"Traps of the Visible"

Joseph Shahadi

> *[T]he age of the photograph is also the age of the revolutions,*
> *contestations, assassinations, explosions, in short,*
> *of impatience, of everything which denies ripening.*
> –Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 93-94

Suicide attacks, as they have evolved in the Middle East in the late twentieth century, famously employ photography (and videography, a detailed exploration of which lies just outside the scope of this essay) to represent itself and its practitioners. Focusing on a close analysis of the martyr poster of Reem al-Raiyashi, I will argue that photography may function to both represent *and* embody absence as a performance strategy that stages the Palestinian body in relation to the Israeli State.

The sociologist Farhad Khosrokhavar has written, "[A Palestinian suicide attack] has four constituent dimensions: a relationship with the Self, with the Other (family, society, or Israeli enemy), with the world, and with the sacred."[1] I suggest these relationships, which extend out from a central, violent absence of the Palestinian suicide bomber, are facilitated by the use of photography *as a performance practice* and that Reem al-Raiyashi's martyr image typifies this dynamic in a particular, gendered way. While not the first woman to perform this act in Palestine,[2] al-Raiyashi's suicide is worth studying for two reasons: she was the first woman to undertake such a mission on behalf of Hamas, a previously entirely male enterprise, and she was the first mother to do so, posing with her three year old son Obedia on her martyr poster (see figure 1).[3] The various markers of al-Raiyashi's identity inferred from her photograph—woman, mother, Palestinian, and finally, "terrorist," a contested term, especially in the context of Palestinian/Israeli politics[4]—makes her martyr image a nexus of competing, if ambiguous, representations.

The Mother In The Martyr Poster

Taken in advance of her suicide mission and disseminated after,[5] al-Raiyashi's

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Fig. 1. Reem al-Raiyashi's Martyr Poster. (2004) (*Photographer unknown.*)

photograph is shocking in its conflation of maternal love and violence.[6] Palestine itself has been portrayed by Palestinians as a woman/mother, a representation that is rooted in the modern Arabic literary tradition wherein sons long to reunite with the homeland and defend her from invaders, a portrayal Professor of Arabic Culture Carol Bardenstein views as a manifestation of the long tradition of idealized, feminine "Others" in Arabic cultures. She notes, "Those that have emerged within the contemporary Palestinian context are most pointedly shaped by the specific experience of occupation and resistance."[7] So, it is not unheard of for images of women and mothers to appear in the iconography of Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation.[8] Nevertheless, Reem al-Raiyashi's martyr image generated a furor of

discourses about the relative incompatibility of maternity with acts of violent self-destruction and the proper role of women's subjectivity in relation to systems of power. However, surrendering to the temptation to focus only on the central figure of this carefully composed image—the mother and child—to the exclusion of the other elements of the portrait would occlude the vectors of force that describe the occupation of Palestine, which is the material context for its production. I argue that the dimensions of a suicide attack suggested by Khosrokhavar—Self, Other, the sacred, and the world—are materialized in this photograph. Therefore, I will frame my analysis around these four dimensions, represented by the landscape, the Hamas headband, the child, and finally Reem al-Raiyashi herself.

The photograph's landscape fixes the context of the image in a fantastic, imaginary space. The green of the background, acid and spring-like, is mouthwateringly artificial: a virtual Heaven. A corona of light wraps the figures and, etched against this invented sky, also brings saintliness to mind. Flowers, the lurid Technicolor pink of a 1950s movie musical, are clustered in the foreground and blurrily resolve in a digital haze of forced perspective around and behind the figures. The effect suggests a timeless, eternal space in which al-Raiyashi, son on her hip, is simultaneously near and far, partly submerged in this dreamscape and also towering high above it. She wears the headscarf of an observant Muslim woman underneath her green Hamas headband, which bears the legend "there is no God but God and Mohammed is his prophet"—the *shahada*, a proclamation of faith in Islam whose honest recitation is all that is required to affirm one's belief. On the surface, one obvious discourse emanating from this image is religious, a general and specific reference to an Islamic afterlife, the infamous "Paradise" that figures so prominently in Western news reports about suicide attacks. However, I'd like to amend that interpretation by suggesting the virtual Paradise that fills this image might also refer to a different imaginary space: a reconstituted Palestine itself. Thinking of this photograph's imaginary countryside as a reference to Palestine, a material—if contested—landscape, allows another register to emerge for our analysis: the political.

Suicide Attacks In Palestine/Israel

Palestinian suicide attacks did not begin in Israel until April 1994 and continued at a rate of about three a year until the start of the second *intifada* (uprising) in September 2000, when the number leapt to over twenty a year. Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation evolved from the violent but unarmed rebellion of the first *intifada*, through the guerilla tactics of the 1990s (which included some suicide attacks) to the large scale suicide terrorism of the second uprising.[9] Martyrdom played an important symbolic but ultimately subordinate role in the broader goal of nation building in the first uprising, a movement that was largely characterized by the hopeful assertion of Palestinian political and cultural autonomy.[10] Yet the

failure of the Palestinian Authority to secure peace and/or an autonomous state following the Oslo Accords dashed hopes for a self-directed Palestinian future, and the second *intifada*, a reaction against both Israeli occupation *and* failed Palestinian leadership, was the result. Concurrently, the increase in the construction of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories during this period[11] resulted in a decrease in available resources for Palestinians even as the Israeli military presence increased, making travel impossible. Palestinian suicide terror attacks in Israel rose as resources dwindled, increased checkpoints rendered Palestinians virtually immobile, and their dissatisfaction grew. Increasingly marked by a pessimistic worldview, and an ironic reversal of the first uprising, the second *intifada* is conducted with the implicit understanding that the yearned-for nation cannot be built.[12] It is this "impossible" Palestine that is represented in Reem al-Raiyashi's martyr poster. Just as the Palestine in which she lived (and died) was parched and gerrymandered, so its imaginary representation is green and vast. And the strange perspective at work in this image enacts a Palestinian fantasy of freedom and self-determination.

This new interpretation of the imaginary landscape of al-Raiyashi's martyr photograph does not preclude the previous, religious one. The iconography of Heaven, so recognizable in this image, has currency in the context of Palestinian nationalism, but simply foregrounding it comes uncomfortably close to replicating a contemporary Orientalist and Islamophobic argument wherein Muslim actants are configured as mindlessly irrational and therefore devoid of political agency. Academic and journalistic accounts of suicide attacks typically proffer the theory that the phenomenon is a result of a cultic indoctrination into Islamic fundamentalism, the suicidal inclinations of depressive, often sexually repressed individuals, or some combination of both. The argument that religious piety precludes expressions of political force has been employed to obscure the agency of female Muslim subjects, a rubric that has been forcefully countered by third world feminists writing about the Middle East and North Africa. And female suicide bombers are especially vulnerable to this charge.[13] Robert A. Pape, Director of the Chicago Project of Suicide Terrorism, has argued that, while religion plays a role in the modern phenomenon of suicide terrorism, as a whole the practice is best understood as an "extreme strategy for national liberation against democracies with troops that pose an imminent threat to control the territory the terrorists view as their homeland." Therefore, according to the data,[14] the relationship being performed here is not primarily with the sacred, or the community (via gender), but with the State, under the terms of neocolonial occupation.

Nevertheless, the deployment of Islamic religious rhetoric and iconography is potentially confusing for Western audiences for whom sacred and political discourses are (at least theoretically) kept separate. The assertion of a self-possessed individual, whose expressions of affiliation with the sacred, if they exist, are performed privately, is a legacy of the European Enlightenment. In the

Muslim world, however, the temporal and sacred interpenetrate and are performed publicly as a matter of course. In Islamic terms, relationships with the sacred and the world are not exclusive of one another. This diffusion of the religious into the political is typified in al-Raiyashi's photograph by her green Hamas headband. Hamas, an acronym for *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* or "Islamic resistance movement," is an Islamist group that simultaneously conducts social, political, and military actions, up to and including martyr operations.[15] In a 2006 election Hamas won a majority of seats in the Palestinian parliament, marking an official—and popular—shift away from the secular Fatah party. While the greater percentage of Hamas's activities in Palestine are social and cultural, they are also primarily responsible for most of the suicide attacks in the second *intifada*, including al-Raiyashi's mission.[16] Although the provision of aid and welfare for the poor (among other activities) and the organized deployment of human bombs seem to be opposite activities, representing the extremes of life and death, in the context of Hamas's mission they are concurrent nation building tasks, which are both articulated in Islamic terms. This interpretation is further supported by the Arabic text printed on the surface of the photo above and below her image: al-Raiyashi's name, the date and location of her suicide mission, and the phrase "beautiful (or elegant) martyrdom." Arabic is simultaneously the holy language of the Qu'ran and the everyday language of millions of people, Muslim and otherwise. It is this dual function that allows it to reference both the divine and temporal in this photograph. A relationship with the sacred in the context of this martyr image is a *de facto* affiliation with a community of co-religionists, potential citizens, and neocolonial subjects: in this photograph al-Raiyashi performs a connection with the world through her relationship to the sacred, not because of it.

The Child

The child on al-Raiyashi's hip, her son Obedia, with his tracksuit and tiny smile could be any child, from anywhere in the world, posing for a family photograph. But, of course, he is not. The happy banality of his expression horrifies: he has no idea that he is living under occupation and that his mother is going to blow herself to pieces. Like any three year old anywhere he is completely wedded to the moment, an eternal present in which, barely differentiated from his mother, he lives. He holds an artillery shell like a toy in his chubby hand, a pleasing extension of himself. He sits in the crook of his mother's arm and is fully supported by her. His happiness is terrible, terrifying. It persists in the eternity of this photograph despite and because of the occupation of Palestine. For Obedia, growing up will mean growing into an awareness of himself as a neocolonial subject in the long shadow of his mother's martyrdom. However, in the frozen moment of this photograph that future is perpetually suspended. He is an anomaly: a (presumably) still-living person memorialized on a martyr poster. Why is he there? As a particular extension

of al-Raiyashi's womanhood, her son performs her relationship with the present and the future, the dynamic tension of this photograph. Haunted with the certainty of her death, in fact produced to perform her death *and* her intention to die (to her family, community, and the enemy State), this photograph contains within it an element of life that will outlive her: her child. This son (and baby daughter, Doha, who does not appear in this photograph) is the material issue of her body, the future made flesh. The child cannot be thought without the mother, and the tender affiliation of one to the other, which will be forever disrupted by al-Raiyashi's suicide attack, is being memorialized here. And that is the agony of his childlike happiness—it cannot be realized. The child will grow up, or he won't, given the dangerous vagaries of the occupation, but his happiness is captured here forever in the open, verdant, digitally rendered, *impossible* Palestine of this photograph.

The Unknowable Martyr

Which brings us to Reem al-Raiyashi herself. The central figure in this photograph—the one that gives all of the others meaning—she stands, flanked by surreal flowers, smiling slightly. Depending on one's ideological position, her expression may be read as haunted or triumphant, maniacal or elegiac, seductive or maternal, or all of these, or none. Her smile does not give or ask; it tells, but what? What can she be thinking? There are vast ideological machineries that turn continually around that question. Psychologists, journalists, academics, government and military officials, and terrorism experts have all proffered theories about al-Raiyashi (and the other Palestinian suicide bombers, male and female, before and since) but none of these is, or could be, definitive. The now decades old project of profiling potential suicide bombers has never produced a workable model[17] and, in the context of the second *intifada*, has been hopelessly defeated at the base of its assumptions. The Palestinians who have undertaken suicide missions since 2000 have come from all social classes, backgrounds, and age groups.[18] Many—including al-Raiyashi—were from the middle class, educated, and did not fit a pre-existing suicidal profile.[19] Indeed, as Farhad Khosrokhavar has written, "there can be no identikit (sic) portrait of suicide bombers in the second intifada."[20] The Identi-kit, a brand of facial recognition software used by police and intelligence agencies to create visual profiles of absent persons by cross referencing a witness's recollection with "mug" files of known criminals, is a telling metaphor in this case. Such assemblages reproduce the physical contours of a face but "fall short of portrait-type"[21] images because they render likeness as pure, depthless surface. Clearly, the impossibility of creating an Identi–kit portrait does not preclude the production of a photographic one. But it does raise the question: is it possible to represent an absent subject?

Immediately following al-Raiyashi's suicide mission in January of 2004, the Israeli mass circulation daily newspaper *Yediot Ahoronot* claimed she was compelled

to carry out her suicide attack as an atonement for committing adultery, a report derived from Israeli military sources. Her husband, Ziad Awad, and family rebutted this assertion. "These are lies spread by the Jews [meaning "the Israelis"] with the aim of defaming the family," Awad said. "My wife is an honorable woman who sacrificed her life for the sake of Islam and Palestine."[22] According to her sister Iman, "No one forced her to do it. People keep saying she was an adulteress but if they have any evidence, they should come and show me. Only then will I believe it. I'm happy she killed the soldiers. I'm proud of her."[23] And her brother Seif said, "Denying our relation to Reem was totally untrue. Thanks God, our sister is martyr. She is still our sister and we are proud of what she did for Islam, for Palestine and for the Palestinians."[24] Nevertheless, the story was picked up and repeated by news organizations all over the world. For example, the *London Daily Mail*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Washington Times*, *London Times*, and *Jerusalem Post* all repeated a version of this narrative without independently investigating its veracity, despite the fact that it originated from unnamed sources within the Israeli military. The *Jerusalem Post* quoted the original report, which declared al-Raiyashi "was not a cold-blooded terrorist, steeped in faith and madness, who chose out of free will to turn her two young children into orphans–but instead a woman who was forced to carry out the act."[25] In other words, despite having performed a suicide mission that killed four Israelis, the official Israeli military position is that al-Raiyashi was not a terrorist after all. And further, that the default explanation for male suicide attackers—misguided religious fervor—was not a factor either. Reem al-Raiyashi was thereby multiply negated: neither a terrorist nor a religious fanatic, but simply a woman, whose maternity precludes and supersedes any other identity. However, the Identi–kit assemblage crafted by the Israeli military and press from pre-existing orientalist types does not, despite its compelling narrative, offer a more definitive portrait of al-Raiyashi than that staged by her martyr photograph. She eludes such attempts at categorization.

In Peggy Phelan's view, the "staged confrontation" of a photographic portrait exists between the photographer and the surface of the image, while the act of sitting for a photograph is a confrontation with one's own body—whose surface then performs the model's subjectivity for the camera. However, Phelan clarifies that, because it is "wedded to the surface, . . . the photograph gestures toward an interior image it cannot see."[26] If the mysterious power of suicide terrorism lies in the unreadable interior images of its practitioners, then I suggest they are not rendered legible though photographic representation. In fact, in the case of Reem al-Raiyashi, her opacity is being represented in this photograph: a performance of the decolonized mind of a terrorist. Al-Raiyashi presents her body's surface, a rehearsal for the performed absence of her suicide in which that surface is ablated. This image then, both obdurate and strangely tractable, in the end can only attest to a single fact: her death.

Photographing The Dead

    In his seminal study of photography, *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes writes that to "make oneself up" through a photographic portrait is "to designate oneself as a body simultaneously living and dead." According to Barthes, the weight of the observing lens prompts the sitter to make an image of herself in advance of the photograph—a process that both transforms and mortifies the body. This dynamic, designated a "social game"[27] by Barthes, is recast in the instance of Palestinian martyr photographs as a performance of radical subjectivity. The example offered by Barthes, of the failed political assassin Lewis Payne in his Washington Navy Yard cell waiting to be hanged (see figure 2), has a chilling resonance with al-Raiyashi's martyr poster in this sense. Both refer to an anterior future declaring both that the subject is going to die and that s/he is already dead. Barthes writes,

> In 1865, young Lewis Payne tried to assassinate Secretary of State W. H. Seward. Alexander Gardner photographed him in his cell, where he is waiting to be hanged. The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the Studium. But the punctum is: he is going to die. I read at the same time: This will be and This has been. I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What pricks me is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die. I shudder . . . over a catastrophe which has already happened. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.

The studium in Barthes's terms is the general sense of a photograph, a register that includes its political, historical, and cultural context, which is disrupted by the punctum, an "accident that . . . pricks (and) bruises" the viewer, a "roll of the dice"[28] that rends the surface of an image and gestures within and beyond it. In other words, the punctum is the performance of a photograph, a catastrophe that interrupts the attention of the viewer and disorganizes her perceptions. This catastrophic nature of photographs haunts al-Raiyashi's martyr poster, which likewise contains a complex temporal relation with the present-past and a potential future. However, a third element, suggested by this example but thus far unpacked, is the effect the agency of choosing one's own death may have on performances of subjectivity. The question I am asking is: if one may actively cocreate a photograph by sitting for it, how is the capacity for bodily transformation Barthes suggests affected by the foreknowledge of the body's violent self-abnegation, the choice
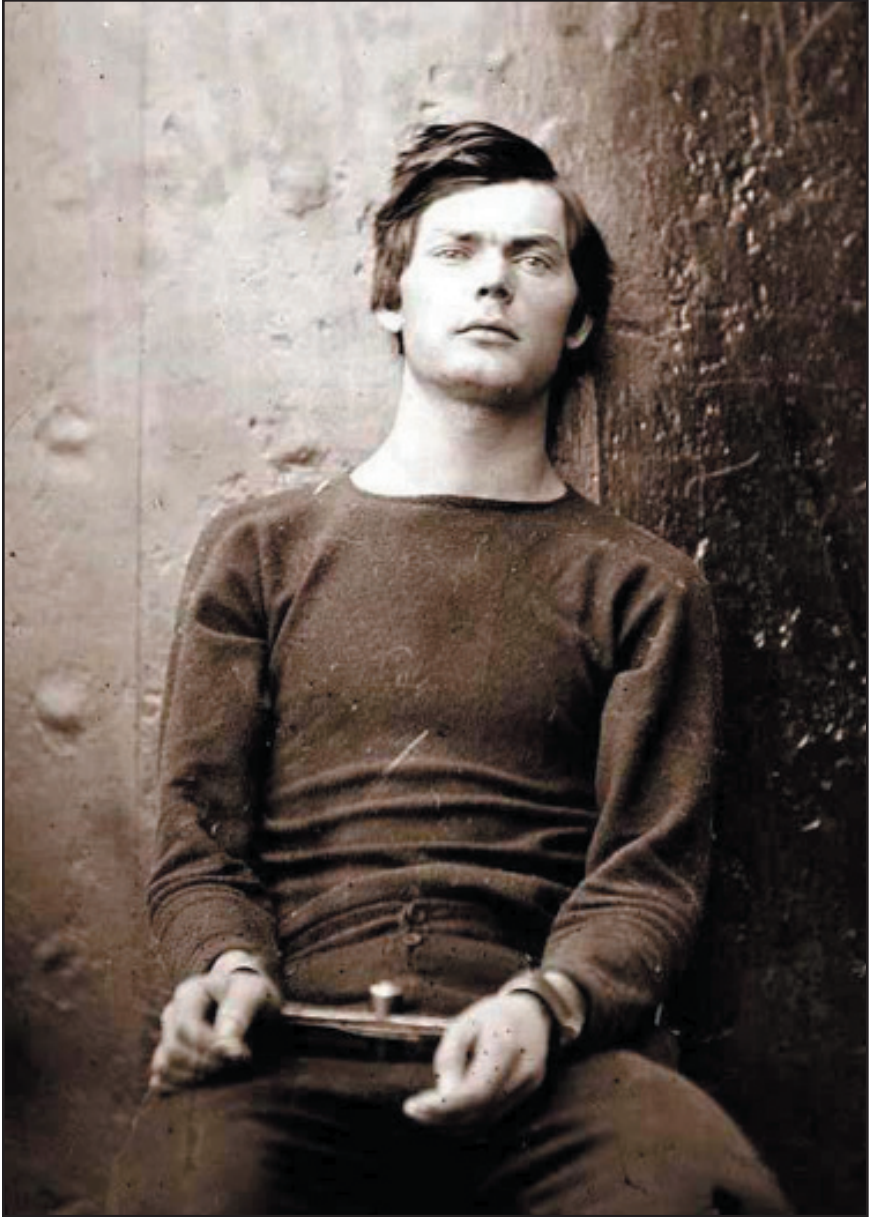
Fig. 2. Lewis Payne (1865). (*Photo: Alexander Gardner.*)

to die violently? The sociologist Celia Lury notes, the "freezing of time creates a dimension in which the future perfect of the photographic image—this will have been—may be suspended, manipulated and reworked in order to become the *past perfected*."[29] This juxtaposition of the anterior "future perfect" ("I *will*

have performed a suicide mission") with the "past perfected" ("I *had* performed a suicide mission") in a frozen moment describes the indexical nature of al-Raiyashi's martyr photograph. Photography may be seen here as a practice that extends the potential of al-Raiyashi's suicide attack to perform as a self-representation within and against Israeli State power as the rupture created by her exploding body is continually referenced by her martyr photograph. In other words, the dead/alive subject inhabits the photograph, which itself amplifies its mortal character and projects it back into the material, social field.

The central element of al-Raiyashi's martyr poster—the image of her holding her toddler son in her left hand and an assault rifle in her right—was taken in anticipation of her death, as is now customary in preparation for suicide bombing missions in Palestine. As she was photographed, Reem al-Raiyashi knew that she was going to die, but she also knew that she was the agent of her own demise. Therefore, while Lewis Payne may be thought of as the object of his photograph, al-Raiyashi is the subject of hers. This difference points up the subtle but important distinction between them: Payne's photograph was photojournalistic reportage while al-Raiyashi sat for hers in anticipation of her suicide, placing her martyr poster within a different genealogy of representations: the portrait.

The Martyr Poster-As-Portrait

The genre of portraiture is widely recognized as having been profoundly influential in defining individual self-identity. The photographic portrait was employed to extend and popularize the ceremonial presentation of the self, which had been a function of oil portraiture. In Celia Lury's view, photographic portraiture was constituted as a genre between these poles, a "complex mix of realism and allegorical caricature"[30] through which it would characterize itself as an idiom. Therefore, even as it was defining itself generically through recourse to evidentiary power, photographic portraiture contained the seed of its own contestation. It is with this ambivalent relation in mind that we may explore the various uses of photography to perform the human self.

The critic Allan Sekula argues that in its infancy photography suggested a system of representation that functioned both honorifically and repressively, a "double operation," he writes, "that is most evident in photographic portraiture." The ceremonial presentation of a bourgeois self, which photographic representation facilitated, was enabled by the simultaneous use of photography to delimit the contours of a new criminal body. Sekula proposes that modes of instrumental realism operate according to an "explicit deterrent or repressive logic," thus connecting indexically the uses of photography for artistic self-representation with those for criminal categorization: "A covert Hobbesian logic links the 'National Gallery' with that of the 'Police Act.'" Just as Hobbes's stark political philosophy suggests that obedience to unaccountable authority is the way to achieve peace, Sekula makes

explicit in these opposite figures in the body politic the argument that photographic portraiture gives material form to a hierarchical concept: some lives are worth more than others. Sekula writes,

> Every portrait implicitly took its place within a social and moral hierarchy. The private moment of sentimental individuation, the look at the frozen gaze-of-the-loved-one, was shadowed by two other more public looks: a look up, at one's "betters," and a look down, at one's "inferiors." Especially in the United States, photography could sustain an imaginary mobility on this vertical scale, thus provoking both ambition and fear.[31]

The genre of Palestinian martyr posters in general and al-Raiyashi's photo in particular confound this binary by intermingling the opposing roles Sekula suggests. In other words, her martyr poster functions both to honor the absent beloved *and* demarcate criminality because, under the terms created by neocolonial occupation, the boundaries between performances of selfhood and criminal acts become increasingly porous. While the "upward" look Sekula suggests has clear implications for an occupied subject, I would suggest that, rather than an accompanying "look down," this photograph performs a look *across* that signals the bonds of affiliation (religious, social, political, cultural) that cohere around the dreamed-for nation.

The social and moral hierarchy that was being staged via the emerging genre of the photographic portrait was also being realized through the nineteenth–century "scientific" interventions of phrenology and physiognomy, which turned on the belief that the surface of the body bore the apparent signs of private character. This notion depended on a conception of the self that is legible to outward authority—and the dispersal of photography's evidentiary power into both the popular imagination and the social sciences. The photographic portrait, then, must be viewed in relation to a larger twentieth-century project of definitive classification that sought to typologically fix individuals in a hierarchy through the creation of standard types and figures. The aesthetic conventions of photographic portraiture supported individual claims of ownership of a unique self, but that assumption of uniqueness was made dependent on the legible inscription of inwardness manifest across the body's surfaces.[32] The preoccupation with the body's surface, a foundational discourse in the history of photographic portraiture, has particular consequences for women in general and female colonial subjects in particular, which are made evident in my analysis of al-Raiyashi's martyr photograph.

Peggy Phelan writes, "Reading the body as the sign of identity is the way men regulate the bodies of women." In Phelan's analysis the politics of representational visibility are compatible with "capitalism's relentless appetite for new markets, . . . [and] the production and reproduction of visibility are part of the labor of the

reproduction of capitalism." She takes up the "unmarked" as a frame to critique the presumptions of the ideology of the visible, which contends that "representational visibility equals increased power," a proscription that in her view, if true, would lead to the Western political ascendancy of "almost naked young white women."[33] Malek Alloula similarly notes the difference between the staged images of Algerian women (often prostitutes, paid to sit for French cameras) and the material reality of life under French occupation for Algerian women in his study of Algerian postcards, *The Colonial Harem*. In her introduction to Alloula's study Barbara Harlow writes, "the postcards . . . no longer represent Algeria and the Algerian woman but rather the Frenchman's phantasm of the Oriental female and her inaccessibility behind the veil in the forbidden harem." She is outlining a historical practice of Western representation of Eastern women via a particular history of Algerian resistance. She writes, "As would happen later in Iran during the Khomeini-led revolution against the Shah's dictatorship, Algerian women collectively reassumed the veil . . . redefining it first as a symbolic, and later practical, instrument in their resistance to French domination." The frustration that the veil presents to the hungry Western eye makes it a key trope in sexist/orientalist discourses. Alloula notes that the veil "instills . . . the modality of the impossibility of photography."[34] He suggests this frustration was assuaged partly by the French generation of pornographic postcards in which Algerian women were not merely unveiled, but whose naked bodies were often entirely displayed for the camera. The forcible unveiling and photographic categorization of Algerian women by the French military, a parallel practice to the creation of ethnographic pornography, is another key example of Western desire manifested as colonial violence. This move toward transparency to the colonial State refigures Phelan's argument about the bodies of women in a Middle Eastern/North African context. The eye to which such images are addressed is not merely white, authoritarian, heterosexual, and male (as in Phelan's schema), but specifically Western and colonial.

The photograph has been used to map humankind typologically, generically, and specifically, a function that has supported patriarchal and colonial projects, but what I am arguing for here is an instrumental use of photography to perform the self in relation to the State. The Palestinian example is instructive: photography was the mass visual art of the first *intifada* because it was easily accessible in Palestinian society, and many photographs were circulated widely as posters. These photographs portrayed two different images of women: the young activist woman demonstrating in the streets and the mother confronting the Israeli soldier and wrestling with him over her son. This double image portrayed the dual nature of Palestinian women's participation in the national struggle in the first uprising, but it had roots in Palestinian women's activism prior to the 1970s, which championed traditional maternal roles.[35] However, the terms of motherhood itself became renegotiated through the demands the occupation placed on Palestinian mothers

and their displacement from the individual experience of mothering. The deaths of their children under the occupation engendered a collective experience wherein maternal care became dispersed throughout the community. Therefore, in the context of the occupation, *all* mothers became the mothers of *all* sons while particular mothers were comforted by the fact that the "collective" mother was taking care of her children (even as she had a meaningful role in caring for a "collective" son).[36] Sharing the experience of grief enabled mothers to refigure their personal losses as a communal political force. "The death of a son in battle was felt by the whole camp community as a loss, expressed in the common reference to martyrs as "sons of the camp."[37] And Palestinian women conspicuously articulated the "willing sacrifice" of their sons to resist the occupation as a substantial contribution to Palestinian resistance. Concurrent with this diffusion of maternal caring labor was the valorization of the sacrifices of individual mothers: if a son died in battle his mother became *umm al-shahid*, or "the mother of the martyr." Carol Bardenstein writes, "This seems to facilitate the wrenching transformation of a parent's indescribable and incomprehensible grief at the loss of a child, into a meaningful contribution that has its place in the broader context of the national struggle for survival." I suggest Reem al-Raiyashi's martyr image synthesizes these related but distinct self-representations of Palestinian women. It collapses the psychic space between the mother of the camp, who inserts her body between Israeli Defense Forces and "her" child; the mother of the martyr, whose loss is both personal and public; and the young militant woman who takes action. Bardenstein notes that the evolving representations of Palestinian women since the first *intifada* are also represented in traditional crafts such as copper enamel pieces, embroidered wall hangings, calendars, and paintings. She observes that, while "most of the traditional depictions of fighters are male, . . . one can find a very small number of these in which the fighters are clearly female, with eyes conspicuously outlined with eye kohl. Further it is common to find artistic portrayals of women *carrying a baby in one arm and a gun in another*" (emphasis mine).[38] Therefore, the image generated by al-Raiyashi's suicide mission, while shocking, is not entirely novel; it exists within a history of self-representations of Palestinian women generated since the *nakba* (catastrophe), the term Palestinians use to describe the founding of Israel and their subsequent exile.

Celia Lury suggests that the terms of self-possession (what might be considered the performance of self-making) in postmodernity have been/are being renegotiated through the medium of photography. In her view contemporary self-making is determined by the adoption of the photograph as a prosthetic organ, a relation we may think of as an *in*organic embodied practice. In other words, Lury proposes that the photograph has created a mediated extension of capability that dis- and re-assembles the self. Mimesis is central to this argument, as a metonymic relation between photographs and their referents operates both within and outside

representation.[39] In the terms presented by the example of al-Raiyashi's martyr photograph, the violent disruption of her body is metonymic with her image, which may perform her presence as political force, but the pain of this act, a metaphor for her life under neocolonial occupation, cannot be represented, only felt.

The haptic relation between photographs and what Rebecca Schneider has termed "the explicit body"[40] has been explored by Kathy O'Dell in her analysis of 1970s "masochistic" performance art. O'Dell argues that photography allows for an ongoing, although fragmentary, experience of a performance. Further, she suggests, "the viewer is made vulnerable by photography's denotative solicitation of the sense of touch."[41] This haptic reflex recalls the preoccupation with the body's surface—and its subsequent classification—that haunts portrait photography, as well as Phelan's dictum that the photograph gestures beyond it, to the body's depths. But O'Dell goes further, arguing the sense of touch—the only external sense to function reflexively (i.e., I touch myself to reassure myself that I am here)—is sensually activated by photographs of violence or its aftermath. This awareness, which O'Dell warns can be painful, "brings tactility and tactile knowing" and what Michael Taussig calls "the great underground knowledges locked therein" into wordless dialogue with the privileged modality of vision. In the context of Palestinian martyr images, I relate this painful awareness to Taussig's direction that the interpenetration of body and image is a necessary element for "revolutionary tension" to become "bodily innervation." For Taussig the collapse of body and image into one another is a "flashing moment of mimetic connection, no less embodied than it is mindful, no less individual than it is social."[42] This suggests to me that the relationships describing Palestinian suicide attacks (with self, other, the world, and the sacred) may continue to be performed *through* martyr photographs *after* the violent deaths of the subjects to which they refer. This operation, a use of photographic self-representation as prosthetic biography, re-authorizes the narrative/image as a technique of the self. Therefore, photographic portraiture plays a vital role in al-Raiyashi's martyr operation because it presents a material relation between self-representation and effacement, and a redefinition of the relationship between her Palestinian body and the Israeli state.

In *Unmarked* Peggy Phelan writes, "I am trying here to remember the traps of the visible and to outline, however speculatively, a different way of thinking about the political and psychic relationship between self and other, subject and object, in cultural reproduction." To elude these "traps of the visible" she proposes an "active vanishing, a deliberate and conscious refusal to take the payoff of visibility."[43] I argue that in Palestinian martyr operations the traces left by embodied performance, the structures created to capture them, and the absences left in their wake form a complex of representations. And the participation of Palestinian women in suicide attacks further troubles this knot, tying the image to the body. I must take care, however, not to suggest too liberatory a construction in my analysis of al-Raiyashi's

martyr photograph: the present absence that it performs is a sad sort of immortality. Art historian W.J.T. Mitchell warns, "We need to account for not just the power of images but their powerlessness, their impotence, their abjection. We need, in other words, to grasp both sides of the paradox of the image: that it is alive—but also dead; powerful—but also weak; meaningful—but also meaningless."[44] Al-Raiyashi's martyr photograph congeals the pain and suffering of the occupation of Palestine into a single image, but the violence it memorializes haunts this image, in both its past (perfect) and future (perfect). These vectors of force are "sticky" (bloody?) with complex "webs of copy *and* contact, image *and* bodily involvement."[45] Reem al-Raiyashi destroyed her body, but her radical subjectivity, contingent and engaged, continues to perform her presence.

Notes

[1] Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers, Allah's New Martyrs,* tr. David Macey (London: Pluto P, 2005) 113.

[2] The first female Palestinian suicide bomber, Wafa Idris, performed her mission in January of 2002, and the profile of her that emerged served in many ways as a template for the women who succeeded her. Unlike Reem al-Raiyashi, Wafa Idris was divorced and childless. She lost a daughter in childbirth and was subsequently unable to bear children, reportedly the reason for her divorce. Much was made of her childlessness, a condition that further marginalized her even among the occupied. However, while it is true that marriage and children are signs of effective womanhood in Palestinian culture (and indeed, throughout the Arab world), the use of Idris's infertility as a retroactive justification for her suicide mission was pure speculation. Nevertheless, her entire identity was posthumously defined in relationship to an absent child or husband. Idris's grief over the loss of her pregnancy and subsequent dissolution of her marriage, which according to the testimony of her friends was profound, was configured as moral weakness, a precondition for performing a suicide mission. While al-Raiyashi's suicide mission was met with horror by virtue of her successful maternity, Idris's was portrayed as pathetic by her lack. The common thread in these different accounts is the use of gender to neutralize political agency, so we can see that from the beginning the discourse around Palestinian women suicide bombers has been haunted by maternity.

[3] Kevin Toolis, "Cult of the Female Suicide Bomber," *The Sunday Mail* (Australia) 17 September 2006, State-Main Country Edition, Features: 51.

[4] Like "performance," there are hundreds of definitions for "terrorism" but no consensus. The intra- and international designations "terrorist" and "terrorism" are never merely descriptive but contain within them ever-multiplying political agendas. Some classify *all* intimidating opposition to the State as terror, while others allow for shades of distinction, as in the case of resistance to foreign occupation. Robert A. Pape, political scientist and director on the Chicago Project of Suicide Terrorism, defines terrorism generally as the use of violence by an organization *other than a national government* to intimidate or frighten a target audience for two broad purposes: to gain supporters and coerce opponents. Pape, *Dying To Win, The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005) 9. *The Oxford English Dictionary* specifies that "terrorist," in the contemporary sense of the term, "usually refers to a member of a clandestine or expatriate organization aiming to coerce an established government by acts of violence against it or its subjects."

[5] Kevin Toolis writes, "Hamas released pictures of al-Riyashi (sic) playing with her son Obedia, 3, and daughter Doha, 18 months, taken days before her death. Al-Riyashi (sic) poses with a gun beside her children, wearing the green Hamas bandanna that symbolizes her forthcoming suicide bombing." Toolis, "Cult of the Female Suicide Bomber," 51.

[6] The nurturing and caregiving aspects of motherhood and their transformation in the context of Palestinian national resistance may be found in a variety of cultural productions and artifacts. Therefore, while the trope of "homeland as woman" prefigured the displacement and exile of the Palestinian people with the formation of Israel in 1948, the shift in their circumstances gave rise to new representations. Carol Bardenstein, "Raped Brides and Steadfast Mothers: Appropriations of Palestinian Motherhood,"

The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right, ed. Annelise Orleck, Alexis Jetter, and Diana Taylor. (Hanover: U P of New England, 1997) 169-81.

    [7] 170.

    [8] For further analyses of these cultural types, their representations, and the roles they play in the movement for Palestinian liberation, in addition to the Bardenstein see also: Rema Hammami, "Palestinian Motherhood and Political Activism on the West Bank and Gaza Strip," *The Politics of Motherhood* 161-68; Julie Peteet, "Icons and Militants: Mothering in the Danger Zone," *Signs* 23.1 (1997): 103-29; James Graff, "Crippling a People: Palestinian Children and Israeli State Violence," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 13, Human Rights and Peoples' Rights in Literature and the Humanities/Huquq al-Insan wa al-Shuub fi al-Adab wa al-Ulum al-Insaniyah (1993): 46-63.

    [9] Pape 48, 47.

    [10] Khosrokhavar 110.

    [11] Pape writes, "During the first thirteen years of the occupation (1967 to 1980), only about 12,000 Jewish settlers resided in the Occupied Territories. From 1980 to 1995, this number increased more than tenfold, to 146,000, and by a further 50 percent from 1995 to 2002, to 226,000" (48).

    [12] Khosrokhavar 112.

    [13] Parvin Paidar, "Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran," *Cambridge Middle East Studies* (Cambridge U P 1995); Roksana Bahramitash, "The War on Terror, Feminist Orientalism and Orientalist Feminism: Case Studies of Two North American Bestsellers," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 14.2 (2005): 221-35; Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton U P, 2005); Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers* (New York: Rodal, 2003); Joyce M. Davis, *Martyrs, Innocence, Vengence and Despair in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

    [14] Pape 16, 23. Pape compiled a database of every suicide bombing and attack between 1980 and 2003 in which at least one terrorist killed him- or herself while trying to kill others. In his analysis of this data the modern phenomenon of suicide bombing has little connection to Islamic fundamentalism, or any world religion. "Rather," he writes, "what nearly all suicide attacks have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland" (4).

    [15] Khosrokhavar 128.

    [16] When secular organizations—notably, Yasser Arafat's Fatah party—failed to mobilize Palestinian youth, Islamic groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad took over the task of nation-building.

    [17] In his 2004 article for *New Scientist* magazine, Michael Bond quotes Ariel Merari, a psychologist at Tel Aviv University in Israel and "perhaps the foremost expert on Middle Eastern terrorism," as having been disabused of his former belief in the influence of depression on the actions of suicide bombers. Following a study wherein he considered the background and circumstances of every suicide bomber in the Middle East since 1983, he came to a different conclusion. Bond quotes Merari as saying, "In the majority (of suicide bombers) you find none of the risk factors normally associated with suicide, such as mood disorders or schizophrenia, substance abuse or history of attempted suicides." This opinion is echoed by Scott Atran, an anthropologist at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, who asserts, "There is no psychological profile whatsoever for suicide terrorists." Michael Bond, "The Making of a Suicide Bomber; What Drives Someone to Kill Themselves While Killing Others? Psychologists and Anthropologists Have Been Studying Suicide Attacks and Have Come to Some Startling Conclusions," *New Scientist* 15 May 2004: 34.

    [18] Khosrokhavar 129.

    [19] Bond writes, "In a study of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad suicide terrorists from the late 1980s to 2003, Claude Berrebi, an economist at Princeton University, found that only 13 per cent came from a poor background compared with 32 per cent of the Palestinian population in general. In addition, more than half the suicide bombers had entered further education, compared with just 15 per cent of the general population. And . . . economist Alan Krueger of Princeton University and the Russell Sage Foundation in New York and Jitka Maleckova of the Institute for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic, showed that Hezbollah militants who died in action in the 1980s and early 1990s were less likely to be impoverished and more likely to have attended secondary school than others of their age." "The Making of a Suicide Bomber."

    [20] Khosrokhavar 129.

    [21] Herman E. Kimsey. "The Identi-Kit." 27 June 2008 <https://www.cia.gov.library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol4no1/html/v04i1a03p_0001.htm>.

    [22] Khaled Abu Toameh, "Bomber's Husband Denies She Was Coerced for Adultery," *Jerusalem Post* 18 January 2004: 2.

    [23] Kevin Toolis, "She Looked Pregnant, Two or Three Months, but Otherwise She Was Completely

Normal . . ." *The Times Magazine* (London) 23 October 2004.

[24] Xinhua General News Service, "Gaza Family Proud of Suicide Bomber Daughter," 18 January 2004.

[25] Abu Toameh.

[26] Peggy Phelan. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance.* (London: Routledge, 1993) 37, 64.

[27] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 31. Barthes writes, "I pose, I know I am posing, I want you to know I am posing, but (to square the circle) this additional message must in no way alter the precious essence of my individuality" (11).

[28] 96, 27.

[29] Celia Lury, *Prosthetic Culture, Photography, Memory and Identity*, (London: Routledge. 1998) 3.

[30] The lineage of such representations, however, isn't entirely straightforward; Celia Lury notes the significance of caricature in the emerging visual realism of the self (42).

[31] Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (1986): 6, 7, 10.

[32] Lury 43, 45.

[33] Phelan 10, 11, 10.

[34] Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem, Theory and History of Literature* vol. 21, tr. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: 1986) xiv, xix, 16.

[35] Hammami 164.

[36] Bardenstein 178.

[37] Peteet 125.

[38] Bardenstein 179, 178.

[39] Writing after David Wills's *Prosthesis*, Celia Lury suggests, "prosthesis is the agency of the body in operations of a transfer into otherness, articulated through the radical alterity of ablation as loss of integrity" (18). In Lury's terms then a prosthesis, which may be virtual or actual, facilitates "experimentation as a technique of the self (and) makes possible a relation to the individual so produced (including the defining characteristics of consciousness, memory and embodiment)." Lury argues that these aspects of the self are increasingly being made into "sites of strategic decision making" (1, 5).

[40] That is, one which is "foremost a site of social markings, physical parts and gestural signatures of gender, race, class, age, sexuality—all of which bear ghosts of historical meaning, markings delineating social hierarchies of privilege and disprivilege." Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, (New York: Routledge, 1997) 2.

[41] Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998) 13, 15.

[42] Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 26, 23.

[43] Phelan 11, 19.

[44] W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005) 10.

[45] Taussig 21.