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PSYCHOLOGICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND THANATOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SUICIDAL TERRORISM

J.S. Piven*

Suicide actions are the most exalted aspect of the Jihad for the sake of Allah.

- Sheik Yussuf Al Qaradawi¹

[H]old tightly to the religion of God. Guide your children to the mosque and instruct them to attend the Qur'an and recitation lessons, and teach them to love jihad and martyrdom.

- Shadi Sleyman Al Nabaheen²

This work focuses on the psychological motivations of those who destroy themselves and others in the name of God. It must be stated at the outset that a psychological reading is not a moral or ethical evaluation of such acts. This piece does not debate whether such deeds are justified, and does not endorse or excuse acts called "suicidal terrorism," but seeks to explore and illuminate complex and elusive aspects of ideology and behavior. In addition, it must also be stated unequivocally that this paper does not essentialize people labeled terrorists, reduce them to a single type, archetype, caricature, or diagnose them as raving lunatics. It does seek out the dynamics of unconscious fantasy, and dwells upon the enigmatic speeches and texts of terrorists who drape their own actions in a theological language that sanctifies death. This paper is not a condemnation of Islam, but rather an elucidation of how ignominy, misery, and oppression catalyze a theology that transforms abjection and victimization into heroic apotheosis.

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¹ Yussuf Al Qaradawi, *The Fatwa of the Scholar, Dr. Yussuf Qardawi, Relating to the Participation of Women in Suicide Actions*, FILISTEENAL-MUSLIMA, available at http://www.intelligence.org.il/Eng/sib/2_05/funds_f.htm.

² Mohammed M. Hafez, *Rationality, Culture, and Structure in the Making of Suicide Bombers: A Preliminary Theoretical Synthesis and Illustrative Case Study*, in 29 *STUDIES IN CONFLICT & TERRORISM* 165, 176.

Suicide bombing is more than a conscious strategy designed to murder and terrorize enemies and oppressors. A psychological understanding of suicide bombing consequently requires more than a delineation of the stated motives and putative goals of the attack. There are numerous motives to murder others, and one must distinguish the form of the attack from the various motives and fantasies that are channeled into this strategy.

Not all suicide bombers have the same philosophy or political agenda. Suicide bombers hail from different countries, societies, cultures, and organizations, and they have different experiences, emotions, and ways of imagining life and death. They have been molded by divergent cultures, families, religions, and events. If suicide bombers perform similar acts, this does not mean that every one has the same purpose, mindset, or psychological organization. People can perform the same act with vastly different conscious and unconscious agendas, desires, strivings, and compulsions, and this means we must question—or even reject outright—the possibility that the act of suicide bombing is merely an intentional strategy of identical impetus for all performers. A psychological approach to suicide bombing is initiated by the axiom that there are profound and powerful motives of which people are completely unaware, and indeed, do not wish to know.

This article therefore attempts to understand not only why suicidal terrorists *say* they are destroying themselves and others, but also what is not being said: what is disavowed, obscured, and fulfilled in suicide bombing beyond the awareness of the actor. The task is to dissect some of the salient motives of suicide bombers by examining the cultural matrices and discourses that define, compel, validate, and exalt the strategy of destroying the self in vengeance against others.

PROBLEMS WITH CURRENT RESEARCH ON SUICIDE BOMBERS

Much of the prominent work on terrorism focuses on strategic, political, and socioeconomic factors. Hafez argues that destroying oneself in a terrorist act is a strategic decision based on the calculation of the cost of one's own death compared to the lives eradicated.³ Suicide terrorism is a stratagem employed by weak groups suffering from limited resources and the asymmetrical power advantage of militarily superior opponents.⁴ Terrorist groups are thus protective of their scarce financial, material, and human assets and prioritize secrecy and preservation of their organizations, waging

³ See Mohammed M. Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs: Strategy, Culture and Conflict in the Making of Palestinian Suicide Terrorism*, Presented at the National Institute of Justice (October 2004).

⁴ *Id.*

indirect, but efficient, types of warfare to impair their adversaries, while vouchsafing their own people and resources.⁵

For Hafez, what is putatively irrational or emotive violence is actually methodologically effective asymmetrical war.⁶ Palestinian suicide bombers, for instance, are unlikely to defeat the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) who have vastly superior training, armament, and prodigious resources that enable them to tolerate considerable material losses.⁷ Unsophisticated weaponry and conventional tactics have been ineffective against the IDF, while incurring severe Palestinian casualties.⁸ Targeting civilians, however, effectively terrorizes Israelis, impairs their economy, and steers settlers from the occupied territories.⁹ The disproportionate paucity of sacrificed “martyrs” compared to the abundance of murdered Israelis creates a more symmetrical “balance of terror.”¹⁰ According to Hamas’ overseas Political Bureau member Muhammad Nazzal, conventional military tactics within the occupied territories resulted in an average of one Israeli casualty for every twelve Palestinians killed, whereas suicide bombings within Israel’s 1948 borders yielded nine Israeli deaths per martyr.¹¹

According to Hafez, recruiting and training suicide bombers is also relatively inexpensive compared to the protracted arming and encampment of guerrillas.¹² Accomplishing their missions with superior versatility and accuracy, suicide bombers are the smartest bombs ever manufactured.¹³ Their impact is also psychologically devastating because of the horrific sense that they are committed, unwavering, and undeterred by the risk of death.¹⁴ Such notions about the strategic effectiveness of martyrdom as a “war of attrition” that could decimate the Israeli economy, jettison immigrants from Israel, generate pervasive dread in Israeli domiciles, and establish a “balance of terror” were confirmed repeatedly in conversations Hafez had with supporters of Hamas in the West Bank.¹⁵ Indeed, the Israeli love of life was construed as the “principal weakness” enabling the suicide bombers to strike fear in the hearts of their enemies.¹⁶

⁵ *Id.* at 3.

⁶ Hafez, *Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, *supra* note 2, at 168.

⁷ See Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, *supra* note 3; See also Hafez, *Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, *supra* note 2, at 173–74.

⁸ Hafez, *Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, *supra* note 2, at 174.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ See *id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² See *id.* at 166.

¹³ See *id.*

¹⁴ See *id.*

¹⁵ See *id.* at 174; See Hafez, *Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, *supra* note 2.

¹⁶ Hafez, *Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, *supra* note 2.

Among the recent plethora of studies, Pape's 2005 monumental work also incorporates comprehensive profiles to analyze suicide bombing as political strategy rather than the consequence of Islamic fundamentalism. Pape claims that over 95% of suicide attacks are campaigns orchestrated by sizeable militant organizations with substantial public support.¹⁷ Suicidal terrorism is positively correlated with military occupation by the United States, which colludes with corrupt undemocratic regimes and dictators.¹⁸ Suicidal terrorism therefore derives predominantly from countries considered American allies, where large segments of the populace resent American imperialism, occupation, and interference.¹⁹

Hence, while Muslim fundamentalism is usually touted as the primary motive for suicidal terrorism, Pape claims that the essential motive is expulsion of an occupying military presence.²⁰ The most prolific perpetrators of suicide terrorism are the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, which is a primarily secular Marxist-Leninist group "adamantly opposed to religion."²¹ Thus, suicide campaigns invariably have a demonstrable secular political agenda to force the withdrawal of military occupation from homeland territories. According to Pape, democracies such as the United States have repeatedly acquiesced to the demands of such terrorists because suicidal techniques have proved strategically efficacious.²² Such palpable effectiveness thus explains the increase in suicide bombing, as opposed to fundamentalist, theological, or eschatological motives.²³ Religion becomes a more crucial factor when the occupying military presence represents a divergent theological tradition, hence amplifying the sense that oppression and invasion are imbued with religious crusade and domination. Religion, then, only intensifies the feelings of victimization and hatred for the oppressors, rather than initiating it.

This perspective thus interprets terrorist motivation as a response to proximate issues. In such studies, terrorism is considered a reasoned response to political injustice and humiliation. Numerous authors thereby purport to examine the emotional responses of terrorists, but then rescue terrorist emotions from any implication that terrorists are driven by non-rational reactions. Though some analysts conspicuously outline a host of non-rational feelings and fantasies—not to mention paranoid and even delu-

¹⁷ ROBERT A. PAPE, *DYING TO WIN: THE STRATEGIC LOGIC OF SUICIDE TERRORISM* 38–39 (2005).

¹⁸ *See id.* at 4–5, 118.

¹⁹ *See id.* at 4–6.

²⁰ *Id.* at 4–5.

²¹ *Id.* at 4. Members of the Tigers are also of Hindu origin, thus additionally disconfirming the correlation with Islam. *Id.*

²² *Id.* at 44–45.

²³ *Id.* at 61–64.

sional responses—authors such as Stern, Robins and Post, Atran and Berko, Wolf, and Addad assert unequivocally that terrorists are not pathological.²⁴

One given in the war against terrorism seems to be that suicide attackers are evil, deluded or homicidal misfits who thrive in poverty, ignorance and anarchy As logical as the poverty-breeds-terrorism argument may seem, study after study shows that suicide attackers and their supporters are rarely ignorant or impoverished. Nor are they crazed, cowardly, apathetic or asocial. If terrorist groups relied on such maladjusted people, “they couldn’t produce effective and reliable killers”²⁵

This argument admirably avoids the unfortunate tendency to stigmatize those we find criminal or aberrant as mentally ill, negating their humanity and delegitimizing their causes as the deliria of mental defectives.

Such evasion consequently ignores the implications of its own evidence, however, and often renders such studies contradictory, shallow, and facile. The quote above also conflates ignorance, impoverishment, cowardice, and insanity, as though mental illness were a malady only of the indigent and craven. According to the above assumptions, proof of sanity resides in the notion that since terrorists are not misfits and maladjusted people, they must be devoid of any form of psychopathology or any other non-rational motivation. The explicit proof is that effective killers cannot be mentally ill, since they would then be ineffective and unreliable, which is both absurd and disproved by copious evidence.²⁶

The specious assumption is that if one can plan a meticulous attack, one must be sane, and conversely, that the mentally ill must be delirious raving lunatics. In contrast, one could isolate a number of psychological syndromes that are not only compatible with meticulous execution of murder, but are necessary for the dehumanization, projection, and dissociation often accompanying slaughter, and are even its fundamental motivations. It seems not to occur to the theorists referenced above that one can be a murderer capable of precise planning, yet pathologically dissociated from guilt

²⁴ See Anat Berko et al., *The Moral Infrastructure of Chief Perpetrators of Palestinian Suicidal Terrorism*, in 9 TERRORISM AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY 10 (Shlomo G. Shoham & Paul Knepper eds., 2005); ROBERT S. ROBINS & JEROLD M. POST, POLITICAL PARANOIA: THE PSYCHOPOLITICS OF HATRED (1997); JESSICA STERN, TERROR IN THE NAME OF GOD: WHY RELIGIOUS MILITANTS KILL (2005); Scott Atran, *Who Wants to be a Martyr?*, N.Y. TIMES, May 5, 2003, at A23.

²⁵ Scott Atran, *Who Wants to be a Martyr?*, N.Y. TIMES, May 5, 2003, at A23.

²⁶ LONNIE H. ATHENS, THE CREATION OF DANGEROUS VIOLENT CRIMINALS 73–74 (1989); see also JAMES GILLIGAN, VIOLENCE 250 (2006) (discussing a specific individual with mental illness who perpetrated a murder); CARL GOLDBERG, THE EVIL WE DO: THE PSYCHOANALYSIS OF DESTRUCTIVE PEOPLE 38–39 (2000) (discussing psychoanalysts tendency to explain the characteristics of “evil people” as symptoms of psychiatric diagnosis, and addressing the relationship between psychology and destructive behavior).

or remorse—suffering from defective empathic structures, trauma that undermines rationality, motivates defensively hostile responses, and engenders regressive and rigidified thinking that only conceives of the world in starkly divided categories of black and white, or utter good and evil, disallowing ambiguity or dissent.

Additionally, this mode of interpretation presumes that the group must be rational (since they “weed out” the lunatics), whereas research into group psychology demonstrates how significant conglomerations of individuals can engage in group fantasies—all sharing ideas, wishes, and convictions with absolute certainty—that are nevertheless entirely fictive. Not only is the group *not* a barometer of reality—either through consensus-made truth or the theory that the larger a population, the more likely their perceptions would be correct—but groups function in ways that validate and mutually reinforce fantasies. Fictions can be validated, propagandized, reinforced, canonized, mythologized, and naturalized as absolute fact in a group.²⁷

Not only does the group *not* seek reality or have a better chance of grasping it with the network of multiple minds, but the group tends toward regression and magical thinking, losing the capacity to discern reality and carry out independent thought. While sometimes retaining realistic anchors, other crucial aspects of cognition erode in the group, where the unreal is made to appear sensible and factual by mutual agreement and the pleasure of in-group confirmation. Members of such groups may or may not be individually pathological; nevertheless, the group itself may suffer from various modes of unreality, paranoia, and even delusions concerning their enemies, the world, and the theological beliefs that are utterly real to them.

Group normality may indeed consist of group delirium—shared imaginings that unite people in a political cause or religion—and from such delirium the most meticulous, realistic planning and murder may be contrived. The Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo is an apposite case. This group of highly educated, intelligent, and skilled individuals, with a diversity of scientific and technical proficiencies, meticulously designed and executed a bioterrorist attack that killed a dozen people and injured five thousand more. Nevertheless, Aum members suffered from delusions that their psychopathic leader Shoko Asahara was a god and savior, that various initiations and machines could clone the brainwaves of the guru, that the world was destined for Armageddon, that the cult would rescue humanity from its deca-

²⁷ Otto F. Kernberg, *Sanctioned Social Violence: A Psychoanalytic View, Part I*, 84 INT'L J. OF PSYCHOANALYSIS 683 (2003); see also Otto F. Kernberg, *Sanctioned Social Violence: A Psychoanalytic View, Part II*, 84 INT'L J. OF PSYCHOANALYSIS 953 (2003) (discussing the way that fundamentalist ideologies shape the reality of those who adhere to the ideologies, specifically terrorists); RONALD BARTHES, MYTHOLOGIES 123–35, 142–45 (Jonathan Cape trans., 1972) (analyzing ways that languages uses myth to distort and frames reality).

dence by initiating the apocalypse, and that members of the cult could be reborn in the cataclysmic aftermath.²⁸ The fact that a group agrees on an idea and plans a murder scientifically is not proof of sanity, only that their fantasies have united them in a potentially lethal purpose.²⁹

Some authors, cited previously, describe terrorism as a reaction to the horrifying and traumatic devastation around them, the murder of civilians, the abject injustice, humiliation, desolation, and slaughter that befall their communities.³⁰ These analyses tend to conclude that the terrorist response to such misery, humiliation, and injustice is a strategic means of wreaking vengeance against the perpetrators.³¹ Despite the appalling massacre that motivates terrorists, these authors contend that the myriad of traumas only motivate reprisal, but somehow do not undermine a sense of reality and sanity, as though one *could* react to such murder and devastation sanely. Somehow one may be repeatedly traumatized but not irrational or pathological as a result.

What is required is an appreciation of the impact of trauma not only on the initial victims, but also on future generations because victims of trauma do not react realistically. Witness the American reaction to 9/11, which understandably—but not *rationally*—included feelings of shock, disbelief, rage, paranoia, militancy, and even guilt. Calls to nuke Afghanistan and bomb them into the Stone Age were fairly commonplace, as were reactions of dissociation, remorse, panic, and an inability to cope. American soldiers returning from one tour of Iraq suffer the symptoms of traumatic stress, and Israeli soldiers often manifest severe signs of trauma derived from experiences of inflicting violence on the Palestinians. Consider what happens when one is traumatized repeatedly—when one does not see it on television while sitting on the couch—but witnesses it unceasingly for years, when one watches the humiliation and blood splatter every day. Then consider how this affects children, whose psychic structure is so much more vulnerable to trauma and derangement, whose very emotional architecture is organized, or disrupted, by such repeated trauma. Consider how such trauma can be transmitted transgenerationally, not only through the teaching

²⁸ ROBERT JAY LIFTON, *DESTROYING THE WORLD TO SAVE IT: AUM SHINRIKYO, APOCALYPTIC VIOLENCE, AND THE NEW GLOBAL TERRORISM* 44–49 (1999). Actually, the group was successful in more than one attack, previously murdering several others with biological agents. They also failed numerous times until their skills were sufficiently honed to distribute lethal doses of sarin gas in the Tokyo subways.

²⁹ Kernberg, *Part I*, *supra* note 27, at 690–93; Kernberg, *Part II*, *supra* note 27, at 956–60; *See generally* DIDIER ANZIEU, *THE GROUP AND THE UNCONSCIOUS* (Benjamin Kilborne trans., 1984); WESTON LA BARRE, *THE GHOST DANCE: THE ORIGINS OF RELIGION* (1970); WILFRED R. BION, *EXPERIENCE IN GROUPS* (1961); DANIEL GOLEMAN, *VITAL LIES, SIMPLE TRUTHS* (1986); IRVING LESTER JANIS, *VICTIMS OF GROUPTHINK* (1972).

³⁰ *See id.*

³¹ *See id.*

and speech of their parents and neighbors, but through interaction with people ineluctably altered by their trauma. The effects are almost incomprehensibly complicated and destructive. To suggest that in such an environment people are inherently rational is not only a denial of the impact of violence, but is further violence against them by denying the depth of such pain and devastation. It denies them their wounds.³² Does this mean they are all insane? Of course not. It means that people suffering such desolation are affected in serious ways, and to assume that the emotions are not rife with turmoil is unrealistic, insensitive, and emotional annihilation.

One tends to assume that if there is real violence and oppression, then a retaliatory response is rational, especially if the tactics are realistic. Despite this premise, the strategic response does not make the retaliatory impulse rational, nor its aims, choice of targets, or claims. For example, one can spin an unrealistic fantasy about one's putative enemies based on real oppression. One can respond to actual violence with realistic tactics but genocidal proclamations. If the Israeli government is oppressive, is every retaliation reasonable? Shall we believe that the call for the elimination of every Jew and the Zionist conspiracy is rational? When someone responds to a horrible atrocity, such as a soldier breaking the hands of a child who throws rocks,³³ is it reasonable to demand the death of every Jew on earth? Is the mass hate and imagination of the Zionist conspiracy rational? Is the impulse to slaughter?

As Kressel reminds us, not every claim of victimization is a realistic assessment of the victimizer.³⁴ The actuality, source, and scope of the evil

³² See generally Rudolph Binion, *Europe's Culture of Death*, in *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DEATH AND FANTASY AND HISTORY* 119 (Jerry S. Piven ed., 2004); Ani Kalayjian & Marian Weisberg, *Generational Impact of Mass Trauma: The Post-Ottoman Turkish Genocide of the Armenians*, in *JIHAD AND SACRED VENGEANCE: PSYCHOLOGICAL UNDERCURRENTS OF HISTORY* 254 (Jerry S. Piven & Chris Boyd eds., 2002); VAMIK VOLKAN, *THE NEED TO HAVE ENEMIES AND ALLIES* (1988); VAMIK VOLKAN, *BLOODLINES: FROM ETHNIC PRIDE TO ETHNIC TERRORISM* (1997); VAMIK VOLKAN, *BLIND TRUST: LARGE GROUPS AND THEIR LEADERS IN TIMES OF CRISIS AND TERROR* (2004).

³³ Though Rabin was reputedly a man of peace, he also apparently advocated the policy of breaking the hands and legs of Palestinians (adults and children) who threw stones. There are numerous internet, magazine, and newspaper reports of the torture and brutality inflicted by Israeli soldiers, though some accounts seem more reliable than others. Allison Weir, *U.S. Media Coverage of Israel and Palestine: Choosing Sides*, in *CENSORED 2005: THE TOP 24 CENSORED STORIES* (2004); John Kiffner, *Arabs Recount Severe Beatings by Israeli Troops*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 23, 1988; Anthony Lewis, *Mr. Rabin's Policy*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 21, 1988, at A27; Gilles d'Aymery, *Justice and Palestine: An Oxymoron?*, Oct. 4, 2004, <http://www.swans.com/library/art10/ga183.html>; Nancy Gibbs et al., *Yitzhak Rabin & Yasser Arafat*, TIME, Nov. 3, 2005, available at <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1125850,00.html>; Ralph Schoenman, *The Hidden History of Zionism*, Apr. 19, 1988, <http://takingaimradio.com/hh/pref.htm#n10>.

³⁴ N.J. KRESSEL, *MASS HATE: THE RISE OF GENOCIDE AND TERROR* 15 (2002).

may be vastly distorted, as may the scope of reprisal reflect utterly rageful, vengeful, irrational feelings and projections. Real victimization can create a victimization mythology that distorts the causes of the events, sanctifies vengeance, and draws on past injustices that validate this mythologized worldview. This is what Volkan calls “chosen trauma.”³⁵ A group may recall victimization that occurred a thousand years ago to mythologize the fantasy that its people are always the victims, ignoring its own aggression and the bloodshed initiated by it. It is an act of supreme naiveté to assume that because one group has been harmed, every act done in reprisal is rational.

Scholars differ in their assessments of the motives of suicide bombers and their emotional states. The eminent CIA profiler Jerrold Post considers terrorists “normal” because they evidence no conspicuous abnormalities or symptoms, and if they did they would certainly be ousted by the terrorist organization.³⁶ Post calls terrorists “true believers” who often suffer from such misery and desolation that they can be manipulated by paranoid leaders and directed like missiles toward their targets.³⁷ They are “driven to commit acts of violence as a consequence of psychological forces,” are “compelled” and “drawn to the path of terrorism” so they may inflict violence,³⁸ and also, terrorists utilize defense mechanisms endemic to borderline psychotics such as splitting and projective identification in relation to their enemies.³⁹ Apparently, however, terrorists evidence no psychopathology.⁴⁰ Even their paranoia is a product of socialization and a group phenomenon, and does not reach psychotic proportions.⁴¹

One of the problems with Post’s analysis is that he continually cites the deep humiliation and pain of terrorists, calling them paranoid “true believers,” while maintaining the belief in their normality.⁴² A “true believer” may indeed be manipulated by a leader and group, but this *is* psychopathology. Post fails to see how socialization and indoctrination can be enormous-

³⁵ VOLKAN, BLIND TRUST, *supra* note 32, at 47–52.

³⁶ Jerrold M. Post, *The Psychological and Behavioral Bases of Terrorism: Individual, Group and Collective Contributions*, 14 GEO. WASH. INT’L AFFAIRS REV. 195, 195–96 (2005).

³⁷ *Id.* at 197.

³⁸ Jerrold M. Post, *Terrorist Psycho-Logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces*, in ORIGINS OF TERRORISM: PSYCHOLOGIES, IDEOLOGIES, THEOLOGIES, STATES OF MIND 25, 25 (Walter Reich ed., 1990).

³⁹ *Id.*; ROBERT S. ROBINS & JERROLD M. POST, POLITICAL PARANOIA: THE PSYCHOPOLITICS OF HATRED 77–78 (1997).

⁴⁰ Post, *supra* note 36, at 196.

⁴¹ Post claims that terrorists are “normal” because they are not psychotic, a peculiar conceptual leap that simplistically voids all forms of severe disorders and even psychopathology in the borderline spectrum. Post, *supra* note 36, at 195.

⁴² ROBINS & POST, *supra* note 39, at 101–02; Post, *supra* note 36, at 195–97.

ly traumatic. One who is manipulated and programmed is not merely brain-washed and filled with misinformation, and cannot be easily deprogrammed if taken from the group.⁴³ The indoctrination process can be so brutal and injurious that it destroys an already vulnerable, fragile personality, even while it gives one purpose. It can not only arouse paranoid potential, but also exacerbate and even imprint it on the biological level. The brain itself can be embossed with paranoid anxiety that is extraordinarily difficult to change.⁴⁴

Many of the paranoid "true believers" Post considers normal are actually fanatics when not under the group's influence. One cannot consider the ideological commitment of Osama bin Laden or Muhammad Atta a product of group psychology. Atta lived in America, which did not decrease his resolve, but may well have intensified it when he was exposed to American hedonism and modernity. The fanatic is not only a transitory pawn, but he can also be a person of permanent paranoia, suffering from malignant narcissism and deeply pathological projections and defenses.⁴⁵ The fanatic obsession with a totalizing cause and the perception of the world in purified black and white terms is not only induced, but can also be a permanent state of psychological arrest and a defense against terror, chaos, ambiguity, and vulnerability.

Misperceptions and misinformation about Jews may be commonplace in the Middle East, but when people have been told all their lives that Jews are wicked bloodthirsty enemies who eat children and conspire against Muslims with a worldwide network, this becomes a delusion. When children are indoctrinated from the time they can speak that the Jews are an insidiously wicked group ceaselessly striving for the death of all Palestinians, terror continually traumatizes the fragile psyche and organizes (or deranges) the cognitive processes with the imagination that cataclysmic evil may strike at any moment. The misinformation has induced so much terror and siphoned so many other angry, humiliating, and fearful emotions into the Jewish image that paranoia has become the psychic architecture.

When Kressel writes about the collective delusion regarding Jews,⁴⁶ he describes not merely the dissemination of inaccurate information or propaganda, but a propensity for paranoid thinking and fantasizing that replaces any semblance or reality concerning Jews (not Israeli politics). Jews are not merely distorted, but are projected, as well. The image of the Jew

⁴³ Post, *supra* note 36, at 197. Some may be deprogrammed, but many others, as I argue, have been brutalized and traumatized, and require far more extensive help.

⁴⁴ See generally JOSEPH LEDOUX, *SYNAPTIC SELF: HOW OUR BRAINS BECOMES WHO WE ARE* (2002).

⁴⁵ Kernberg, *Part I*, *supra* note 27, at 693; Kernberg, *Part II*, *supra* note 27, at 953.

⁴⁶ KRESSEL, *supra* note 34, at xxiv.

secretly conveys the inner turmoil of the person who imagines and recreates his enemy. As Robins and Post demonstrate, many Muslims perceive any random and even minuscule event as a Jewish conspiracy.⁴⁷ Even a tiny but unexpected mark on a piece of clothing becomes evidence of an insidious collective Jewish plot against hapless Muslims.⁴⁸ Indoctrination is not the only group agreement or group anxiety that has mistaken the Jew. It has so warped the sense of reality that paranoia has been imprinted, and individuals suffer from a ubiquitous post-traumatic stress disorder, featuring Jews as the permanent nightmare and persecutor, regardless of the fact that no Jew is responsible for such imaginings. No Jew is actually guilty of such machinations, nor has any provided an iota of reason to support such profuse fantasies that the world is teeming with scheming Jews bent upon Muslim agony. One cannot assert that there is good reason to believe Jews are secretly marking Arab clothing for some untold sinister purpose. And again, the Israeli government is not a worldwide Zionist conspiracy.

To conclude from Israeli military strikes that all Palestinian suffering and *any* random sign is evidence of Jewish conspiracy would be to conclude from the actual instances of suicide bombers that a fleck on one's kosher hot dog were evidence of Palestinian conspiracy to taint one's wienener with traife. It would be like imagining that the Palestinians secretly controlled the whole world—all industry, entertainment, and government—and were with all these pervasive powers engaged in ubiquitous efforts to liquidate all Jews, whether through bombs, child cannibalism, or befouled frankfurters. Not actual Israeli militance, but the infinitude and omnipresence of Jewish conspiracy and malevolence is the delusion of reference, a paranoid means of rendering any and all evil the fault of Jews, namely imaginary Jews who in this delirium control the world and conspire for the death of all Muslims.

Thus, while one might reasonably suggest that the profusion of Israeli violence against Palestinians traumatizes them into fearing the imminence of death and destruction, one must also recognize the immense impact of indoctrinating children into believing that all Jews are a force of worldwide conspiratorial evil. One should also consider that while groups regress cognitively and emotionally, this regression is not inevitable. Groups also willingly regress, for this allows members to become dependent like children on powerful leaders, to behave in ways that would ordinarily be forbidden, and to perform violent acts without fear of punishment or accusation because the acts are sanctified by the leader. Groups can also nurture enemy images, for these enable intracommunal conflicts to be projected

⁴⁷ ROBINS & POST, *supra* note 39, *passim*.

⁴⁸ ROBINS & POST, *supra* note 39, at 54–55.

onto the other and combated.⁴⁹ If one needs and nurtures fantasies of the enemy and stays in a state of regression and fantasy, then in one sense, the person has chosen not to emerge from the dream, or hallucination. It is gratifying in manifold ways, and hence, one should be wary of assuming that one has been manipulated beyond his own will or capacity to resist.

Implicitly, then, by claiming terrorists are not pathological, even the most paranoid idea is muted to support the conclusion that terrorists are people whose reasoning faculties are entirely intact. One wonders just how irrational or paranoid a terrorist must be for such analyses finally to suggest that he may be driven by ideas and fantasies other than a reasoned response to political oppression.

There is the simultaneous acknowledgment of deeply nonrational motives, but a denial that terrorist strategies are nonrational and derived from deeper, more complex causes than the actual political problems being addressed. This argument seems to tacitly assume that there is only overt disorder or normality, rather than a spectrum of psychological problems ranging from ordinary but minor conflicts, to isolated aspects of reality distortion and obsession, to complete decompensation and psychosis. From such a perspective, one is either functional or not, whereas there is ample evidence that people can suffer serious reality impairments or personality defects while nevertheless being rational or functional in other ways.⁵⁰

Another tacit assumption seems to be that unless there is overt or demonstrable symptomatology, there are no deeper motives at all. This conflates normality with the absence of nonrational motives and unconscious fantasies, as though "normal" people are fully conscious, completely aware of themselves, and in control and unburdened by irrational needs and impulses. The supposition is that "normal" people are not motivated by unconscious emotions and fantasies. Such facile explanations divest the mind of its intricacy, capacity, and proclivity for imagination and contradiction, and the sense that our conscious ideas and emotions may be comprised of a matrix of rational and nonrational ideas.

Consider the example of Silke, who argues that suicide can be a sensible act, the behavior of "rational, reasonable, relatively ordinary individuals."⁵¹ Further, "the more reliable studies on the psychology of terrorists have refuted the view that they suffer from mental problems or are other-

⁴⁹ See generally ROBINS & POST, *supra* note 39, at 77–78; VOLKAN, THE NEED TO HAVE ENEMIES AND ALLIES, *supra* note 32; VOLKAN, BLIND TRUST, *supra* note 32.

⁵⁰ See generally MICHAEL EIGEN, THE PSYCHOTIC CORE (1986); MICHAEL EIGEN, AGE OF PSYCHOPATHOLOGY (2006), available at http://psychoanalysis-and-therapy.com/human_nature/eigen/pref.html; NANCY MCWILLIAMS, PSYCHOANALYTIC DIAGNOSIS: UNDERSTANDING PERSONALITY STRUCTURE IN THE CLINICAL PROCESS (1994).

⁵¹ Andrew Silke, *The Role of Suicide in Politics*, 18 TERRORISM AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE 1, 36 (2006).

wise psychologically deviant.”⁵² Silke names no studies, but interestingly, such studies do exist and have been continually cited by others in the field.⁵³ The problem is, obviously, that supplying no evidence and merely claiming something is proved does not actually prove anything. The appearance of consensus then becomes a clichéd way of not addressing the conceptual and methodological issues, whereas many of the psychological studies purporting to demonstrate an absence of terrorist pathology are susceptible to serious criticisms.⁵⁴

Silke’s argument that murdering oneself can be reasonable is comprised of several historical examples, such as the suicide of Cato after defeat by Caesar’s armies and *kamikaze* self-sacrifice.⁵⁵ The ineradicable problem here is that none of these historical examples speaks for itself, and Silke has provided no real evidence of the psychological motives for such cases. Certainly his examples make it seem that certain instances of suicide could be rational, but we have no access to the unconscious fantasies and motives of Cato. Even if we allow for the possibility that some suicides are not driven by unconscious motives, Silke has not in any sense proved that the suicides of Palestinian bombers are rational. The only conclusion is that they might or might not be, since no real evidence is cited.

Can we really assume that the simply stated motives of an act preclude all else? Shall we take all suicides at their word? The study of suicide demonstrates far more intricate motives than the conscious subject knows. Were one to actually investigate these historical examples, one might find they are far more complicated than the simplistic versions that desiccate them of any psychological content. There were, indeed, complex and varying emotions among the *kamikaze* pilots, including a profound need to feel

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ See Jerry S. Piven, *Terrorist Theology, Hallucination, and Apotheosis in Death*, in *TERRORISM, JIHAD, AND SACRED VENGEANCE* (Jerry Piven et al. eds., 2nd ed. 2007); see also Jerrold M. Post, *The Psychological and Behavioral Bases of Terrorism: Individual, Group and Collective Contributors*, 14 *INT’L AFFAIRS REVIEW* 195, 195–6 (2005). As argued above, they tend to assume that since terrorists can be highly intelligent and functional, they cannot be irrational or pathological, since they would then be “apathetic,” “asocial,” “indigent,” or some species of drooling mental patients suffering paroxysms of frenzied homicidal rage. Such studies are also usually based on brief interviews, as though these could be sufficient to fathom the complexities of human motives for murder. Finally they tend to ignore terrorist discourse, especially the language of totalizing theology as its validation of apocalyptic and genocidal justice. This discourse is a vital source of information about the cognition of the terrorist, the disposition toward paranoia, even hallucination, the black and white schema that tolerates no deviation, the worldview that demands dissenters must die, etc.

⁵⁵ Silke, *supra* note 51, at 40–44.

loved that drove them toward fusion in death, or the desire for oblivion against the agony of life.⁵⁶

Since time began
the dead alone know peace.
Life is but melting snow.

Kanete naki
mi koso yasukere.
yuki no michi.

(Nandai; d. 1817)⁵⁷

The Japanese writer Yukio Mishima also committed suicide for the emperor, using a Japanese sword to open his bowels in the name of national and cultural salvation.⁵⁸ His rhetoric seems rational to those who decried the failure of Japan to protect its people and culture and believed that the defeat of the emperor and acquiescence to the imposition of an American constitution were opprobrious.⁵⁹ If we believe Mishima's rhetoric, one can die a samurai warrior for Japan, a superlatively rational person in control of his faculties, who chooses to sacrifice himself for a cause.⁶⁰ If one examines Mishima's life, novels, essays, and speeches, however, what emerges is a picture of someone who utilized political and nationalistic clichés, bombast, gasconade, and homiletics to gratify obsessive sadomasochistic desires, while cloaking them in the aura of proud nobility and social sacrifice.⁶¹ He was a man infatuated with violence, homosexual murder, pederastic rape, disembowelment (of himself, others, lovers, and kittens), and the sexual

⁵⁶ Viggo V. Jensen & Thomas A. Petty, *The Fantasy of Being Rescued in Suicide*, in *ESSENTIAL PAPERS ON SUICIDE* 131–41 (Mark J. Goldblatt & John T. Maltzberger eds., 1996). See also Dan H. Buie, Jr. & John T. Maltzberger, *The Devices of Suicide: Revenge, Riddance, and Rebirth*, in *ESSENTIAL PAPERS ON SUICIDE* 397–415 (Mark J. Goldblatt & John T. Maltzberger eds., 1996) (discussing the idealization of suicide and the fantasy that death brings a person some pleasure or inner peace); JERRY S. PIVEN, *THE MADNESS AND PERVERSION OF YUKIO MISHIMA* 114 (2004) (describing the philosophy and culture of kamikaze pilots); Norman L. Farberow & Edwin S. Shneidman, *The Logic of Suicide*, in *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SUICIDE* 63–71 (Norman L. Farberow et al. eds., 1970) (describing the fallacies in belief systems of individuals who commit or attempt to commit suicide); Ruth Stein, *Evil in Love and as Liberation*, in *TERRORISM, JIHAD, AND SACRED VENGEANCE* 41–55 (Chris Boyd et al. eds., 2004) (describing how killing is an attempt to fulfill a fantasy and eliminate conflicting emotions); C.W. Wahl, *The Fear of Death*, 21 *BULL. OF THE MENNINGER CLINIC* 214, 214–22 (1997) (discussing the roles of hatred, love of God, and fear in the psyche of terrorists).

⁵⁷ Poem by Nandai, in *JAPANESE DEATH POEMS* 249 (Yoel Hoffman ed., 1986).

⁵⁸ JOHN NATHAN, *A BIOGRAPHY*, 279–80 (2000); See also PIVEN, *supra* note 56, at 92–95.

⁵⁹ PIVEN, *supra* note 56, at 120–23.

⁶⁰ *Id.* at 121.

⁶¹ *Id.* at 246.

ecstasies of suicide long before politics aroused his interest. Death was his first and last orgasm.⁶²

There is far more to thanatology than Silke would seem to know—far deeper and more opaque motives for suicide.⁶³ I would argue that death is *never* death plain and simple; death is never an idea devoid of profound psychological significance. One can pretend death is insignificant, a common fact of existence, or something one accepts rationally and without deeper feelings, but there is considerable evidence that the awareness of death—how it is conceived, imagined, denied, and displaced—has a crucial impact on psychological functioning, including its fundamental coalescence with worldview, religion, politics, violence, and psychopathology.⁶⁴

The elusive and symbolic meaning of death for suicide bombers is discussed below, but for now, this section will focus on the importance of recognizing the intricacies of human motivation beyond rationality and mere strategy. Compelling arguments have been made for the strategic use of suicide missions, but this does not preclude other over-determined emotions and motives. This returns us to the problem, then, of determining the “real” motives of terrorists, as though isolating the political causes annulled or attenuated the theological significance, rendered other motives irrelevant, and all other explanations defunct. Despite the flurry of encomia for Pape’s work, for instance, it is susceptible to a number of devastating criticisms, including misrepresentations of religiosity among terror groups and distortions of the statistical data. Roberts, for instance, demonstrates how the Tamil Tigers are *not* predominantly secular, mobilizing “both the Hindu majority and a significant Christian minority within the Sri Lankan Tamil population via modalities that are deeply rooted in the lifestyles and religious

⁶² According to his autobiographical novel *Confessions of a Mask* (1949), Mishima achieved his first orgasm while looking at Guido Reni’s painting of Saint Sebastian being penetrated by arrows. Mishima’s erotic obsession with penetrating and being penetrated, murdered, and eviscerated lends his actual death a sexual color. NATHAN, *supra* note 58, at 95; *See also* PIVEN, *supra* note 56, at 40–41.

⁶³ Aside from this, there is considerable evidence that many *kamikaze* pilots were far more ambivalent about their missions than we imagine. EMIKO OHNUKI-TIERNEY, *KAMIKAZE, CHERRY BLOSSOMS, AND NATIONALISTS: THE MILITARIZATION OF AESTHETICS IN JAPANESE HISTORY* 238 (2002).

⁶⁴ *See generally* ROBERT JAY LIFTON, *THE BROKEN CONNECTION: ON DEATH AND THE CONTINUITY OF LIFE* (American Psychiatric Press 1996) (1983); *DEATH AND DENIAL: INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON THE LEGACY OF ERNEST BECKER* (Daniel Liechty ed. 2002); DANIEL LIECHTY, *TRANSFERENCE AND TRANSCENDENCE: ERNEST BECKER’S CONTRIBUTION TO PSYCHOTHERAPY* (1995); *THE DEATH ANXIETY HANDBOOK* (Robert A. Neimeyer ed., 1994); Irvin D. Yalom, *EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOTHERAPY* (1980); Marvin Hurvich, *The Place of Annihilation Anxieties in Psychoanalytic Theory*, 51 *J. AM. PSYCHOANALYTIC ASS’N* 2, 579.

practices of Tamils in India and Sri Lanka.”⁶⁵ Current support for the argument focusing on secular and strategic aspects of suicide bombing does not take sufficient account of the profuse theological language of numerous terrorist organizations and leaders. As Hafez contends:

[S]trategy alone cannot explain the decision of individuals to accept the role of martyrs. . . . Strategy may explain the recruiter’s logic in the selection of suicidal tactics, but not the rationality of the bombers themselves. To probe the motivations of individual bombers, we need to look beyond strategic calculations and into the realm of cultural frameworks and religious appeals.⁶⁶

Palestinian martyrs are celebrated, honored, and publicized on murals and posters. Wills and final letters reveal the joy in martyrdom and exaltation of God.⁶⁷

My last wish to you my family is that none of you should weep in my procession to heaven. Indeed, distribute dates and ululate in the wedding of martyrdom.

Love for *jihad* and martyrdom has come to possess my life, my being, my feelings, my heart, and my senses.

Dear Father: If I do not defend my religion, my land and holy sites . . . then who will liberate the land and the holy places? . . . We only die once, so let it be for the sake of God.

May our blood become the light that shows the way toward liberation for those around us. Let us raise the banner of truth, the banner of Islam.

I ask God almighty that my martyrdom is a message . . .⁶⁸

Further, this theological language is often fanatically apocalyptic, calling not only for political freedom but the extermination of entire populations in the name of God.⁶⁹ Such terrorist discourse invokes divine justification for mass murder, demands obedience from adherents under the auspices of divine judgment, threatens dissenters with divine wrath, invokes Qur’anic edicts to sanctify its pronouncements, and claims that mass murder will be inflicted through the arm of God.⁷⁰ To ignore the profusion of such theolog-

⁶⁵ Michael Roberts, *Tamil Tiger “Martyrs:” Regenerating Divine Potency?*, 28 *STUDIES IN CONFLICT & TERRORISM* 493, 533.(2005).

⁶⁶ See Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, *supra* note 3, at 5; See also Hafez, *Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, *supra* note 2, at 181.

⁶⁷ See Hafez, *Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, *supra* note 2, at 175–77; See also Siamak Movahedi, *Death, Fantasy, and the Politics of Self-Destruction*, in *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DEATH IN FANTASY AND HISTORY* 13, (Jerry S. Piven ed., 2004).

⁶⁸ Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, *supra* note 3, at 26.

⁶⁹ See *id.*

⁷⁰ See *id.* at 26–27.

ically fanatical discourse is to eradicate the actual words of many terrorists. There is indeed political oppression, and there are strategic motives, but the discourse of bin Laden, the 9/11 hijackers, Al Qaeda, and Palestinian suicide bombers is explicitly theological, espousing divine retribution, slaughter, martyrdom, and immortality.

This article seeks a psychological understanding of both the theological fantasies expressed by Muslim suicide bombers, and a deconstruction of terrorist motivation beyond the strategic agenda.

PSYCHOANALYTIC AND PSYCHOHISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

The strategic aspects of suicide bombing are the conscious purpose. In psychoanalytic terms, the conscious purpose is manifest content.⁷¹ It is a facade, a surface, a caliginous veil that obscures the elusive life beneath. This does not mean that conscious motives must be false or dishonest, but this is often the case. Conscious rationales often frame (and distort) the most irrational, chaotic, and ulterior motives so they may appear rational, logical, justifiable, moral, and heroic, disguising their actual purposes to avoid the humiliating appearance of sordidness and irrationality. Conscious explanation is often mythologization of oneself and transforms the unknown or ignoble into noble and heroic choice before oneself and society.⁷² One's personal mythology situates a person in his own fantasy and narrative, a fiction that makes the self acceptable to oneself and others, makes one a hero in his own story, glosses over aspects of the self one wishes to disavow, and reorders reality and memory to conform to one's wishes and needs.⁷³ To be psychoanalytic means recognizing that there are other motives than one knows, or even wishes to know. Verily, the lies people tell themselves to disguise their motives and to appear more noble and rational protect the ego against shame and depredation, transforming injury and rage into heroism, and hence one defends and nurtures one's deceptions as the means of rescuing oneself from ignominy.⁷⁴ This is why Becker calls such deceptions "vital lies."⁷⁵ One should nevertheless resist the temptation to assume that

⁷¹ The manifest content is the surface of the dream, that images one sees, while there is a much deeper, more complicated, irrational, conflicted life beneath that facade.

⁷² See PETER HOMANS, *JUNG IN CONTEXT* 29 (2d ed., 1995); Kris Ernst, *The Personal Myth*, 4 *J. AM. PSYCHOANALYTIC ASS'N* 653 (1956).

⁷³ See ERNEST BECKER, *THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF MEANING* 47–50 (1971); JERRY S. PIVEN, *THE MADNESS AND PERVERSION OF YUKIO MISHIMA* 231–41 (2004) (discussing Mishima's psychology and conception of his own self, which was based on fantasy).

⁷⁴ ARE YOU CONSIDERING PSYCHOANALYSIS? 9–14 (Karen Horney ed., 1946).

⁷⁵ BECKER, *supra* note 73, at 47–66.

any conscious purpose is *only* a lie, and should one expose the deception, there could be a moment of pure unconcealment.⁷⁶

A psychoanalytic understanding recognizes the immensely tangled complexity of motivation, that ideas and events are not merely conscious and rational but are a conglomeration of fantasies, inner conflicts, ghosts of the past compelling present action and projecting past perceptions, archaic relations that determine the way we experience and distort the world. The present can be the unconscious recreation of past relationships and the compulsion to repeat and resolve lost scenarios by inflicting them on unknowing surrogates and victims. As Movahedi writes:

Constructive or destructive engagements with the world are symbolic expressions of inner struggles that seek resolution in relation to the internal objects. Self-destructive and dangerous acts may be initiated as a form of symbolic dialogue with a universe that has failed to validate the self. Such acts may simultaneously serve as a symbolic ritual for disentanglement from a particular perceived entrapment in the world.⁷⁷

In addition to the strategic value of suicide bombing, then, the psychoanalytic question might be what emotional value there might be in dying—what death performs not only ideologically, but unconsciously.

One naturally asks why, among the vast range of possibilities, suicide is deemed most heroic. Suicide bombers are clearly not the only people to consider self-sacrifice heroic, and many traditions romanticize or even divinize the hero who hurls himself into the jaws of death. The hero may be defined as one who courageously defies death, or even overcomes it through daring and prowess. The hero is willing to descend into the underworld and brave abjection for a higher cause, and his willingness to lay down his own life is valued as the most altruistic act of surrender to others. Some would even suggest that we value those who sacrifice themselves because they surrender to death willingly, so that we may feel safe from the chaotic contagion of violence and catastrophe. We may need scapegoats to siphon and contain our terror and malice, and thus we love and sanctify such a heroic and willing sacrifice. There is compelling evidence that even in military circumstances—where leaders knew there would be more effective tactics—men were marched straight into death. The death of the other is our immunity bath from mortality.

Few, however, exult self-sacrifice for its own sake, adore soldiers for committing blatantly suicidal acts, or consider the warrior who lives a shameful failure. Beit-Hallahmi writes that “patriotic self-sacrifice makes

⁷⁶ See BARNABY B. BARRATT, *PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE POSTMODERN IMPULSE: KNOWING AND BEING SINCE FREUD'S PSYCHOLOGY* 180 (1993).

⁷⁷ Movahedi, *supra* note 67, at 30.

sense and is idealized, but most patriots don't want to die in war and most believers don't want to be martyrs."⁷⁸ The soldier who dies to save others, or who volunteers for a dangerous mission, is different from the warrior whose ultimate purpose is self-obliteration. Thus, death as consequence and death as purpose must be distinguished.

If suicide is not the only choice, the final option after all others have been exhausted, or even the most effective way of killing or terrorizing people, one should ask why the idea of self-murder is so enticing. I suggest here, contra Pape's view that suicide bombing is geometrically more effective than other terroristic strategies,⁷⁹ that there are other things that must be factored into the equation of what the most efficient means of death might be.⁸⁰ For instance, one must question how effective suicide bombing is, when in fact the military reprisals are so devastating and kill so many innocent victims including women and children. Palestinian suicide bombers are in no danger of eliminating the Jewish population, but they do invite the retaliatory persecution, immiseration, and annihilation of their own people. How efficient is that? One could claim that the entire community is prepared to die, and rejoices in their own martyrdom, but then there would be no cries of agony or injustice, and no demand for such violence to cease. The reality is that Palestinians are miserable and suffer unimaginable humiliation and anguish from military reprisals, and this cannot be ignored when determining what is effective strategy.

Actually, the entire process is cyclical and rife with fantasy, for oppression breeds terroristic responses, which breed retaliation vastly more atrocious, which then becomes further justification for terrorism. The Palestinians are aware that suicide bombing leads to military strikes, but the military strikes then become proof of oppression. Psychologically, this is an invitation to victimization that provides the oppressed with proof or moral superiority and the wickedness of the enemy. It is what Moses-Hrushovski calls "deployment;" the orchestration of one's own victimization to prove the other evil and purify the self of guilt, shame, culpability, or self-loathing.⁸¹ Here the suicide bomber loves his martyrdom and moral victory far more than any innocent women or children in his own community whom he purports to protect.⁸² The community knows that such death and mutila-

⁷⁸ Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *The Return of Martyrdom: Honour, Death, and Immortality*, in RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM, AND POLITICAL EXTREMISM 11, 24 (Leonard Weinberg & Ami Pedahzur eds., 2004).

⁷⁹ ROBERT A. PAPE, DYING TO WIN: THE STRATEGIC LOGIC OF SUICIDE TERRORISM 61–76 (2005).

⁸⁰ One could also ask how suicide bombers came to employ suicide, since they did not do empirical studies to decide what was most effective. *See id.*

⁸¹ RENA MOSES-HRUSHOVSKI, DEPLOYMENT 3–4 (1994).

⁸² PAPE, *supra* note 79, at 187–98.

tion will be the consequence, yet they protest reprisal for acts they rejoiced as though their reprisal was righteous but their enemy's purely unjust.⁸³ That process of repeatedly disavowing the fact that one initiated the very act that led to the reprisal is a quintessential transference that performs a crucial psychological function. It does *not* mean they deserve it. It means their moral claims are mysteriously inconsistent with acts they know will breed more suffering for themselves. It is saying: How dare you retaliate when my act of murder was justified? I will murder again. How dare you retaliate? You are evil. And so on. The center does not hold, and thus one suspects in this compulsive repetition, a scenario whereby victimization is unconsciously invited as a path to redress humiliation, proving the enemy evil and justifying murder and the suicide bomber's own death. In this sense, those who invite reprisal nurture it and verily thrive on it despite their cries of injustice.⁸⁴

The very strategy of suicide bombers thus contains deeper psychological satisfactions and processes than merely killing or terrifying. The projection of evil exceeds mapping illusory qualities onto others, or even attributing one's own illicit motives to them. As Grotstein says, projection is also projective identification.⁸⁵ The projection transfers rage and the loathsome aspects of the self to the other in order to murder oneself and purify the self of badness. It also seeks to evacuate abjection onto the other, to render him or her as humiliated and abject as oneself. It forces a corresponding introjection on the recipients of violence, and its purpose is filling living victims with one's own horror, defeating and conquering by reducing them to paroxysms of terror. Davis states:

Terror's *origin* is a feeling of inner powerlessness. Its purpose is to reverse that condition by reducing others to it. At the center of the terrorist's psyche one invariably finds an overpowering presence: that of a malevolent, destructive other who has a command over the psyche more complete than that of the most extreme super-ego. . . . The terrorist's inner world is one of ceaseless persecution and unbridled cruelty. The malevolent other has reduced the psyche to a condition of abjection; i.e., the utter loss of any possible identity in a horror within that cannot be overcome. Humiliations have eradicated the ability to sustain any positive feelings toward oneself. One's inner world is defined by a single reality: cruelty. That cruelty has produced the only possible result: self-hatred. The malevolent other has shattered every other possibility of psychic cohesion and identity, rendering the inner world one permanently tottering on the brink of self-fragmentation and psychotic self-dissolution. Only one route to an identity

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ *Cf.* ROBINS & POST, *supra* note 39, at 68.

⁸⁵ See JAMES S. GROSTEIN, SPLITTING AND PROJECTIVE IDENTIFICATION 143-44, 154-55 (1981).

remains. Empowerment through hate, externalizing the hate one has been made to feel toward oneself by projecting it onto others. Power is the only reality and its abiding purpose is the prosecution of cruelty. Everything else is a sign of weakness. . . . Self-brutalization provides the only safety from the malevolent force that presides over one's psyche. There's only one solution to one's condition. *Wounds must be turned into weapons.*

Caught in that project, a bitter necessity has seized one's being: to evacuate one's inner condition by finding those objects fitted to receive its projections. . . . Cruelty proves that one is no longer a weak victim but in fact one of the truly strong who've triumphed over the force that once had power over them.⁸⁶

It should be noted that for Davis, the powerlessness issues not only from political but also cultural oppression, a socialization process of shame and humiliation descending from one's own parents and relations.⁸⁷ For Davis, it is the remorselessly cruel and punitive installation of moral values that wounds the self so drastically and establishes that malevolent inner persecutor and an intrapsychic state of self-hatred and punishment.⁸⁸ This does not omit the unimaginable abjection of living in squalor, when an occupying government continually employs its military to inflict humiliation, depredation, and terror.⁸⁹ It does, however, emphasize other aspects of the psychological process that do not originate solely in political oppression. Davis continues:

Such is the genius of humiliation and cruelty: to make a person feel contempt for themselves

Psychological cruelty is the attempt to bring the other to a condition where they willingly sacrifice the last thread of their self-respect in order to escape the threat of further humiliation The founding feeling of inner powerlessness has transformed itself into a feeling of boundless, unrestrained power A deadly inner peace descends on the terrorist.⁹⁰

If paranoia and delusion have become part of the psychic architecture, they are therefore the consequence of manifold historic and social trauma, a life of persecution, misery, and abjection, and an existence of Kurtzian horror witnessing relentless indignation, suffering, and death. But it is also a recuperation of autonomy from helplessness and victimization. One can perceive paranoia and delusion as consequences of injury and psychological im-

⁸⁶ Walter A. Davis, *DEATH'S DREAM KINGDOM: THE AMERICAN PSYCHE SINCE 9-11*, at 154–44 (2006).

⁸⁷ *Id.*

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ *Id.*

⁹⁰ *Id.* at 156–57.

pairment, but this omits the way fantasy, violence, and self-obliteration can transform humiliation and defeat into triumph and victory. As Jacobsen says of suicide, it can be a reclamation from fate and a way of repossessing one's body, identity, and life when one feels dispossessed, controlled, or enslaved.⁹¹

Once again, one might ask why physical autonomy requires suicide. The choice may or may not be the only viable option. Suicide may well be (mythically or historically) preferable to the Masada Jews than rape, enslavement, or slaughter.⁹² For others in different circumstances, there may be alternate means of gaining autonomy, including effective violence in which one triumphs by emerging unscathed, trampling others, and defeating death. Some experience euphoria when escaping a deadly situation, looking over the bloodied body of a dead foe, or laughing in the face of death as one slaughters enemies and reaps victorious glory.⁹³

The suicidal tactic may then involve other motives. A clue was already supplied by Davis' idea of the malevolent inner persecutor.⁹⁴ If indeed people have suffered individual and social trauma, victimization, and humiliation, there may well be a hidden psychological executioner motivating self-punitive obliteration.⁹⁵ The hidden executioner is the psychological inner presence of another person who demands masochistic surrender and suffering. Suicides often internalize the idea that others want one to die, and some people become self-punitive when they come to hate themselves, direct anger inward, punish their own inner objects (parents in the psyche), destroy inner objects or inner badness, and pacify others who wish one to suffer. One might consider the possibility, then, that suicide bombing destroys the self to castigate the self, inflicts violence on the hated self and hated others within the psyche, as well as satiates an inner executioner demanding one's death. In yet another sense, the murdered enemy becomes a substitute for the hated self.

Volkan has described the internalization of trauma that leads to generational unconscious communication of victimization and humiliation.⁹⁶ Here we have children not only observing victimization, but hearing stories, perceiving the pain and humiliation of parents, identifying with that pain and indignation, and even introjecting that wounded parental presence. In

⁹¹ EDITH JACOBSON, *DEPRESSION: COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF NORMAL, NEUROTIC, AND PSYCHOTIC INDIVIDUALS* 37 (1971).

⁹² Recent evidence suggests that the Masada story is a myth, and that the Jews did not in fact commit suicide. Barry Schwartz, *The Masada Myth*, 102 AM. J. SOC. 1222 (1997).

⁹³ ERNEST BECKER, *ESCAPE FROM EVIL* 141, 155 (1975).

⁹⁴ *Id.*

⁹⁵ Stuart S. Asch, *Suicide and the Hidden Executioner*, in *ESSENTIAL PAPERS ON SUICIDE* 379—96 (Mark J. Goldblatt & John T. Maltzberger eds., 1996).

⁹⁶ VOLKAN, *BLOODLINES*, *supra* note 32, at 35.

this way, victimization can be transmitted between generations even when the current generation is not actually victimized. If actual oppression continues, this feeds the experience of a persecutory world. In this manner, a hidden executioner is also the unconsciously transmitted humiliation and victimization that arouses hatred and demands retaliation. Actual victimization aside, this inner executioner rouses such rage and violence from within, even if perceived as external to the self, deriving from actual enemies in the present moment. While the generational transmission of trauma may involve the internalization of grievances leading to vengeance against enemies, in some cases it leads to aggression against the self. For if one perceives one's parents as weak and humiliated, one may be angry at them, ashamed of their castrated impotence and degradation. If internalized, one may then despise oneself as humiliated and castrated. The shadow of the humiliated object has fallen on the ego. Once again, the urge to retaliate represents not only vengeance against others, but a hidden executioner murdering others as surrogate hated self.

In a further way, then, suicidal violence represents a response to self-loathing, humiliation, and abjection, a reclamation of physical and spiritual autonomy, and transcendence of oppression and *oneself*. Not least, the obliteration of self and other transcends death. Mortality is a physical reality, but it is also fantasy and a complex symbol that varies between individuals and cultures. The symbol of death joins multiple meanings that may include the shame and disgust for a vulnerable body that weakens, defecates, and decays, a body of flesh that desires disgusting things like sex with beings considered inferior and contemptible, such as women, whose bodies are reviled as contaminated and castrating in numerous societies. Death is the defeated, castrated, victimized self. Transcending death means transforming the most horrific, terrifying, disgusting, ignoble dread into invulnerability beyond the body, sex, decay, and fear. Physical and emotional death become life and rebirth. Geifman writes:

[A]t the moment when the terrorist physically ends his life, psychologically he is already partly dead—self-destroyed in the inner victim-aggressor conflict. A “kind of serene joy, often coupled with an other-worldly smile” that is “sometimes visible on the faces of suicidal homicides prior to their deadly deeds” . . . astonished the Israeli soldiers and the US marines in Lebanon. This is what is so difficult to grasp: terrorists are the individuals emotionally drained to the point of barely being able to sustain their agonizing existence. Their divided selves, ravaged by the on-going “civil war,” are depleted of vitality. They are, in fact, dead-in-life—ghosts. . . . The act of suicide is just the final point—a definitive and conclusive

statement affirming death. They are happy and relieved to die; it is exhausting always to pretend being what they are not.⁹⁷

A loyal servant who sacrifices himself for people and God, vanquishing evil, the suicide bomber feels joy bathed in the vision of meeting Allah in Paradise. This is why theology is such a crucial aspect of martyrdom and suicide bombing. One need not have theological motives to destroy oneself or the enemy, but the theological fantasy transforms death into rebirth; not just earthly, but cosmic heroism, the love of God, and glory in Paradise with eternal bliss and scores of dark-eyed virgins. A secular death cannot raise the mangled body from gelatinated flesh to eternal life. It cannot be a miraculous apotheosis where the *shahid* and his God look down triumphantly on the vanquished enemy. A secular suicide may still contain the unconscious fantasy of rebirth, but this is different from a conscious vision of sacred death and rebirth adored by one's people.

Hence the beatific smiles on the faces of suicide bombers as they wade into death. If there is joy in vengeance, there is also euphoria in inflicting the power of God on evil, transcending the flesh with godlike power in iridescent death—an incendiary, a convulsion that bathes slaughtered enemies in one's own blood and bowels—leaving them behind in a tangled mass of ignoble corpses as one reaps God's reward beyond death. This is the purpose of the sacred, its very invention. One should not imagine that a life of piety moves people to destroy themselves this way, as though honest Muslims studying the Qur'an and Hadith were blithely pursuing the only path *shari'ah* cleared for them. Even if they were honestly following Muslim law, this would not explain the fervid ecstasy in the face of death. But they are not merely obeying the law as piously interpreted. Rather terrorists are cloaking vengeance, and the psychological processes outlined above, in theological terms to sanctify death. Some might consider this illegitimate religion or bad faith, hijacking religion to satisfy secular purposes. Rather this may be the quintessential *invention* of sacredness itself.

There are many forms of sacredness, but the genesis of *one* crucial manifestation of the sacred is the act of consecrating the violent, the horrible, that which arouses overwhelming cadences of terror, ecstasy, and unfathomable destructiveness. People consecrate and make sacred as an act of emotional fervency, magically bestowing transcendental power. The sacred is not inherited, it is fabricated, endowed, and imparted. One makes an act sacred to give it cosmic importance, and to fabricate rituals, vestments, and obligations and pronounce them numinous, endowing the act with an aura

⁹⁷ Anna Geifman, *How are We to Understand Suicide Terrorism?* (2004) (unpublished manuscript, on file with author).

of unworldly magic, imparting divinity and rendering all that falls under its auspices holy. Blessedness is imagined and conferred.

Violence becomes sacred not only when people wish to rationalize it. People may indeed use theological rhetoric to sanctify the mundane, impart the appearance of holiness to vile acts, provide the façade of righteousness to lascivious and profane motives. This is the mythologization of terror that was discussed previously. The sacred has been devised in the first place to provide that sense of ineluctable, irrevocable transcendent sanctimony, blessedness, and force. Murder has been sanctified since human beings created rituals. Human sacrifice, the scapegoat, the Pharmakon, the Buphonia, and the Aztec flaying of prisoners and princesses, all manner of ritual have been wrought to lavish divinity on death, in the act of slaughter. Blood magically makes life germinate, propitiates bloodthirsty creatures, eliminates evil, purifies and sanctifies the living community inflicting death in the name of God, whom they have invented, conceived, and delivered unto the universe so they may transcend death, satisfy a profound yearning for love, and hallow vengeance in pious obedience to their own fantasy.

One might ask not only how people can murder in the name of God, but how Eros can ever be born when human beings are beset by death, misery, horror, and abjection, and are driven to sanctify death as a desperate means to vanquish it. Not bloodshed in the name of God, but Eros divested of violence is the mystery, the moment of grace. For even here the terrorist murders for love, bathes in his love of God, and basks joyously in God's love.

CONCLUSIONS

This article seeks to bring psychological and theological depth to the understanding of suicidal terrorism, while addressing prevailing views that deny the religious dimension and focus on its secular strategies and political agendas. The very discourse of terrorism—its *fatwas* and proclamations, as well as the wills and final letters of suicide bombers—is steeped in a theological language of martyrdom, *jihad*, immortality, and divine sanction for slaughter.

This article further seeks to elucidate psychological elements in suicidal terrorism, unconscious fantasies, wishes for death, punishment of inner objects, acquiescence to inner persecutors, and murder of the vile aspects of the self in the other. Conscious strategies with logically calculated results can still be symbolic representations and repetitions of unconscious scenarios, transferences that rework unconscious material into heroic ideologies. If suicide bombing is an effective strategy, it is also a fantasy of conquering victimization, abjection, and death, a way of hallucinating self-purification, eternal life, and the love of God in self-murder. Death transforms humiliating defeat into heroic transcendence of emasculation and

decay. Explosive dismemberment becomes apotheosis and immortality, ecstatic conquest of one's persecutors and inner sense of impotence.

Certainly these speculations are only a précis of the complexities of suicidal terrorism, and have focused on these specific issues to the omission of other crucial problems. I leave these analyses to other authors and colleagues who are well-equipped to perform the task. One must inquire of the rise in female suicide bombers, their psychological constellations, their relation to secular and religious authority, and the familial and cultural matrices that render their deaths putatively different from the male suicide bombers discussed so far.

It must be remembered that a psychological analysis of suicide terrorism is not a nullification of claims to oppression and injustice. It neither denies the brutal atrocities that have motivated vengeance from victims, nor sanctions them. It in no way condones suicide bombing, the oppression of the Palestinian people, or the political agenda of those who seek to exploit the region while claiming the lives of those in their way.

The preceding analysis does have crucial policy implications. If certain modes of theology and violence are invented to transform depredation and misery into heroic triumph, then one must desist in taking action and making policies based on the subjugation and humiliation of others. This does not mean pretending that we can all just hug and get along, nor that Israel should not protect itself with the appropriate defenses or programs that decrease the receptivity of potential recruits. It does mean that there may be ways of reducing demeaning and incendiary forms of treatment. One of the remarkable lessons from history—putatively ignored by those who seek to conquer and punish their adversaries—is that vengeance begets vengeance. One will never eliminate anger and victimization by putting people in their place, but there are still those who imagine that enough force will subdue and domesticate their foes. Humiliation and injustice never achieve this goal. Rather, one must comprehend how humiliation, insult, and degradation only instigate violence, and policies that subject a people to ignominy can only rouse an ideology of vengeance that ennobles retaliation, humiliation, and terror. One virtually *guarantees* that the oppressed will be so resentful that they will seek a similarly terrorizing, immiserating redress. One ensures that a defeated, shamed, and unjust death will be transcended by a death made sacred, divine, and beautiful. Anything other than a recognition that our own unjust subjugating practices *inspire* such sacred violence is not only an avoidance of reality. It *invites* sacred vengeance.

It is not idealistic to expect people to treat one another with respect, to acknowledge injustice on one's own part, and to grieve with all the victims on either side. It is not a sign of weakness when one shows sorrow for the suffering one caused, though those ashamed of any sign of weakness may feel diminished by anything less than the appearance of complete mastery and strength. And yet only sympathy for victims and genuine displays

of remorse can appease the wrath of those who feel so profoundly wronged. Policies must be fashioned in such a way as to stop subjugating and humiliating, and instead, they must demonstrate conciliation and sincere recognition of the other's humanity. This may be difficult, but the problem is not merely that this is an impractical notion. Rather policymakers are still bent upon revenge, an ideology that feels more pleasure inflicting pain and killing evildoers than waging peace.

One may be accused of being a bleeding heart or of being naïve for suggesting that we find ways of acknowledging the humanity of the enemy. Policies may indeed be arduous and elusive, but to those who scoff, I say they lack imagination and the willingness to relinquish their defensive, demeaning, dehumanizing argot of self-righteous superiority. Policies can be made that recognize how humiliation will only sanctify vengeance and death, and how others are palpably appeased when respected and treated as human equals.

There will always be those who are so terrified of peace, and of surrendering their dehumanizing fantasies, that amity may actually inspire more violence. This article has adumbrated the ways in which suicide bombing inflicts inner agony and persecution upon external enemies, and thus the need for vile adversaries to vanquish, may sometimes be enraged by the prospect of peace. Those who thrive on the perception of their own victimization as a means of evacuating inner wretchedness are only outraged when the enemy disappears or displays some form of human compassion that defies his image as endemically evil. Abolition of the fantasy of evil can induce immense panic and rage, for one has stolen the gift of an illusion, or delusion, that supplies moral sanctimony and hides perception of one's inner workings, the psychological reward of unknowing oneself, and inflicting the mind's agony on others with a vengeance. To eliminate another's illusions is to destroy the sacred beliefs upon which life depends, and that, in itself, arouses ruthless malice raging for revenge.

And yet knowing this is crucial as well. Truth be told, conciliation is sometimes perceived as weakness by others, and we have ample evidence that withdrawal is seen as resignation and defeat.⁹⁸ There is also evidence that recognizing the other's humanity, and behaving in ways that inspires them to see the humanity of the other, also leads to a diminution of hostility.⁹⁹ We are left with the reality that peace will never be attained by more

⁹⁸ Robert A. Pape, *The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, 97 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 343, 354–55 (2003).

⁹⁹ See Anat Berko et al., *The Moral Infrastructure of Chief Perpetrators of Palestinian Suicidal Terrorism*, in 9 TERRORISM AND THE INT'L COMMUNITY 10 (Shlomo G. Shoha, & Paul Knepper eds., 2005); Mark Juergensmeyer, *TERROR IN THE MIND OF GOD: THE GLOBAL RISE OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE* (2000); Scott Atran, *Mishandling Suicide Terrorism*, 27 WASH. Q. 67 (2004); James Dingley & Marcello Mollica, *The Human Body as a Terrorist Weapon*:

violence, and that abjection breeds strategies to revisit excruciating agony on others. Recognition of one's own culpability and acknowledgement of the other's wounds may only be the beginning, but it is ineluctably necessary, the *sine qua non* of peaceable solutions.

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