By doing so, he just informs the world that 'I have lost everything. So, it is better for me to leave. But I am not leaving alone.' He summarizes his loss in the following way:

Now they have taken my means of livelihood away from me. I am a strong, healthy man who is helpless and unable to feed his family—just as my father was more than 50 years ago. This is my Nakba; it is my own personal Catastrophe. I have been deprived of my wife that made my house a home, and also deprived of my source of livelihood. Only now I understand the depression and hopelessness that some refugees fell into in the early days, and that even now infects so much of the population (p. 179).

It is this sense of loss that drives him to commit such a lethal act. Muhammad represents a generation of Palestinians who were brought up on defeat and displacement; a generation for whom a happy life is a dream. He expresses his feelings of loss, despair and helplessness when we meet him in the car going to his target. He soliloquizes:

I know this is a worthwhile operation...All of the martyrs who go out with a bomb strapped to their bodies are trying to communicate the desperation of the refugees. Our deaths are an extreme measure used to get the Israeli citizens and the rest of the world to understand the despair and hopelessness of our lives. We are screaming to the world for attention, telling them that the life we have is not worth living. We want the world to realize that our plight is desperate. The Israeli army is not killing our soldiers—we have no soldiers; it is killing our entire population, and the death toll includes more women and children than men. The trust of the usual operation is to gain attention and point out the desperation of the Palestinians (p. 189).

It can be affirmed that Muhammad's decision to be a suicide-bomber is a sign of desperation. As Avishain Margalit says: "the suicide bombings have more often been taken as a sign of the desperation of the Palestinians than as acts of terror" (2003, para. 40). Despite Muhammad's long and repetitive confessions that he is taking revenge for the death of his wife, he is committing suicide bombing only to make his voice heard, that is, to communicate his desperation.

Muhammad's life is a long tragic journey of hopelessness, full of pain, suffering and frustration. And because his enemy is powerful and well-armed he resorts to the act of suicide bombing. Suicide bombing becomes an outlet for expressing his feelings of injustice, frustration, despair and deprivation. Every brutal act by Israeli soldiers strengthens and reinforces these feelings. This situation can be generalized to include all the Palestinians who commit this lethal action because all of them live in the same circumstances. Riaz Hassan writes: "The experience of the everyday degradations of Israeli occupation had created collective hatred in them [Palestinians] which made them susceptible to indoctrination to become youthful living martyrs" (2011, p. 59). According to Hassan, studies "have found that the conditions of the occupation were a significant cause of suicide bombings in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict...Harsh repression at the micro-level was found to be a major contributor to the rise in suicide bombings" (2011, pp. 59-60). Hassan's findings are echoed in another study by Hisham H. Ahmed who concludes that the main motivation of suicide attacks by young Palestinians is the

heavy repression of Israeli occupation experienced in everyday Palestinian life...The misery and personal traumas arising from a brutalizing occupation created an immense anger, bitterness and hatred that justified the extreme response. For Palestinians, suicide bombings were acts of ultimate despair, horrific reactions to

extremely inhumane conditions in a seriously damaged environment of hopelessness (Hassan, 2011, p. 60).

Echoing Ahmed, Palestinian psychiatrist El Sarraj attributes the rise of suicide attacks to “the hopelessness that comes from a situation that continues to worsen: a despair where living becomes no different from dying propels people to unthinkable actions” (Hassan, 2011, p. 61).

When all legal means of seeking justice are blocked, when the whole world watches his suffering silently, Muhammad reacts with rage and resorts to violence. As Hannah Arendt observes “Only when our sense of justice is offended do we react with rage, and this reaction by no means necessarily reflects personal injury...To resort to violence when confronted with outrageous events or conditions is enormously tempting because of its inherent immediacy and swiftness” in setting “the scales of justice right again” (1970, pp. 63-4). Arendt adds “To act with deliberate speed goes against the grain of rage and violence, but this does not make them irrational. On the contrary, in private as well as public life there are situations in which the very swiftness of a violent act may be the only appropriate remedy” (Ibid., p. 63). What drives Muhammad is the unbearable suffering and a desire to set the scales of justice right again. In fact, Hannah Arendt’s understanding of violence is very helpful to understand the transformation of Muhammad. Arendt, as Sophia Frese says, maintains that physical aggression is not irrational, but a “phenomenon that may be rooted in a deep dissatisfaction with a particular status quo. When political conflicts, such as the situation in Israel and the occupied territories, turn violent it could be indicative of a deeply felt hopelessness by those who resort to violence; but those who deem another group as unworthy of freedom and respect may also employ force as an instrument of oppression” (2010, p. 253). Arendt’s statements are echoed by Jean-Paul Sartre, who writes:

But these constantly renewed aggressions, far from bringing them to submission, thrust them into an unbearable contradiction which the European will pay for sooner or later. After that, when it is their turn to be broken in, when they are taught what shame and hunger and pain are, all that is stirred up in them is a volcanic fury whose force is equal to that of the pressure put upon them. You said they understand nothing but violence? Of course; first, the only violence is the settler's; but soon they will make it their own; that is to say, the same violence is thrown back upon us as when our reflection comes forward to meet us when we go toward a mirror.

Make no mistake about it; by this mad fury, by this bitterness and spleen, by their ever-present desire to kill us, by the permanent tensing of powerful muscles which are afraid to relax, they have become men... (1963, p. 17).

Sartre adds: “for at first it is not their violence, it is ours, which turns back on itself and rends them; and the first action of these oppressed creatures is to bury deep down that hidden anger which their and our moralities condemn and which is however only the last refuge of their humanity” (Ibid., p. 18). Sartre affirms that the native’s violence is a reaction to the colonizer’s violence: “it comes back on us, it strikes us, and we do not realize any more than we did the other times that it’s we who have launched it” (Ibid., p. 20). Hence, Muhammad’s suicide bombing is an instinctual reaction to a provocation.

Hallaj’s novel refutes the claim that suicide bombing is motivated by religion or politics. If Muhammad is driven by religious zeal, it would be surprising that Ziad is not a suicide bomber because religiously he is more devoted and righteous than Muhammad. On the contrary, Ziad has no interest in the issue at all. He is just waiting for others to come and free Palestine. On the other hand,

Muhammad is secular. He does not believe in God. This stark contrast between a secular and a religious man refutes the idea that suicide bombers are motivated by religion. Further, Muhammad is not driven by political zeal. He is apolitical and what worries him most is making his family happy. This refutes the claim that suicide bombers are driven by religious or political motivations or that they are encouraged and trained by religious or political organizations. It can be affirmed that Muhammad's decision is personal and has nothing to do with religion and politics.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that Muhammad is driven to self-sacrifice by a cocktail of emotions including desperation, pride, honor, loss, anger, rage, humiliation, dehumanization, demonization, shame, powerlessness, and hopelessness. Muhammad's attempt to commit the suicide attack is the outcome of the unbearable conditions in which he lives. His decision to be a suicide bomber can be attributed to deprivation and humiliation he has suffered at the hands of Israelis. Generally speaking, suicide bombing in Palestine is a reaction to Israeli continuous killing, confiscation of land, continuous expansion of settlements, control of water supply and other daily needs, the destruction of new houses every day, the daily arrest of activists, and the daily humiliation of Palestinians at checkpoints. Palestinians resorted to suicide because the legal political and peaceful means are blocked before them.

The novel moves very slowly in portraying the main character until it reaches the unexpected end. It opens with a happy family (regardless of the difficulties they face) consisting of a wife, three children, and a mother. But it has a tragic end. The mother is dead; the father is about to kill himself. Muhammad's family is a macrocosm of the larger Palestinian society. This transformation of the family is a symbol of the transformation of the Palestinian life in general.

Refugee without Refuge rebuts the claim that suicide bombing is motivated by religion or politics. Muhammad is not a religious man; he is secular. He does not believe in God. His disbelief in religion refutes the idea that suicide bombers are motivated by religion. Further, Muhammad is not driven by politics. What worries him most is not politics but happiness of his family. This refutes the claim that suicide bombers are driven by religious or political motivations.

Hallaj is not promoting or justifying suicide-bombing. She is just offering a diagnosis of the situation. She is stating a fact. As an observer, she bases her diagnosis on what she has observed during her eleven years stay in Palestine. Hallaj's aim of writing this novel is to correct the misperception of the Palestinians in the west. The Palestinians are shown as terrorists in western media and the motives pushing them to such actions are never explained or discussed. There is only half of the story. The novel is, therefore, an attempt to bring the other half of the story into the surface. Further, Hallaj attempts to show the effects of Israeli occupation on the Palestinians.

Hallaj is refuting the popular stereotype of Palestinians as ruthless terrorists. The novel demonstrates that they resort to violence because they have no other alternative. It is unreasonable to order them to be nonviolent while they are controlled by guns. It is also unreasonable to ask them to be nonviolent while the enemy is using cannons and gun machines. Peace is two-sided. Both parties have to stop the violence. Further, history has shown that waiting for the world to recognize their plight and redress the injustices that have been perpetrated on the Palestinians has not alleviated the conditions of the refugees. On the contrary, the conditions in the camps continue to deteriorate as aid budgets are cut and the population continues to grow. Palestinians' suicide bombing is a personal decision taken under certain circumstances to communicate their grievance, suffering, and desperation.

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