

TERRORISM AND HUMILIATION

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I. Introduction

A psychological connection between terrorism and humiliation is clear. It is not hard to imagine humiliated young people¹ believing that such powerful acts are the only way to avenge themselves, their families, or their people, regain control of their lives, and express the rage that comes from humiliating experiences.

It is, therefore, incumbent upon the powerful nations of the world to make policy changes accordingly. These policy changes must address the cessation of the humiliation of populations at risk for producing “terrorists”² and implement humanitarian solutions to conflict. The policy change would also necessitate the cessation by the super powers of their own vengeful terrorist acts, which are really demonstrations of machismo domination, but are sold to the public under propaganda such as a “war on terror,” and only serve to incite more violence.

Most importantly, however, we must recognize that both humiliation and violent acts of vengeance often result in the population turning to religious fundamentalists³. These fundamentalists do not hesitate to use the psychological consequences of the humiliation of young people to seduce them into horrific self-destructive acts. Furthermore, fundamentalism always involves the oppression and control of women’s lives and an often brutal extrication of women from the public forum. Nowhere is the feminist mantra “the personal is the political” more important than in the fight against fundamentalism.

Accordingly, solutions adopted to eradicate humiliation must also include solutions to address fundamentalists and fundamentalists regimes.

II. The Connection Between Terrorism and Humiliation

It is logical to make the connection between those who commit acts of terrorism and humiliation. To strike back at an all-too-powerful entity out of the desperation and rage that always accompanies humiliation makes perfect psychological sense. Experts agree that a terrorist is often an individual who has suffered a lifetime of humiliation.⁴ (A

¹ Far more terrorists are male than female. Stern, December 18, 2003, *When Bombers Are Women*, op ed. The Washington Post. Nonetheless, both are recruited and, in the context of political humiliation, both have suffered and both may act out by committing acts of terrorism.

² I use the term “terrorist” throughout this Note as that is the term popularly recognized for these young people. Let the record reflect, however, my objection to such a term as applied to young people acting out of sheer desperation and in response to powerless lives.

³ A term of “political fundamentalists” may be more appropriate. As so many scholars argue, the fundamentalists use religion, or rather abuse religion, to gain control over the population and subject certain segments of the population, especially women, to outrageous oppression. *See generally* in RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISMS AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN (Courtney W. Howland, ed.) (1999).

⁴ *See generally* Jessica Stern, Terror in the Name of God (2003); Mark Juergensmeyer, Terror in the Mind of God (2003); Benjamin R. Barter, Terrorism’s Challenge to Democracy, op. eds. posted at

google search of “terrorism and humiliation” yields approximately 459,000 hits). As Jessica Stern points out, “it is the pernicious effect of repeated, small humiliations that add up to a feeling of nearly unbearable despair and frustration, and a willingness on the part of some to do anything – even commit atrocities – in the belief that attacking the oppressor will restore their sense of dignity.”⁵ This paper could end, then, with one policy recommendation: finding ways to cease humiliation.

This policy recommendation involves a two-fold “sub-solution” on the part of modern super powers. First, of course, they must take humanitarian and cooperative actions conducive to the cessation of humiliation. This first step would entail (non-violent) enforcement actions against allies as well as regimes to which the super powers object.

Second, they must cease using terrorism as an excuse to perpetrate their own terrorist acts such as military invasions and bombings, illegal detainings, or “regime changes”. In fact, there is now evidence that such retaliatory violence *increases* rather than decreases incidents of terrorism.⁶ Ms. Stern, for example, puts responsibility for the increase in violence in Iraq directly on the feelings of humiliation experienced by the Iraqis at the hands of U.S. troops.⁷ And, interestingly enough, many families of the September 11 victims were opposed to Bush’s warmongering. Despite the personal price they had paid, the families understood that violence in answer to violence is no solution to the ills that plague the modern world. Prof. Juergensmeyer points out that more aggression by the United States feeds directly into the hands of fundamentalists, a danger addressed in Section III below, corroborating the picture they paint of evil and imperialist Americans and providing justification for more violence.⁸

Consequently, even if the governments of the so-called “first-world” countries refuse to recognize humanitarian reasons not to inflict further humiliation and violence on already oppressed populations, their constituencies must demand the cessation of such actions and refuse to allow the governments to exploit the oppressed to further their own political or economic agendas.

III. Religion and Humiliation

Victims of humiliation are exceptionally vulnerable to falling prey to extremist groups who happily use these individuals to further their own fundamentalist causes. Ms. Stern opines that those most likely to join fundamentalist sects “are those with the least to lose in the outside world, either because they have limited economic or social prospects, [a humiliating circumstance in and of itself] **feel deeply humiliated and confused about their future path**, or are frustrated with the political regime in which they live.”⁹

<http://www.benjaminrbarber.com/oped2.html>. See also Robin Morgan, *The Demon Lover*, Intro. pp xxii - xxiii (1989), describing the humiliation experienced by Mohammed Atta at the hands of his father.

⁵ Stern, *supra* at 62.

⁶ In the two years following September 11, 2001, acts of terrorism almost doubled. Stern, June 6, 2004, *Beneath Bombast and Bombs, a Caldron of Humiliation*, op. ed. in the Los Angeles (citing to data compiled by the Rand Corporation).

⁷ Stern, November 28, 2003, *Terrorism’s New Mecca*, op. ed. in *The Globe and Mail*.

⁸ See generally Juergensmeyer, *supra*.

⁹ Stern, *Terror in the Name of God*, at 69 (emphasis added).

Nor is it only those who experience cultural or group humiliation who sign up with fundamentalists groups. Some are products of familial humiliation. For example, one member of a terrorist fundamentalist Christian group was forced as a young boy to go to the girls' physical education classes because he couldn't keep up with the boys due to illness.¹⁰ He reported feeling weak and humiliated outside the fundamentalist group but inside, needed and strong.¹¹ Mohammed Atta, the alleged leader of the September 11, 2001 attacks, was terrorized as a child by his father. The father has since given interviews in which he said that young Mohammed was a disappointment. "He was so gentle. I used to tell him, 'Toughen up, boy!'"¹²

Nor are we discussing any one religion. Prof. Juergensmeyer and Stern both cite examples of terrorist acts committed in the name of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and even Buddhism.¹³ What is key is not to which religion the humiliated person attaches but the psycho-socio-political needs the fundamentalist groups are willing and able to fill, needs that are created directly out of the humiliation experience. Once the fundamentalist groups have snared the young person, it is a short trip to so-called glory and martyrdom in furtherance of the "cause". This cause usually involves an imagined divinely-justified murder of those belonging to the identified enemy. Note that in agreeing to carry out the fundamentalist's violent agenda, the desperate, humiliated, and powerless young person has a chance to become a powerful hero with an opportunity to finally exercise control over his life (even if that means dying) and avenge suffering. The psyche damaged by humiliation simply may not be able to resist such a seduction. Consequently, the fundamentalist groups now have the requisite "large supply of young men who feel humiliated and deprived . . ." to wage their "holy wars".¹⁴

And the consequences of holy wars are enormous. I have argued that when a child is raped, it is the entire community that suffers the consequences.¹⁵ Similarly, when a young person suffers humiliation and is subsequently seduced into joining a fundamentalist sect, it is the entire world that suffers the consequences. This occurs on several levels. First, the young person may be talked into killing himself and others in the name of the fundamentalist cause. Second, women, more than any other segment of the population, suffer terrible loss of the most basic human rights in the context of fundamentalism.

For example, although Israel is "a strong democracy that has provided a high level of constitutional and legal protection for women's right to equality, affirmative action, and accommodation in other spheres of social and economic endeavor", its female population remains subject to the fundamentalist religious laws of three major religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Muslim.¹⁶ Jewish women, for example, remain subject to the *Halachic* requirement of a *get* (a Jewish divorce), which may only be given with the

¹⁰ Stern, *Terror in the Name of God*, at 25.

¹¹ *Id* at 19.

¹² Morgan, *supra*.

¹³ See generally Juergensmeyer, *supra*; Stern, *Terror in the Name of God*, *supra*.

¹⁴ Stern, *Beneath Bombast and Bombs, a Caldron of Humiliation*.

¹⁵ Miriam H. Marton, *Survivors of Childhood Rape in the United States*, paper prepared for the 5th Annual Meeting of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies in Berlin, 2005, "Beyond Humiliation: Encouraging Human Dignity in the Lives and Work of All People", (2005).

¹⁶ Frances Raday, *Religion and Patriarchal Politics*, in *RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISMS AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN* 156 (Courtney W. Howland, ed.) (1999).

husband's consent. If the husband refuses such consent, the woman is left stranded, unable to remarry or engage in sexual relationships with other men without risking losing her rights to alimony or custody of her children.¹⁷

Christian fundamentalism has at its heart the goal of restricting a woman's control over her own body. Under the guise of preserving patriarchal family and culture, which the cult imagines is divinely sanctioned, and protecting unborn "children", Christian terrorists have bombed abortion clinics and murdered physicians and their staff. Moreover, the Promise Keepers, a Christian fundamentalist group founded in 1990, has as its goal "motivating men toward Christlike masculinity."¹⁸ In other words, good old fashion patriarchal family structure where the man "wears the pants" and controls his wife and children. Studies of domestic violence show that abuse of women and children is more common among such patriarchal family units.¹⁹ I have written that in my 14 years of experience treating survivors of childhood rape, more often than not the perpetrator was a member of a fundamentalist religious group.²⁰

And, consistent with my argument in Section II above, a super power's violent actions against an oppressed population leads to fundamentalism, which in turn leads to the further humiliation of the population, especially its women. For example, let's look at the consequences of Pres. Bush's war on Iraq. For all of his propaganda about bringing democracy and freedom to the Iraqi people, the proposed Iraqi constitution states:

Islam is the official religion of the State and is to be considered a source of legislation. **No law that contradicts the universally agreed tenets of Islam, the principles of democracy, or the rights cited in Chapter Two of this Law may be enacted during the transitional period.**²¹

What is the meaning of this clause for the Iraqi people, especially for Iraqi women? To what "tenets" of Islam does this language refer?²² Is there a way to negotiate the tension between "the universally agreed tenets of Islam" and "the principles of democracy", a task the success of which most feminists highly doubt and which the Israeli example above negates? Or has Bush simply succeeded in creating a religiously fundamentalist

¹⁷ *Id.* at 160.

¹⁸ Susan D. Rose, *Christian Fundamentalism*, in RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISMS AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN 11 (Courtney W. Howland, ed.) (1999).

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Marton, *supra*.

²¹ Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period 8 March 2004, art. 7 (emphasis added).

²² Feminists argue that it is not Islam but patriarchy and men's need for control that demands misogynistic laws. "Neither Islam nor the culture of Muslim peoples is per se an obstacle to women's achieving rights. Rather, Muslim women face patriarchal structures that certain men, in power or seeking political power, misrepresent as religion and culture." Mahnaz Afkhami, *Gender Apartheid and the Discourse of Relativity of Rights in Muslim Societies*, in RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISMS AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN 68 (Courtney W. Howland, ed.) (1999). See also Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Religious Reservations to Elimination of Discrimination against Women*, in RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISMS AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN 105-114 (Courtney W. Howland, ed.) (1999). One expert proposes that this is true for all religions. "It is essential to argue that the spirit of all the world's religions is supportive of human rights and that it is only man-made practices that result in the violation and abuse of human rights." Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Different but Free*, in RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISMS AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN 84 (Courtney W. Howland, ed.) (1999).

regime in which Iraqi women are the sacrificial lamb and will become the new humiliated? As one expert framed it: “[t]he Islamist world view is defined mostly by its treatment of women and thus wherever Islamism has assumed power or otherwise becomes politically active women have born the brunt of the violence.”²³ Tragically, women are already reporting violent attacks against them occurring in Iraq:

Across the country, a steady clampdown on women's rights has been going unreported and unchecked by the government. Islamic terrorism is killing and injuring Iraqi women daily, employing among other weapons, acid attacks.

...

In March this year, for example, followers of the Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr targeted an outing of students from Basra University. Playing football and listening to music, the mixed group was attacked in Basra Public Park. One male student was killed trying to defend his female friends against Islamists who literally tore the women's clothes off their bodies. Sadr's men photographed the dishevelled, half-dressed women, and told them that their parents would receive the photos if they didn't refrain in future from "immoral" behaviour.

More widely, professional women have been deliberately targeted and killed - notably in the city of Mosul - and, recently, anti-women Islamists in Baghdad have taken to throwing acid in women's faces and on to their uncovered legs. So-called "honour killings" are rife, as is the kidnapping and rape of women. Beheadings have occurred and women have been sold into sexual servitude.²⁴

In the end, we can see that the fundamentalists in all religions have one thing in common. At best, they “seek to control women and the expression of sexuality”.²⁵ At worst, they seek to murder or maim women for, well, for being women.

²³ Afkhami, *supra*, at 71. See also Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Religious Reservations to Elimination of Discrimination against Women*, in RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISMS AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN 106 (Courtney W. Howland, ed.) (1999) (“Only exceptionally do women enter the corridors of power in Muslim countries, and women as a whole have never attained the level of influence that would enable them to play a decisive role in defining national policies affecting women.”).

²⁴ Houzan Mahmoud, August 15, 2005, *Iraq Must Reject a Constitution that Enslaves Women*, The Independent.

²⁵ Susan D. Rose, *Christian Fundamentalism: Patriarchy, Sexuality, and Human Rights*, in RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISMS AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN 9 (Courtney W. Howland, ed.) (1999). See also Christine Chinkin, *Cultural Relativism and International Law*, in RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISMS AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN 55-63 (Courtney W. Howland, ed.) (1999), arguing that where religious

Consequently, “[h]uman rights, with their . . . goal of universalism, have to identify fundamentalisms as the greatest threat of our time.”²⁶ Ignoring fundamentalism as a consequence of humiliation inflicts grave danger on populations, especially women.

IV. Conclusion

Not only is there a direct correlation between humiliation and terrorism but there is also a link between the humiliated and those who join violent fundamentalist religious groups whose goals are often the annihilation of the “enemy.” In this way, the individuals labeled “terrorists” are akin to survivors of childhood rape who get trapped in adulthoods of repetitively abusive and life-threatening relationships.

Furthermore, if the response to terrorist acts on the part of the more powerful nations is their own acts of terrorism, such a response will incite more violence and risk fundamentalistic triumphs. The consequences are then paid by the whole world, but most especially by women, whose lives are put under the oppressive and often violent control of a patriarchal fundamentalist religious group and whose very existence is at risk, and by the young people who are convinced to give their lives in the name of the fundamentalists’ “cause”.²⁷

extremists are in control, there is more often than not a noncompliance with international human rights law via a claim of religious freedom.

²⁶ Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas *What is Your Tribe* in RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISMS AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN 30 (Courtney W. Howland, ed.) (1999).

²⁷ In a research project expanding on these ideas, one idea to be explored is whether the Bush administration itself qualifies as “fundamentalist”. Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas, for example, defines fundamentalists as “political movements of the extreme right which, in a context of globalization . . . manipulate religion, culture or ethnicity in order to achieve their political aims.” Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas *What is Your Tribe* in RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISMS AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN 22 (Courtney W. Howland, ed.) (1999). Most anti-war advocates agree that Bush completely manipulated the American public using the events of September 11, 2001 and the fear of more terrorism in order to achieve his political aim, i.e. the invasion of Iraq. Furthermore, like the religious fundamentalists, Bush continues to propagandize his actions with nebulous concepts like “liberty”, “democracy”, “freedom”, “protecting this [the United States] country”, “axle of evil”, etc. while his direct actions are aggressive and murderous acts in complete contradiction of such concepts.