

The Psychoanalytic Roots of Islamic Terrorism

By Phyllis Chesler

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In the ongoing battle for Fallujah, terrorists are using women and children as human shields against American soldiers. On April 27, 2004, in Jerusalem, Hamas used a Palestinian human bomb to kill two Palestinian alleged "collaborators." On April 28, 2004, even as UN envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, was busy characterizing Israeli policy as the "great poison in the region," Jordanian police arrested al-Qaida operatives who were quite literally trying to launch a chemical poison attack that might have killed 80,000 Jordanians and Americans. And, on May 1, 2004, in Gaza, Palestinian gunmen shot and killed a Jewish woman who was eight-months pregnant together with her four young daughters.

Despite enormous and continuing denial on the part of left and liberal ideologues and the media, we are facing an exceedingly pathological strain of Islamofascist terrorism. So a crucial question must be asked: from a psychological and anthropological point of view, what kind of culture produces human bombs, glorifies mass murderers, and supports humiliation-based revenge?

According to Minnesota based psychoanalyst and Arabist, Dr. Nancy Kobrin, it is a culture in which shame and honor play decisive roles and in which the debasement of women is paramount. In an utterly fascinating and as-yet unpublished book, which I will be introducing, the Sheik's New Clothes: the Psychoanalytic Roots of Islamic Suicide Terrorism, Kobrin, and her Israeli co-author, counter-terrorism expert Yoram Schweitzer, describe barbarous family and clan dynamics in which children, both boys and girls, are routinely orally and anally raped by male relatives; infant males are sometimes sadistically over-stimulated by being masturbated; boys between the ages of 7-12 are publicly and traumatically circumcised; many girls are clitoridectomized; and women are seen as the source of all shame and dishonor and treated accordingly: very, very badly.

According to Dr. Kobrin, "The little girl lives her life under a communal death threat--the honor killing." Both male and female infants and children are brought up by mothers (who are debased and traumatized women). As such, all children are forever psychologically "contaminated" by the humiliated yet all-powerful mother. Arab and Muslim boys must disassociate themselves from her in spectacularly savage ways. But, on a deep unconscious level, they may also wish to remain merged with the source of contamination--a conflict that suicide bombers both act out and resolve when they manfully kill but also merge their blood eternally with that of their presumably most hated enemies, the Israeli Jews. In Kobrin's view, the Israeli Jews may actually function as substitutes or scapegoats for an even more primal, hated/loved enemy: Woman.

Widespread child sexual abuse leads to paranoid, highly traumatized, and revenge-seeking adults. Based on my own experience in Afghanistan (a non-Arab, Muslim culture), a polygamous, patriarchal culture also leads to an infernal, fraternal competition for paternal favor and inheritance. It is brother against brother, full brothers against half-brothers, full and half brothers against first cousins--and thus, can entire families and clans remain locked in revenge-fueled mortal combat for generations.

Clearly, only evolution of democracy and the elevation of women can begin to change such dynamics. Western feminists, American leaders: Please note. Alas, historically and theologically, Arab and Muslim culture strongly opposes both democracy and equality for women. This is why the battles to liberate Iraq,

Afghanistan, and the Middle East are so important and so very difficult. The American and Israeli war against terrorism is like World War Two, not like Vietnam.

Yesterday, further confirmation of Dr. Kobrin's thesis arrived at my door. The remarkable and charming Walid Shoebat, an ex-PLO terrorist, came to visit. He has been speaking about his renunciation of terrorism and conversion to evangelical Christianity. Shoebat has been touring the country speaking out for Israel and against the "occupation of Palestinian minds with Jew-hatred." Unlike the human bombs, Shoebat "merged" with his American-born mother by finally rescuing her from years of captivity and domestic abuse in Bethlehem/Beit Sahur. He also rescued his father, the man who imprisoned and abused her.

Shoebat confirmed the widespread sexual abuse of both boys and girls in Palestinian society. "It is a strange society. Homosexuality is forbidden but if you're the penetrator, not the penetrated, it's okay." He is describing prison sexuality. "If you're a teenage boy with no hair on your legs other boys your age will pinch your butt and tease you. Once, I saw a class of clothed teenage boys sexualize their gymnastics exercises. And once, on a hiking trip, I saw a line of shepherd boys waiting for their turn to sodomize a five year old boy. It was unbelievable."

Shoebat's father also told him stories about starving Arab men who would barter sex for meat from Iraqi soldiers. According to Shoebat, teenage boys prey upon younger children; older male relatives prey upon pre-adolescent and adolescent boys and girls. They do not have intercourse with the girls since this would render them un-marriageable and bring shame upon their families. I heard many stories in both Afghanistan and Iran about the male preference for anal sex, even within marriage, either as a form of birth control or as a preferred homosexual practice.

Most Arabs and Muslims will deny that this is so. They will attack westerners who say so as "orientalists, colonialists, racists." Western intellectuals will agree with them. They have been well indoctrinated by--no, western academics were the ones who first glorified the work of the late Edward W. Said who, in my opinion, published his master work, *Orientalism*, in 1978 as a way of denying feminist ideas and refocusing academic attention away from women and onto brown, Muslim, Arab men as the truest victims of oppression. Neat trick.

Shoebat's grandfather was the Mukhtar of his village. Nevertheless, eleven-fifteen people lived cramped into two rooms with a huge balcony, a courtyard, and an outhouse. Once, when Shoebat's American-born Christian mother, (she was forced to convert to Islam), upended a backgammon board in front of his father Achmed's friends, Achmed took a hammer and cracked her skull. Shoebat, her youngest child, took her hand and walked with her to the nearest church where the nuns sewed up her head. There were no hospitals. Whenever his mother tried to escape, (always together with her three children) the Shoebat men would find her, re-kidnap her, subject her to further punishment.

The male sexual abuse of female children exists everywhere; it is one of the main means of traumatizing and shaming women into obedience and rendering them incapable of resistance or rebellion. However, the male sexual abuse of male children--denied, never admitted--may work differently and may turn boys into predatory, pedophilic men. Also, among Arabs and Muslims, revenge killings are uniquely prevalent.

Shoebat told me several extraordinary stories which illustrate Palestinian and Arab Middle Eastern mentality. One of his paternal uncles was supposedly having an affair with the mother of Yusuf Al-Atrash who belongs to the family of Sami Al-Altrash, the Montreal-based student who stopped Bibi Netanyahu

from speaking at Concordia University. The woman's husband was the chief of police whose revenge consisted of throwing live grenades at Shoebat's family home. The home bore the unrepaired damage for years. The outraged husband wanted to not only kill his wife's lover but his entire family. "My father and his immediate family all had to die because of what his brother did."

Shoebat asked me how I would resolve this feud-unto-death because of his uncle Najib, who was also the chief of police. I floundered. Bride-exchange sacrifice? Blood money? I could not come up with the ingenious plan that Najib crafted--a plan which may also shed light, in part, upon the nature of the Arab war against the Jews. Najib persuaded the village that they had to attack, pogrom-style, a nearby Jewish community. (Ramat Rachel). Once the Israelis opened fire in self-defense, most of the Arabs fled. However, the Arab attack upon the Jews provided cover for what Najib had to do: He himself sniped Yusuf in the back. When the Israelis, as they always did, allowed the Arabs to safely retrieve their dead, Najib proclaimed Yusuf al-Atrash a "shahid" and buried him in his bloody clothing. This is a mark of honor. A "shahid" enters heaven more quickly, clothed in his own blood.

This characterizes an Arab way of thinking. From here, it is easy to create the kinds of doctored footage and photo-opportunity journalism that has dominated this latest Intifada against the Jews. It is also a way of thinking that the liberal western media does not comprehend.

Yusuf's martyrdom was not enough, the "honor" of the al-Atrash family had not yet been redeemed. Another man from the al-Atrash family attacked Shoebat's father Achmed, who, in self-defense, "ripped his stomach open like a sheep." The man did not die. Shoebat's father immediately went into hiding. By this time, Shoebat was living in America. His paternal uncles called him and asked that he pay the blood money. Shoebat did so but not until each of his uncles ("nice uncles") publicly "abandoned" Achmed. "He is not my brother, I denounce and abandon him."

And only in this way was Shoebat finally able to rescue his mother. He paid the blood money and brought both his long-suffering mother and her abuser, his father, to America. Since Shoebat's mother holds an American passport she was able to bring her husband into the country with her.

Recently, Shoebat's brother--a man they had previously socialized with-- called Shoebat's wife. "Tell your husband that we know what he is doing against Islam. Tell him we know where he lives. Bye bye."

"I told my wife, Welcome to the Middle East where your beloved one day can become your executioner the next day."

Shoebat is, miraculously, engaged in redefining loyalty. He has taken his mother's side, and in so doing, has broken with the shame, honor, and secrecy codes of his father's culture. It is important to understand that Shoebat has not broken with his father. On the contrary, he rescued him too. Shoebat's mother and father both live near him in the United States.

These amazing anecdotes confirm the veracity of Dr. Kobrin's work. In my view, they also suggest that Americans and Europeans begin to think twice about what Arabs tell them about who started a fight, and why the Israelis, the Jews, and the Americans are to blame.

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