

Sacred Values

Psychological and Anthropological Perspectives on Fairness, Fundamentalism, and Terrorism

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Enduring, violent, social, and political conflicts have often been interpreted as resulting directly from socioeconomic inequity. The advent of global terrorism is traditionally understood by the political left as representing a rational, albeit regrettable, third-world response to poverty. On the political right the alternative explanation tends to see the world in terms of the fight between good and evil—each side “Islamist” and “Western,” characterizing the enemy in similar opposing terms. This has recently been popularized as a clash of religions, cultures, or civilizations. Most poor societies do not, however, respond to their circumstances with violence (particularly terrorism), and indeed it is often at the point where the socioeconomic circumstances of a society or a region are improving that there is a breakdown into violence. Starting in Northern Ireland and then exploring other regions, including Peru, Nepal, and the Middle East, the author’s close observation of a number of societies where there has been persistent terrorism has revealed that the response is an emotional and self-destructive one rather than being marked by rational economic self-interest or an essentially religious/cultural conflict; it is often the sense of humiliation, disrespect, and injustice that is the most toxic stimulus; and, insofar as there is inequity or cultural division, it is the component of “unfairness” or “injustice” that is the potent element in the predisposing mixture. “Righting a terrible wrong” or responding to unfairness and injustice is, therefore, a key to understanding and addressing such violent social conflicts.

Key words: sacred values; religious fundamentalism; terrorism; psychology of terrorism

Introduction

David Brooks, in an opinion-editorial in the *New York Times* recently,¹ remarked on the testimony provided in October 2008 to the U.S. Congress by Alan Greenspan, who was for almost 20 years until 2006 the Chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve Board. Greenspan noted that he was “shocked” that markets did not work as he had anticipated. “I made a mistake in presuming that the self-interests of organizations, specifically banks and others, were

such as that they were best capable of protecting their own shareholders and their equity in the firms.” For a long time the basic assumption in public policy analysis has been that economics and politics are best understood as rational decision-making processes based on maximizing self-interest. Alan Greenspan was now questioning the “rational actor” model in economics because of the global economic collapse. Given the failure of the “War on Terror” it may also be time to explore how far alternative analyses provide a better key to understanding politically motivated violence. All these matters are essentially issues of human relationships and, as such, are driven much more by emotion than by rational thought.

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Individual or Group Psychology and Terrorism

My interest in understanding and dealing with the problem of terrorism comes from growing up in Northern Ireland during the period of what is euphemistically known locally as “The Troubles.” In addressing the issue of terrorism, I should from the start clarify that I am not using the term in any judgmental or morally-loaded sense. I am simply employing it to describe that particular tactic of asymmetric warfare with which we have all become tragically familiar. I see this as structurally different from the use of terror by authoritarian states to force their will on their own or other citizens. I do not regard one as more-or-less justified than the other. I am simply differentiating between what in medicine we might call different syndromes in order to become clearer about diagnosis, pathology, course, management, and prognosis. Objective examination of these phenomena rather than approaching them morally is necessary if we are to make progress in understanding them scientifically.

It is often asserted that those who become terrorists are either evil or psychologically disturbed people, but there is little evidence that in the majority of cases either is the case. Of the relatively few individuals who have been directly involved in terrorism and present voluntarily for psychological treatment, most are no longer active. Some are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, but these symptoms develop as a consequence of violent experiences rather than being a predisposing factor to involvement. Some of those who become involved in terrorism are disturbed individuals whose difficulties are expressed through violent behavior and who may also show symptoms of anxiety or depression, alcohol abuse, and other psychiatric disorders, but this could be said of any group in society; most vulnerable people are actually excluded by sophisticated terrorist organizations because they create a high risk.

A few terrorists would conform to the diagnostic criteria for sociopathic personality disorder,

but they are as difficult for their organizations to handle as they are for the rest of society. They tend to cause violent internal feuds and may break away and form dissident groups. Certainly it was our experience in Northern Ireland that, as a group, most of the people who became involved in terrorism were not themselves psychiatrically ill or suffering from disorders of personality.

Some grew up in communities where the tradition of using physical force to address political problems had been maintained for generations. They admired fathers, grandfathers, and other male role models honored in the community for their participation in a historic struggle. The involvement of these young people in terrorism was an identification with these significant figures and was ego and culturally syntonic. Other young men who have less impressive role models in their family or local community may seek out heroes in sport, politics, or war (in reality or in the movies).

Many who get involved in terrorism describe experiences of major trauma in which friends or family members were killed or badly injured by bombings or shootings and where they felt that the official institutions—the police, the army, and the justice system—gave them and their community inadequate protection or were indeed the instigators of the violence. For such individuals, joining a terrorist or paramilitary organization was consciously seen both as a way of protecting their community and of satisfying the wish for revenge for the death or injury of their loved one. At another level it is also an expression of the shame-rage response engendered by narcissistic injury. Although some respond in the immediate aftermath of the loss and in other cases, especially in some young women in the Palestinian territories, there is evidence of abnormal grief reactions, for most people who react in this way it is not pathological when seen from the perspective of the emotional responses within their community. Looking on from outside one may have a very different perspective of individual rational self-interest and living within the rule of law, and

some terrorists looking back on a lifetime of operations may come to a different more self-interested perspective; at the time and for many years the responses by most of those involved cannot be regarded as a matter of gross individual pathology. This comes about because the survival of my community (or my family) can become more important than my own personal survival, and this becomes possible through a regressive crisis where I merge and completely identify with my family or community.

These two groups—those who were following a significant tradition (identification with an admired person) and those who joined in a violent response to loss and injury (identification with the aggressor)—often despise others who have joined primarily to benefit from the organized crime through which terrorist organizations survive and exert control in their own communities. The largely criminal element seeks to gain personally from extortion, racketeering, drugs, and illegal businesses, such as the sale of stolen tobacco, alcohol, or laundered fuel. These activities are needed by a terrorist organization to raise the substantial funds necessary to conduct an illegal campaign, but the more committed terrorist has a political cause (in a sense a sacred cause) for which they gave up family and financial security and risked their lives. They did not seek personal financial benefit through these illegal activities and resent their political cause being used as a flag of convenience by those whose agenda is crude, personal, material gain. These sentiments were not just evident in Northern Ireland. I have heard Hamas volunteers speaking in similar critical terms about corruption in Fatah. In the later years of struggle in Ireland, some individuals justified slipping into personal criminal gain with claims that these were the spoils of war or a kind of “terrorist pension plan.”

It will readily be understood from these brief descriptions of five differing groups—

- the psychologically damaged (as a result of involvement),

- the psychologically disturbed (prior to involvement),
- those identifying with admired people in their community, or heroes from outside,
- the “protectors and avengers” (identification with the aggressor), and
- the criminal element—

that there is not one personality type or background that identifies the terrorist, and, as Travis² reported, the British intelligence agency MI5 has come to appreciate that there is no easy way to identify those who will become involved in terrorism.

Individual psychology may help us in retrospect to understand the personal histories and vulnerabilities that led some individuals into terrorism. The psychological profile and personality of the leaders, however, is important as a representation of key aspects of the psychology of the group. The leader also mirrors particular qualities and provides an inspiring role model, and changes in the group will result in changes of leadership. Studies of the psychology of particular leaders^{3,4} can shed light on the cause because, in their very personality, they tell us something about the psychology of the group.

Although there is not one profile for those who become involved in terrorism, there are psychological similarities between people who get involved in contrast with the nonterrorist criminal community. The relationship between prison colleagues is more supportive; they survive better in solitary confinement, they use educational facilities better, and some groups tend to be puritanical and self-sacrificial. Lyons and Harbinson⁵ compared political and non-political murderers in Northern Ireland and found greater stability in those who were convicted of political murders. More recently Sageman⁶ and Atran⁷ have piloted a people-based database that includes background information on over 500 global network terrorists and their trajectory within the contexts they arose. This has enabled them to look scientifically at different hypotheses about terrorism and has

substantiated the view that it is in the context of the group that we are most likely to find pointers in the study of the psychology of terrorism. Atran suggests that the development of relationships based on “sacred” values seems important in understanding the radical commitment of these groups to the use of terrorism. This is not meant to imply that the use of terrorism is sacred or that they are inspired by a particular religious faith or doctrine but rather that they espouse transcendent values, such as “justice for their people,” that are regarded as higher than issues of normal individual morality. Given the perceived inequality of their political position, they come to believe that terrorism is the only effective tactic of warfare available in the asymmetric power context in which the group finds itself.

The Sageman⁸ and Atran⁷ work shows that, with the exception of Israel/Palestine, many violent jihadis (and jihad is not necessarily violent) live in the diaspora. They joined the jihad outside their country of origin and most had no religious education until they became “born again” in their late teens or early adulthood. Most join through friendship or kinship, creating small bands of about eight “fictive kin” who regard each other as brothers and would as easily die for each other as for any natural parent, sibling, or child. Unlike criminal organizations, terrorist groups usually claim their atrocities. For them the crime is worth committing even if they die in the attempt. The failure of the struggle, rather than their personal capture or death, is the ultimate disaster. Their individual self becomes conflated with their cause, ideal, or group—identification with their fellow group members. These are not, however, the particular characteristics of poor, ignorant, lonely, psychologically disturbed, or criminal individuals, as is sometimes portrayed by politicians or the press.

These findings suggest that to understand causation the psychological fault line must be explored at the level of the group more than the individual. Vamik Volkan described this in his ground-breaking book *Cyprus—War and*

Adaptation.⁹ In this book and in many writings since then, most recently *Killing in the Name of Identity*,¹⁰ he demonstrates transgenerational transmission of the group identity and often an imperative toward reparative violence. The transmission from the parental generation of the sense of being shamed, humiliated, and under attack and the imperative to redress it is one important element in understanding why suicide bombers and radicals may come from second- and third-generation immigrants who seem otherwise well integrated into their host community.

Evolution and Dissolution of Mental Function in Individuals and Groups

The 19th century English neurologist Hughlings Jackson outlined the developmental or evolutionary principle in the structure of the body and in mentation. Organisms grow from the simple, rigid, and reflex to the more complex, pragmatic, and unpredictable, and when they break down, dissolution of function can be observed. The higher more recently acquired functions are lost and replaced by the return, or, more accurately, the release of the primitive capacities that remain or by fundamental characteristics of mental life, such as the repetition compulsion.¹¹ Freud and others developed these ideas further in psychoanalysis, showing how infants and children, as they move through the process of maturation, experience difficulties that mark certain stages in their development as vulnerable points to which they may return in the course of later psychological regression. When an individual in the face of a trauma or threat withdraws from an unacceptable reality, their thinking and behavior becomes similar to that seen at various stages in childhood and they transfer, onto people and places in the present, ways of relating that were more appropriate in earlier times. Such thinking may be magical and rigid, and the form of their relationships is increasingly characterized by identification. Something further happens

when a patient falls ill with a schizophrenic psychosis. In these disorders patients display some disturbances of thinking and perception that are not generally seen in childhood but are seen during the dream life of healthy adults. Henri Ey,¹² the French evolutionary psychiatrist, called this *dissolution of the field of consciousness*, to differentiate it from dissolution of the development of the personality. Freeman¹³ and Katan¹⁴ have used analyses of the processes of psychotic thinking similar to psychoanalytic dream analysis to produce reconstructions of the prepsychotic mental life that reestablished the link and meaning behind a psychotic breakdown.

It may seem a substantial step to suggest that these models of growth, development, and illness in the individual may provide analogies for group and societal processes, but in 1887 when Hughlings Jackson was trying to describe the processes of evolution and dissolution in neurological development and disease in the individual, he used precisely this analogy. "The higher nervous arrangements evolved out of the lower, keep down those lower, just as a government evolved out of a nation controls as well as directs that nation," he said. "If this be the process of evolution, then the reverse process of dissolution is not only a 'taking off' of the higher, but is at the very same time a 'letting go' of the lower." Indeed, while psychoanalysis has tended to shrink into being seen by many of its practitioners as a disembodied individual psychology, it was from the beginning both rooted in bodily and brain functions and also seen as relevant to the understanding of group function. I am strongly of the view that with technical developments we have an opportunity to reconnect psychology and brain function, and, with the collapse of conviction about the rational actor model, we can reapply our psychoanalytical ideas to understanding groups. In the case of our present study, this involves observing the processes of evolution and dissolution in communities where a terrorist campaign goes through different stages.

Dissolution and Reparative Evolution of the Community Culture and Group Thinking

Terrorism usually breaks out after a lengthy gestation but once released has its own terrible dynamic. Catholic Nationalists in Northern Ireland felt betrayed in 1922 when their fellow Irishmen accepted partition of the island and independence for the south. After 50 years of political discontent and alienation in Northern Ireland, the civil rights marches in the USA offered a new model for Northern Nationalists to exert political pressure. There was, however, a violent unionist reaction to their marches, and this opened the way to further regression from marches into street riots, then to vigilantism, and finally to terrorism on both sides. The street activity was replaced by more organized bombing of buildings and shootings and by the 1980s by hunger strikes, more targeted assassinations, and car bombings; and then in the 1990s the widening of "legitimate targets" and the strategy of bombing mainland Britain. The community became deeply polarized. The failure of all of the destructive tactics in solving the problem eventually led to the development of a peace process involving negotiations among all the parties. After the Belfast Agreement in 1998, attacks on security forces and the "other" side of the community were replaced by attacks on elements in their own side of the community as a way of maintaining control. This, too, settled as the new agreed political and policing arrangements were gradually put in place and a more democratic and inclusive way of structuring the community evolved. This was a most unusual outcome. More often there is simply a long-term intractable conflict.

How had the rest of the community and the responsible sovereign government in London responded to the regression into terrorist and reactive violence? In the early years of breakdown into gross chaos and mayhem, the gruesome and relatively random attacks created widespread acute terror. The objective of terrorism is to undermine and destroy belief and

confidence in the hated authority and attack the populace's capacity for thought and dialogue by promoting primitive states of mind that can be more easily manipulated in the frantic search for soothing and reduction of primitive anxiety and panic.

In the areas of actual street violence during that early phase of the campaign, the levels of suicide and depression went down, but in the penumbra—the areas around the scenes of violence, which heard the news and feared what could happen—*anxiety mounted and the prescription of benzodiazepines rose considerably*. There were demands for a robust security response, resulting in executive detention without trial and vigorous army activity alongside the police. The number of prisoners, soldiers, and policemen grew exponentially. Soon there was trouble inside as well as outside the growing prison estate. The prisoners and the outside community became ever more divided along religious lines, and there were major movements of population reflecting this. The communal divisions extended beyond the traditional apartheid in schools and sports activities. People increasingly tended to live, work, and socialize only with co-religionists. The territory controlled by each group was clearly marked out by flags, and sectarian murals painted on the gable walls of houses. The stones at the edge of pavements were painted red, white, and blue in Protestant areas and green, white, and orange in Catholic areas.

This acute phase was gradually replaced by a period of chronic disturbance. The community had regressed from a myriad of individual differences maintained in a broad mosaic of relationships to a narrower frame of reference where the single difference between Protestant Unionist and Catholic Nationalist assumed preeminence and was reflected in control of territory. This was maintained by physical attacks on those who crossed the community divide in their personal life and by regular marches of partisan community groups that emphasized the geographical boundaries of the two sections of the community. Only after about 30 years did

the many attempts at an exploratory healing process begin to make significant advances toward peace when the British Government came together with the Irish Government and all the political parties in Northern Ireland, including Sinn Fein, the political element of Irish Republicanism (PIRA being the military wing).

It will not be difficult to discern in these references to the process of acute dissolution and regression, emergence of primitive phenomena, chronicity, containment (with security measures rather than medication or inpatient care), and a slow resistance-bedevelled healing process, something analogous to the breakdown and repair of mental health in an individual. The question is how far can one take this analogy in translating the evolutionary or developmental and psychoanalytical approach beyond the arena of individual intrapsychic conflict and mental illness into the field of intracommunal and intercommunal conflict?

Splitting and Understanding

The notion that we should try to achieve some understanding of people and groups involved in politically motivated violence¹⁵ is a challenge to the simple law and order approach. The immediate emotional response to a terrorist campaign is often to split the community into bad (the terrorists who are outside the pale) and good (law-abiding citizens who need protection from them). In the global "War on Terror" the terrorists are not, however, being entirely successfully isolated, but those who proclaimed the war against them are increasingly experiencing antagonism from erstwhile friends as a result of the unacceptable nature of their reaction to the terrorist campaign. The strength and depth of the hatred involved on all sides usually overcomes a rational appreciation of the damage of communal violence and war, which is self-evidently not in the interests of any of those groups or individuals concerned. Rational argument is, unfortunately, a weak lever in the face of profound violence and hate, and

in any case splitting into good and bad and making the struggle into a moral one of “Good against Evil,” is the exercise of a psychological defense mechanism against profound anxiety rather than a result of rational analysis.

Some analysts have adopted a different good/bad split expressing the view that terrorism is a result of post-colonial poverty (“Terrorism is caused by bad wealthy imperialists oppressing good but poor natives”). There is clearly a moral imperative to address the painful inequalities of education, health, and economic well-being in the world, but it is generally not societies at their poorest that fall victim to the tactic of terrorism. Northern Ireland began to experience terrorism as Catholic grievances were being addressed by a more progressive government in the late 1960s. The Middle East became more unstable after oil was discovered. Mr. Osama bin Laden was not a poor man; indeed he came from an element in the more wealthy Saudi elite.⁴ What he does demonstrate in his personal life is much of the experience of humiliation and disrespect and their exculpation and repudiation by rage and hostile impulses aimed against a designated “shaming other,” which are the emotional driving forces in the group dynamic behind the involvement in terrorism. It is not in the depths of deprivation but at the point of improvement that things become most vulnerable to breakdown. This suggests that the link with socio-economic disadvantage is through the emotional reaction that may come out of a sense that the relative disadvantage is experienced as unjust and disrespectful.

A rationalistic explanation by the political left for the emergence of violence as a last resort might read as follows: Where people are aware that their relative disadvantage is the result of poor education or social or cultural differences, they may sometimes accept these as unhappy but justifiable causes of their disadvantage. When their educational opportunities improve and they feel as capable as the next person, they begin to see their disadvantage more in terms of historic, cultural, racial, or

political discrimination and oppression. If they are unable to change this by peaceful political means and nonviolent options, the use of physical force, including terrorism, comes onto the agenda.

In the past some on the political right, who espouse what is commonly referred to as “realpolitik,” maintained that national leaders and their countries pursue what they perceive to be in their own best interests. Others on the right give a more primitive explanation in terms of good and evil—our religion/culture/civilization is good and advanced, theirs is primitive and wicked; they hate our culture and wish to destroy it, so we must destroy them first. Both of these groups on the right tend to propose responses of a simple behavioral kind, giving economic and political favors as encouragement and embarking on punitive operations and war to discourage negative behavior. The recent US approach to the wider Middle East, and Israeli attacks on Palestinians could be seen as being characterized by this approach to the problem.

However, neither of these entirely work as explanations nor will the actions that flow from them be successful; we know from our clinical experience that individuals and groups often act against, rather than in, their own best interests, especially when their emotions are high. It is also clear that those on whose behalf terrorist campaigns are apparently waged (e.g., Catholic Nationalists in Northern Ireland, first nation people in Peru, lower caste people in Nepal, Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank) often suffer profoundly at the hands of their “protector” terrorist organizations.

The Violent Power of Feelings, Especially Humiliation, Shame, and Rage

Engagement with those involved in political life in regions of such conflict reveals powerful memories of times when their group, or they as individuals, had been demeaned and

their existence threatened. These feelings are often profound, especially the sense of humiliation and the shame at having failed to prevent the degrading attacks. These experiences provoke deep anger and fear and a capacity for responses at least as violent as those that have been experienced.

In Northern Ireland it was often observed that the PIRA would not only try to kill British soldiers and police officers, or indeed uninvolved civilians, they would also mete out appalling violence on their own people. While this was said to be about maintaining control, in fact social and domestic violence and abuse of their own people, especially young people, became endemic in their areas and persisted long after the terrorist campaign was over.

In Peru there has been an historic failure by the descendents of the conquistadors to integrate the majority native population into the mainstream of establishment life. They remain generally poor but also disrespected and excluded from positions of power. This was borne in on me as I participated in a ceremony when the remains of seven of the tens of thousands of those who “disappeared” during the Sendero Luminosa (Shining Path, Maoist) terrorist insurgency were returned to their families. As I walked with the families through the streets of Ayacucho following the coffins, few people paid any attention; they just went about their business ignoring this multiple funeral. These grieving people and their dead relatives seemed to be of no import; they were split off and disregarded.

Nepal was, until the recent deposing of the king, the last Hindu kingdom. The upper castes in power excluded the lower castes from positions of respect and split the community into “good” and “bad” with the same toxic humiliation I had seen in Northern Ireland. Even limited moves to democracy were set aside, and the representatives who espoused the Maoist strategy did so after their exclusion from any democratic prospect was removed. What is, however, striking about the Maoist response strategy in both Nepal and Peru is that, despite their an-

gry violent promotion of the cause of the oppressed, their own abuse of these same people was dreadful. Their lack of humanity in the treatment of those in whose cause they fought powerfully highlights that it is not merely a rational protective response to the socioeconomic plight of the poor.

Although the situations in Northern Ireland, Peru, and Nepal are widely divergent when assessed on economic, historic, and political grounds, all have experienced violent internal insurgencies characterized by the use of terrorism, and there is good reason to conclude that these insurgencies stem from the long-standing sense of humiliation and disrespect felt by a significant section of the population. There is also a deep feeling of shame that is connected to a sense of failure to protect or repair, which is personal but also public, and experienced as a loss of power or agency. While humiliation is characterized by sadism, shame is linked to banishment and the catastrophic feeling of being wiped out. The narcissistic injuries of shame and humiliation together create the most violent and toxic of responses in the form of terrorism. That aggressive response has also been visited as much on their own section of the community as on the “enemy.” A rational reaction model is much less helpful in explaining this outcome than one that also takes account of the processes of evolution and dissolution and the power of emotions in the causation of political terrorism.

Analysts of terrorism have often attempted to differentiate between the kind of terrorist insurgencies I have just described and the conflict between Islamists and the West. My own experiences of meeting and talking extensively with leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah in the Middle East over the past few years have demonstrated to me that, certainly as far as they are concerned, the same key problems are present—severe relative deprivation, a deep sense of injustice especially (but not only) on the question of land, experiences of humiliation and disrespect, and a belief that all non-violent options have been exhausted. In this

sense the movements in Palestine, Lebanon, and the surrounding region are local nationalist movements whose purpose is to right perceived wrongs on behalf of their own people. Insofar as they turn to co-religionists for help, it is in the service of this primary purpose rather than their being inherently instruments of a wider malign religious conspiracy. When they see no peaceful route to resolving the historic and current hurt and grievance of their people and instead experience sanctions, exclusion, and brutal violence, they will regress into destructive and indeed self-destructive acts. If an alternative route can be opened up, it may be that evolution toward a peaceful outcome can slowly be found, as has been the case in South Africa and Ireland.

Understanding Al Qaeda and the Global Systemic Shift

A further question arises as to what group psychological processes are at work in the global jihadist networks of Al Qaeda and others. The origins of this movement are complex. At one level we could observe that a combination of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the stable instability of the Cold War led to regression and the reappearance of the old nationalisms and religious divisions that had been kept in control and subjection for many years. In addition, because humanity has not yet found a way of living without an enemy, the loss of “the familiar enemy” led to the emergence of Islamism not only *sui generis* but also, as I have argued elsewhere,¹⁶ as an unconscious result of Western responses to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the presence of the USA as the sole hyperpower.

Globalization consequent on developments in communication, travel, and weapons of mass effect has produced profound group anxiety and a regression in thinking toward fundamentalism and culturally to old societal themes and structures. The reaction is, however, deeply ambivalent because mixed with antipathy toward

domination is a wish to possess all the benefits of education, healthcare, and economic prosperity represented by Europe but more especially by its offspring the USA. There is also the haunting problem for Muslims (and indeed all of us) of why Islamic society, which was once fertile in ideas and innovation, suffered such reversals and humiliation. Part of the answer given by Islamist fundamentalists is not just Western imperialism and the disastrous collapse of the Ottoman Empire but what is seen as Muslim betrayal in the form of Arab royal families and the regime in Egypt enjoying oil wealth and the alliance with the West rather than sharing it with their own people. The reciprocal hypocrisy, as they see it, of Western powers proclaiming an attachment to democracy and human rights while allying themselves with undemocratic regimes and disregarding the results of free and fair elections adds to the shame, humiliation, sense of injustice, and rage and opens up the dangerous possibility of a regression beyond the split between Islam and the West into the communal split and sectarian bitterness of Shiite against Sunni.

These observations about the origins of terrorist violence are reminiscent of the work of James Gilligan¹⁷ with mentally disturbed individuals who had committed serious violent crimes in the USA. He had made observations about what he described as “shaming” in prisoners who had committed very violent crimes against other persons, similar to what I am describing in the origins of terrorism in various parts of the world. Despite the awfulness of their crimes, his prisoner patients also believed themselves to be justified; righting some terrible wrong; some deep disrespect done to them. This is similar to those who engage in terrorism. While the rest of the world may see them as evil, those who engage in terrorist attacks believe that theirs is a moral and courageous activity motivated not by personal material gain but by principle. Those against whom they pit themselves are seen as the immoral ones, and they cite not only the political oppression noted above but also the falling away of a sense of

meaning and moral purpose and commitment in the West. This latter strand of their critique is actually a view shared by Christian fundamentalists in the West.

This shared view of groups that regard each other with deep antagonism brings another issue into view. The analysis given above could easily be misused to serve a stance that simply condemned Israel and the USA; however, this fails to take the history of these two communities into account. The formation of the state of Israel was an attempt to find a safe haven for a religious group and nation that had been persecuted by Christendom for much of the last two millennia. The USA, too, was for many of its citizens a place to escape from religious and political persecution and economic hardship and misery in Europe. That both groups gave scant regard to the welfare of the indigenous people they found there, treating them as badly as they themselves had been treated in Europe, was a group manifestation of “identification with the aggressor”; a repetition on to the “other” of the abuse that they themselves had suffered. The gross appearance of such a psychological defense in the politics of today suggests that any process to address the problems of “anti-Western” Islamist terrorism must also enable Israel and the USA to explore the origins of these difficulties in their own history.

Primitive Thinking and Emotional Responses

Professor Gilligan’s patients were individuals suffering from psychoses. As I have outlined earlier, this is not the case with individual terrorists, but is it possible to interpret the thinking of their group as analogous to a psychosis or at least a process of regression into primitive thinking? Certainly terrorist groups can at times present a fundamentalist mode of thinking, which is difficult to engage in rational debate or argument. There is a denial in word and action of the individual humanity of those who are about to suffer at their hands. The per-

ception of the people who will die in the Twin Towers or a bomb in Belfast or Tel Aviv is that they are Americans, Protestants or Catholics, or Jews and that this is all that is to be said. Just as in psychotic thinking, the part stands for the whole, and the humanity and difference of the other is lost. There is little appreciation that those they kill may not even be their enemies. They may not as individuals share the position of their government or state; they may even have campaigned for the cause espoused by the terrorist who will now kill them as symbols of the hated “other.” These possibilities are shut out from thinking. The people who will die are either regarded as *de facto* complicit in the sins of their government or are set aside as the “unfortunate collateral damage of war.” In using such a phrase, however, we immediately become aware that the need to set aside the individual humanity of the victim of our violence is also a necessary defense for all soldiers, including those who respond militarily to terrorist attacks with orders to “destroy the terrorists”. The attachment to a hard-won rational system of law and liberal democracy is always in danger of being loosened by the powerful emotions unleashed in the community by the terrifying nature of terrorism and war. Terror is a result of the regression into violence, but terror is not a mere side effect of these attacks. It is the purpose not just to blow away people and buildings but also the institutional and mental structures of freedom and order that a group worked for centuries to put in place. An angry terrorism often provokes an emotional response rather than a calculated one.

In Northern Ireland the failure of the terrorist campaign led eventually to the profoundly regressive behavior represented in the “dirty protest” and the hunger strikes of 1981 that created martyrs because of the character of the response of the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. This helped make their deaths a symbolically powerful “blood sacrifice” and became the basis for the political rise of Sinn Fein, which now represents the majority of the Catholic Nationalist community in Northern

Ireland. This increase in the strength of the Republican movement's political wing (Sinn Féin) began even while PIRA was still involved in violent criminal activity, although not after 9/11, in overt terrorist tactics. In the Middle East the reactions to the suicide bombings also contributed to the creation of a generation of martyrs with their conscious voluntary "blood sacrifice." By treating themselves in a less than human fashion, they become glorified. While their enemies respond with a mistaken analysis that punishment will stop the bad behavior, Islamists have grasped the psychological transcendence and paradox on the other side of dehumanization.

In South Africa and Northern Ireland, it was finally discovered that only a long process of containing difficult emotions, building relationships, and untangling the historic repetitions of hurt and humiliation gave any hope for the future. It was remarkably similar to the process of individual and group psychotherapy. In pursuing and being involved in this process, I was struck by the work of the French Canadian Rene Girard¹⁸ who has written extensively and with considerable insight about the connections between group violence, sacrifice, law, religion, culture, and the scapegoat mechanism. He acknowledges the insights of Freud who realized that, while the evidence of the clinic had led him to valuable understandings about the vicissitudes of the libidinal drive in the individual, the truly terrible tragedies of the First World War required him to reevaluate his understanding of aggression and the importance of the group. Girard, however, draws attention to Freud's reference in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*¹⁹ to the inescapable conflict arising from identification in the relationship between the boy and his father. The inevitable emergence of hostility when the boy imitates the desire of his father in relation to his mother leads to the Oedipus complex. Freud notes in the paper, "Identification, in fact, is ambivalent from the very first. . . ." Girard's complaint is that Freud does not then follow this insight through to its logical conclusion, which

is the relational and imitative nature of aggression and its outcome in violence, although other analysts, including Klein, Bion, and Rosenfeld have gone on to address this. Girard further explores the ways in which the mechanism that he refers to as *mimesis* leads inevitably to violence unless the social boundaries of religion, law, and culture are respected. Mimesis is the precursor to identification and individuation. It is a primary activity. Perhaps the "holy" or "sacred" characteristic of martyrdom in the regression of suicide bombing and hunger strikes in particular and terrorism in general is linked to going back to first principles and primary relationships—redrawing the map in the most "pure" and fundamental manner possible.

The implication of Girard's approach is that it is not religion that is the cause of violence, not even fundamentalist religion—although it is along the regressive road—but rather it is the breakdown of the boundaries established through religion and law that results in the release of violence. This argument implies that after the breakdown of the horrible but stabilizing boundary of the Cold War the emergence of a new and peaceful world order depended on putting new boundaries in place. Without that, the positive opportunities of globalization with its freedom to trade, travel, and communicate could only be perceived as a threat. The current regression to fundamentalist ways of thinking in the West as well as the East is then a flight from and defense against this modernity in the absence of other more healthy defenses. The Islamists make this clear when they proclaim that the solution is for the great evil, which is America, to leave their part of the world—that is to say for a new East/West boundary to be established. This is a profound and dangerous regression, but without alternative boundaries, such as those set by the United Nations and international law, reciprocal violence seems almost inevitable.

The appearance of terrorism can, therefore, be reinterpreted not as a moral issue (on either side) but as a symptom of psychotic-like regression to acting out a fantasy of a primary

idealized “object” (the wish belief of a past perfection) with which the terrorist mimetically identifies—a kind of group equivalent of psychosis. We are well aware as psychiatrists of the need from time to time for appropriate and sensitive containment (pharmacological, physical, and social) if a patient with psychosis and their family are to be able to benefit from psychological therapies and find healing. By analogy we could make the proposition that the important role of containment and boundary setting in the national and international sphere should not be portrayed as a moral intervention but rather the creation of a context in which the disturbed thoughts, feelings, and behavior of all the groups involved as well as the causes of the disturbance can be addressed.

The Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism

It is understandable that many current writers begin their published reflections on the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism by acknowledging the significance of September 11, 2001, and the suicide attacks on the USA, in particular on symbols of its economic, military, and political power. However, there are certain problems with this starting point. Firstly, there is an implied conflation of religious fundamentalism with the use of terrorism and politically motivated violence, a connection that merits further exploration; and secondly it disconnects, by setting to the other side of that watershed, the importance of the Protestant fundamentalism that was substantially mobilized in the US presidential election campaign of George W. Bush the previous year. In addition to Islamic and other religious fundamentalist movements, Protestant fundamentalism has been on the rise in various parts of the world for some time. The worldwide Anglican Communion, for example, is near to schism over the question of the church’s attitude to homosexuality. This demonstrates a profound divergence and antagonism between those who

may be described as liberals or modernists on the one hand and those taking action against them who we might describe as fundamentalists. That those in the latter group are not merely conservatives is shown by their intolerance of the position of the liberal modernists. The Anglican Communion always prided itself on being a “broad church” of liberals, conservatives, and others and the views being expressed by the modernist tendency are by no means new, so threats of schism and discussions within the courts of the church about bringing back heresy trials seem to represent something significant about the growth and development of fundamentalism.

In my own study of the history of Northern Ireland in the 20th century, I found it difficult to avoid the conclusion that there was an intimate connection between the strength and aggressivity of fundamentalist religious views and instability and uncertainty about the political and constitutional future of the province. Despite the insistence of fundamentalists that faith is an individual matter and that each person must make a personal commitment based only on their convictions and relationship with God, there is much evidence that this is more generally a group phenomenon related to political anxiety and fear. Indeed many authors have identified the rise of fundamentalism amongst Protestants in the USA and among Muslims from Indonesia to Morocco to various aspects of social, economic, and political instability and change in the world as they experience it, and I have been struck in my own conversations with religious Islamists how they are keen to emphasize the importance of the political problems rather than religious differences with the West.

If one applies the neo-Jacksonian ideas of Henri Ey mentioned earlier to the large group, we could understand the response to the anxiety caused by global change and uncertainty to be a regression involving a loss of the higher functions that enable history to be experienced as past (temporal function) and also those capacities for differentiation between individuals within the group as well as between the group

and other groups (spatial function). The loss of these functions leads to the collapse of time so that the past invades the present, and the loss of differentiation between individual people and between the large group and other large groups leads to what Girard calls a “mimetic crisis” with the attendant danger of violence.

The importance of the differentiation between individuals and groups in controlling violence is identified in great detail by Girard in his book *Violence and the Sacred*.¹⁸ In human beings, he says, there are not only the instinctual appetites for food or water and so on, which we share with the animal kingdom, but also imitative desire—“I want that because I observe that you have it.” This fundamental mechanism of mimesis or nonconscious imitation of desires inevitably leads to rivalry, and in Girard’s view the social constructions of law, culture, and religion were essentially mechanisms that set down boundaries for rivalry, which, if uncontrolled, would lead by rapid mimesis to a violent rivalrous crisis. The particular device at the center of this boundary setting is the scapegoat mechanism by which, instead of everyone being set against everyone in violence, all turn against one individual who is demonized, victimized, sacrificed, and then, because his sacrifice brings peace, is ultimately divinized. Girard identifies this mechanism as key to understanding the foundational myths of what he calls archaic religions. In every repetition of the phenomenon, the lynch mob feels itself justified in their violence against this individual who is regarded as the embodiment of some sort of evil. The difference between such myths and Judeo-Christian religion in particular (as exemplified in the crucifixion of Christ and its ritualization in the Eucharist), he says, is the recognition that the identified victim is actually innocent and that he is being sacrificed not because of his wickedness but to rid the community of its evil/violence. The problem is that once the myth of the wickedness of the victim is exposed as a lie, the power of the mechanism is destroyed, for no one can feel so justified in scapegoating. In a post-September 11

expression of his thinking, Girard²⁰ says that while the realization of the hypocrisy or “lie” behind the scapegoat mechanism has ensured that we have, in many ways, become less violent through our insistence on the rights of women, racial and religious minorities, the disabled, and other victims or potential victims, this demythologizing has also contributed to more violence through the release of the old mimetic violence that the sacrificial violence was instigated to control.

As I have outlined previously,¹⁶ if one puts these observations together, the rise of religious fundamentalism may be seen as resulting from a societal regression brought about by the fear of the loss, or in some cases the trauma of actual damage or loss, of large-group identity resulting from a combination of rapid sociopolitical changes in the past century. These might be summarized as follows—the advances in evolutionary science that remove the boundaries between humanity and the rest of the animal kingdom and introduce complexities of thinking that a majority of the population may find difficult to construe; the collapse of traditional authoritarian forms of government (monarchies, empires, and tribal chieftains) with the advance of participatory democracy; the developments in information and communication technologies, greater speed and ease of travel, and the borderless capacity for destruction in the nuclear age—all of which both excite interest and threaten large-group identity; the end of the Cold War, the collapse of communism, and the widespread espousal of free-market economics; in short, the forces that we describe as rapid globalization represent the loss of boundaries, and our experience of time and space is shaken.

Interestingly, however, fundamentalists do not generally see their movements as merely going back to the past. They certainly feel that they are identifying key strands from the roots of their faith and tradition, which they feel to have been overlooked, lost, or denied; however, they describe their activities as “revival,” and many readily espouse new technology in their own lives. Professor Ahmad starts his paper

on Jama'at-e-Islami²¹ in precisely this way, and in conversation I found him very clear that the Islamist approach was about addressing the modern world not trying to recreate the past. Hamas and Hezbollah also say that they are not trying to recreate an old way of living, and there is nothing Amish-like in their style of life. They are instead developing new ways of constructing social and economic models for their communities. From a Jacksonian point of view, fundamentalism is not merely a form of regression but includes the release of functions from an earlier time or lower level of structure and complexity and, most importantly, also incorporates an attempt at reconstruction from a position of dissolution. Given what Girard describes as the fundamental mechanism of mimesis (or nonconscious imitation), large-group identity regression may result in a reparative attempt to re-erect the boundaries that could obviate mimetic rivalry but have been removed by the traumatic loss of or damage to large-group identity. It is as though the unsaid message from the frightened community is, "We do exist; we are different and we may be acting in an aggressive (scapegoat) way, but it is in order to prevent worse (mimetic) violence." This is of enormous importance because it makes clear that it is possible to identify within fundamentalism an innate reparative or reconstructive component, something that is often missed or dismissed by observers. It may not be impossible to relate to this component if it is recognized.

Finally, I return to two key problems: the relationship between different fundamentalisms and the relationship between fundamentalism and violence.

Girard's emphasis on mimetic behavior and the infective nature of violence should alert us that different fundamentalisms will imitate each other and create an interactive cycle of regressive thinking and action. Hence the growth of Protestant fundamentalism within the USA is not hermetically sealed from the growth of other religious fundamentalisms elsewhere; it takes from them and contributes to them as

well. As the boundaries are dissolved, so the possibility of mimesis of thinking increases.

Further, as Volkan points out and Girard helps to further explain why it is, there is an inherent violence, sadistic and/or masochistic, in the scapegoat mechanism, and therefore, insofar as fundamentalists are attempting to re-institute it with old and new boundaries, there will be an aggressive tone to their approach. It may be militant in its evangelism, aggressive in its language and attitude (especially to lukewarm co-religionists who are more of a threat than those who are clearly different), and there will often be abuse and sometimes overt violence in its treatment of women in particular and minorities in general. The overwhelming majority of fundamentalists, however, do not become involved in, or supportive of, terrorism, and indeed many will abhor it. Those who do become genuinely supportive of, or involved in, terrorism seem to have undergone a kind of radicalization that they may share with others who are not religious fundamentalists at all. Many of the young people who get involved in suicide attacks and other terrorist activities are radicalized but are not especially religious, although if they survive they may become religious afterwards while in prison or under the influence of radical clerics or other prisoners. This differentiation between fundamentalist religious convictions and radicalized activists is of great importance in managing the deterioration in global security, and we do not yet understand it fully, save to say that one does not necessarily progress to the other or require the presence of the other, although they can be present and facilitate each other.

A further key question is how far the scapegoat mechanism can really be revived. Perhaps it can no longer work for long because the "cat is out of the bag" that the mechanism is based on a lie, although I am not yet sure of this because as human beings our capacity for denial is significant. There are in any case possible alternatives. The development of the European Union and some of the other peace processes that have been modeled on it show that, in

certain contexts, a process can be created through which it is possible not only to contain the violence but to work through and transform it by the development of relationships in which differences can be sustained and mimesis limited or directed in positive competition rather than dangerous rivalry. On this, however, I must sound a note of warning because these alternative processes are new and, as we can see in Europe, are still susceptible to deteriorate into mimesis and rivalry. While the post-war generations in Europe remembered that the purpose of the European Project was to prevent a return to the rivalries of nation states that had resulted in catastrophic wars, all was well. But now that a new generation of leaders is more concerned with economic success and using the EU as a platform for power to rival the USA, Russia, and China, so the dangers reemerge both within the EU, with the appearance of racism and xenophobia, and also (in collusion with a new line of international division) with scapegoating of the Islamic world in general and Iran in particular.

In summary, both terrorism and religious fundamentalism can best be understood as phenomena of large-group psychology that occur not merely as a direct result of regression in the face of threat or trauma but show three related elements—the loss of some more developed social functions, the return to or release of more elementary social characteristics, and the reconstruction of the large-group identity from the remaining functions and faculties of the group. Fundamentalism is characterized by the diminution of individual freedom, a concretizing of thinking, and restrictions of behavior, but its “purpose” is to repair or reconstruct the group identity and create protective boundaries to prevent further breakdown and/or mimetic violence. This positive component should not be disregarded. Terrorism, on the other hand, involves the resort to violence in the absence of boundaries or other “solutions” to the experience of irreparable humiliation and a deep sense of unfairness and injustice. While containment and security are a necessary response

to terrorism, if approached in a moralistic way, they will only contribute to the violent cycle, while if seen as “holding the ring” for the implementation of a relational approach to addressing the root problems, security and containment can be both positive and necessary.

Both fundamentalism and terrorism represent problems of group relations in which there is a commitment to a “sacred cause,” accompanied by powerful emotions and a belief in addressing what is seen as unfairness and deep wrong, and both call for an appropriately emotionally informed process; but they are not simply two sides of the same coin, and much more work needs to be done to clarify the connections and boundaries between them.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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