

ANN WILKENS



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Ann Wilkens

Suicide Bombers and Society

A study on Suicide Bombers in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Cover photography: Scanpix. There is no indication that the Madrassa or the students in the picture have any connection with or supports suicide terrorism.

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164 90 Stockholm	SE-164 90 Stockholm

Summary

During the last decade, suicide attacks have emerged as an almost daily phenomenon in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Compared to previous waves of suicide bombings in the Middle East, the attacks in this area present slightly different characteristics, situating them closer to the martyrdom ideology developed by the Iranian regime during the war against Iraq in the 1980s. Suicide bombers tend to be very young, a number of them educated in religious schools, *madrassas*.

This study suggests that the rapid development towards a growing number of suicide attacks, which, in spite of the indiscriminate killings of innocent victims linked to them, have been largely accepted as an instrument of asymmetrical warfare, could have been facilitated by some features in the surrounding societies. The concept of “inversion” is used to characterize these phenomena, which turn basic values upside down. Judicial practices which punish the victim rather than the perpetrator, as in many rape cases, serve as an example.

In both Afghanistan and Pakistan, the backdrop to the emergence of suicide bombings consists of multiple and persistent crises in the security, political and economic areas, which have stretched the social fabric close to breaking point. The sectors identified as crucially needing reform, if the descent into lawlessness is to be turned around, are education, gender relations and the judiciary. At the same time it is concluded that the scope for successful Western interventions has been reduced, as various conflicts involving the Muslim world have been left unsolved.

Key words: Pakistan, Afghanistan, suicide bombers, Taliban movements, martyrdom, inversion, respect, humiliation, *zina*, moral crimes, blasphemy laws, *madrassas*, hyperbole

Sammanfattning

Under det gångna decenniet har självmordsattacker trätt fram som ett nära nog dagligt fenomen i Afghanistan och Pakistan. Jämfört med tidigare vågor av självmordsbombningar i Mellanöstern uppvisar dessa attacker ett något annorlunda mönster. De förefaller stå närmare den ideologi kring martyrskap som den iranska regimen utvecklade under kriget mot Irak på 1980-talet. Självmordsbombarna tenderar att vara mycket unga och ett antal av dem har fått sin utbildning i koranskolor, *madrassas*.

I denna studie framförs tanken att den snabba utvecklingen mot ett ökande antal självmordsattacker, trots det urskillningslösa dödandet av oskyldiga offer, i stort sett accepterats som ett instrument i en asymmetrisk krigföring. Vidare underlättas självmordsattacker av vissa fenomen i de omgivande samhällena. För att karaktärisera dessa fenomen används begreppet "inversion", innebärande att grundläggande värden ställs på ända. Rättsprocesser, som utmynnar i bestraffning av offret snarare än förövaren – såsom sker i många våldtäktsfall – är ett exempel.

I både Afghanistan och Pakistan finns i bakgrunden till uppkomsten av självmordsbombningar som fenomen ett antal parallella, ihållande kriser inom säkerhet, politik och ekonomi, vilka tänjt samhällena till bristningsgränsen. De sektorer som i studien identifieras som de mest centrala för att vända utvecklingen mot växande laglöshet är utbildning, genderrelationer och rättsväsende. Samtidigt dras slutsatsen att utrymmet för västvärlden att framgångsrikt intervensera har krympt, i takt med att ett antal konflikter som berör den muslimska världen har lämnats olösta.

Nyckelord: Pakistan, Afghanistan, självmordsbombare, talibanrörelser, martyrskap, inversion, respekt, förödmjukelse, *zina*, brott mot moralen, blasfemilagar, koranskolor (*madrassas*), hyperbol

Programme Manager's remarks

In this report Ann Wilkens, former Swedish Ambassador to Pakistan, discusses why suicide attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan have become a more common instrument of insurgency and power struggles in the two societies. Initially the objective of the study was not as ambitious; the report was meant to scan literature on suicide bombings in Pakistan and Afghanistan and collate some of the more important conclusions. But as the project moved forward Amb. Wilkens identified several interesting explanatory factors which she felt would be well worth exploring. The resulting discussions on the importance of gender issues as well as societal and political injustice is of great importance in explaining how and why suicide attacks are used and how they are linked to the wider issues plaguing the region. As suicide bombings continue to reap lives and wreak havoc, Amb. Wilkens' message is undisputable. A more stable political and societal situation is a must to reduce suicide bombings and other forms of civilian violence. By pushing the antiterrorism agenda large parts of the outside world is unable to provide any effective help towards this goal. What Pakistan and Afghanistan need is a rise of moderate political forces, and these must rise and prevail largely by their own accord.

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John Rydqvist

Programme Manager, FOI Asia Security Studies

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Table of contents

1	DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES	9
1.1	INTRODUCTION	9
1.2	THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY	9
1.3	THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY	11
2	WHO ARE THE SUICIDE BOMBERS AND WHY ARE THEY USED?	13
2.1	SUICIDE BOMBERS	13
2.2	CONCLUDING REMARKS	22
3	SUICIDE BOMBERS AND ISLAM.....	25
3.1	LINK TO ISLAM?	25
3.2	CONCLUDING REMARKS	28
4	MARTYRDOM AND MOTIVATION	31
4.1	MARTYRDOM	31
4.2	CONCLUDING REMARKS	35
5	THE CONCEPT OF INVERSION.....	37
5.1	INVERSION.....	37
5.2	CONCLUDING REMARKS	41
6	POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN.....	43
6.1	PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN	43
6.2	CONCLUDING REMARKS	46
7	INVERSION FACILITATORS IN PAKISTAN/AFGHANISTAN	47
7.1	ROTE LEARNING, THE ROLE OF MADRASSAS	47
7.2	RESPECT FOR AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN.....	51
7.3	THE HUDOOD ORDINANCE, THE CONCEPT OF “ZINA”	57
7.4	THE “BLASPHEMY LAWS”	61
7.5	HYPERBOLE.....	64
8	CONCLUSIONS.....	67
9	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	71

1 Different Perspectives

1.1 Introduction

Less than ten years ago, suicide bombings were a phenomenon alien to the culture in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Today, they are an almost daily occurrence in either or both of these countries. This rapid development is now attracting attention but most of the literature to date on suicide bombings has been generated by events in the Middle East. This study attempts to put some of that literature into a perspective that is applicable to the emergence of Afghanistan and Pakistan as a key target for such attacks.

Suicide terrorism is often analysed either from a security and policy perspective or from a psychological, social or economic one. What this study attempts to do is to examine if and how these two perspectives are linked. The basic question asked is: why have suicide bombers become so prominent in Pakistan and Afghanistan during the last decade and how can we explain this development?

1.2 The Scope of the Study

This study is a primer, intended to open up new areas for further exploration. As such, it is suggestive, not conclusive. It is also a desk study, based on a review of relevant literature touching upon the topic. Extensive quotes from these sources are used to form the basis for the following discussion.

Dwelling on the intersection between different perspectives and disciplines, it is suggested that explanations can be found in the interaction between suicide bombing as a phenomenon and the societal context within which it is acted out. In short, there may be features in the way that the society functions and in the value system that it propagates which facilitate the recruitment and use of suicide bombers. For instance, when the desire for life in a young person is compromised and turned into a desire for death/martyrdom, this development could be termed an “inversion” – opposing values change places, things are turned upside down. If such inversions are already present in the society, in the sense that basic values are turned upside down, the inversion of life/death might be more easily accepted - by recruiters, the suicide bomber himself and the remaining family. The dynamics of political and economic developments will also come into play, in order to create a sociocultural climate which produces and, it seems, by and large accepts suicide bombing as a paramilitary instrument.

Starting with an overview of the phenomenon of suicide bombing as such, the study arrives at some observations, and finally some suggestions with a bearing on the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In many perspectives, Pakistan and

Afghanistan are quite different from one another. However with regard to the upsurge of suicide bombing they can arguably be viewed as a more or less cohesive arena. Taliban movements are active in both countries and are drawn largely from the Pashtun population present in both countries. The border between the Pashtun areas of Afghanistan and those of Pakistan is in fact not accepted by large parts of the population and questions are also raised as to its validity.¹ The division of the Pashtun area was the main reason why Afghanistan voted against the membership in the United Nations of the then newly created state of Pakistan. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas, FATA, in the border region have a diffuse, administrative status as semi-autonomous and are, in practice, linked to Afghanistan as much as to Pakistan (to which they formally belong).

The western and southern part of the area borders on Iran. It seems plausible that ideas of martyrdom developed in Iran during the war with Iraq in the 1980s have more in common with those of the suicide bombers of Pakistan and Afghanistan today than do the patterns which have characterized suicide bombing actions in the Middle East proper. However, we do not know very much about the suicide bombers who are active today in the Pakistan/Afghanistan area. Their testimonies are seldom made public in the way that has been common in the Middle East, and documented interviews with would-be or failed suicide bombers have been few.² The organizations dispatching the suicide bombers are less anonymous, as most of them are eager to take credit for the attacks – but even so, evidence is limited and sometimes anecdotal. The region is less transparent, less visited and less analysed than the hotbeds of the Middle East conflict.

The suggestions of this study are directed mainly towards the surrounding society, in which I spent the period between 2003 and 2007 as Ambassador of Sweden to both countries. First-hand experiences have been a central source of the arguments put forward here, as well as an important motivation for writing this study. As an outsider, I have been struck by several features which seem to

¹ The Durand Line, drawn up in 1893 by the British colonial government through a commission led by Sir Mortimer Durand, is interpreted in some quarters as having had a lease of life of only 100 years, and thus as now being expired.

² However, Assaf Moghadam relates the testimony of one Afghan “suicide bomber who introduces himself as Amanullah Ghazi from the province of Khost. [He] decries the ‘infidels’ who have ‘defiled’ Afghanistan, where they are ‘misleading’ Muslims from the righteous path. He then invokes *fard ayn*, the notion that each Muslim must join the jihad if Islam is under attack, saying: ‘it is the duty of every Muslim to sacrifice oneself in the path of God’. Ghazi also urges other Muslims to follow his lead, adding that the Quran offers the martyr Paradise: ‘Inshallah I will meet you in paradise’.” Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Md, 2008, p. 158.

fit into the concept of “inversion” and I return to these phenomena in the latterpart of the study.

1.3 The Structure of the Study

Chapter 2 sets out to describe the basic rationale driving individual actors and organizations to resort to suicide attacks. It addresses features common to suicide terrorism in different parts of the world, especially in the Middle East and in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Chapter 3 explores possible links between religion, specifically Islam, and suicide terrorism followed by a discussion on why Muslim societies seem particularly plagued by suicide terrorism today.

Chapter 4 links the issue of the role of Islam to that of martyrdom. The question is if and in what way the idea and ideal of martyrdom affect suicide terrorism today.

Chapter 5 introduces the concept of inversion and highlights the role that inversion plays in Pakistani and Afghan society, particularly with regard to the emergence of suicide terrorism.

Chapter 6 sets the scene for developments today. It outlines recent political developments in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In chapter 7, current developments are analysed with respect to the concept of inversion and the concept is applied to a number of specific phenomena in these societies.

In chapter 8 conclusions are drawn and the study is summed up.

2 Who are the suicide bombers and why are they used?

This chapter sets out to describe (in general) the rationale driving individual actors and organizations to resort to suicide attacks. It deliberates on the commonalities between suicide terrorism in other parts of the world, especially the Middle East, and in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It also establishes some basic differences between such attacks in that region as compared to other places where suicide terrorism has been used. The chapter concludes with a discussion on possible common individual traits of those performing suicide missions and what these may be.

2.1 Suicide bombers

Most attempts made to date at profiling suicide bombers and their organizations have been centred around the Middle East. While some aspects of Middle Eastern suicide terrorism appear to be quite different from the situation prevailing in Pakistan and Afghanistan today, there are also many common features. A key common denominator, for instance, is that suicide terrorism all over the world appears in asymmetrical conflict situations:

Suicide terrorism has made its appearance primarily in conflicts where the balance of power has been asymmetrical, meaning a relatively weak organization up against a strong state. This method of action has succeeded, in many cases, in minimizing the advantages of the military superiority of the stronger side of the conflict. The explanation for this is straightforward. The great damage achieved by the suicide action, especially in terms of the number of victims, carries with it considerable psychological impact both on the citizens of the country under attack, as well as on its policy-makers. The anxiety that spreads through the society in cases of a protracted campaign of suicide terrorism has the potential to reduce the faith citizens have in the government's ability to protect them, and the latter becomes subject to persistent pressures to concede to terrorists' demands.³

With regard to the Pakistan/Afghanistan area, it could be added that "the faith citizens have in their government's ability to protect them" has long been eroded through bad governance. It was already low before suicide bombing emerged as a recurrent phenomenon. By the same token, "pressures to concede to terrorists' demands" have not taken on the character of a unified campaign. The Pakistani,

³ Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 27.

as well as the Afghan, public remains divided in their attitudes towards organizations using suicide bombing as an instrument to attain their goals – in fact these organizations enjoy a surprising amount of sympathy.⁴ Hence, in these countries, the “protracted campaign of suicide terrorism” seems to have added to the sense of insecurity already permeating the daily lives of their citizens, rather than being the cause of such feelings emerging. Robert Pape characterizes suicide terrorism as follows:

Modern suicide terrorist groups share a number of features. In general, they are weaker than their opponents; their political goals, if not their tactics, are broadly supported by a distinct national community; the militants have a close bond of loyalty to comrades and a devotion to leaders; and they have a system of initiation and rituals signifying an individual’s level of commitment to the community.⁵

Later on, he adds:

Suicide terrorism is most likely when the occupying power’s religion differs from the religion of the occupied, for three reasons. A conflict across a religious divide increases fears that the enemy will seek to transform the occupied society;⁶ makes demonization, and therefore killing, of enemy civilians easier; and makes it easier to use one’s own religion to re-label suicides that would otherwise be taboo as martyrdom instead.⁷

Assaf Moghadam explains that, in the Salafi-Jihadist brand of suicide terrorism now prevalent in Pakistan and Afghanistan, “[i]t is no longer necessary for foreign troops to be present in a country in order for that country to be perceived as occupied, though such a foreign presence certainly helps. More important is the perception that a given regime is complicit in the attempted subjugation and humiliation of Muslims, which renders the country occupied in a more indirect way.”⁸

In Pakistan and Afghanistan, the “strong state” referred to by Ami Pedahzur is in fact not synonymous with the actual state where the attacks are carried out. Both

⁴ According to a Pew Research Centre opinion poll carried out inside Pakistan and reported on 30 July 2010, “a majority of Pakistanis still consider India as a major threat, view America as an enemy and are far less concerned about Taliban and al-Qaida”.
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/Majority-of-Pakistanis-call-India-a-threat-US-enemy/articleshow/6236494.cms>.

⁵ Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: Why Suicide Terrorists Do It*, Gibson Square Books Ltd, London, 2006, p. 8.

⁶ In the case of Afghanistan, the objective of transforming society, e.g. as regards gender equality, is quite explicit.

⁷ Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 22.

⁸ Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, p. 260.

the Pakistani and Afghan states are indeed perceived as weak. However, they are also perceived as being propped up by the West, in particular the United States, and it is mainly on account of the relationship with the West that the state is perceived as being strong. Thus the “strong state” attacked by suicide bombers is a conglomeration of weak and corrupt local and regional government viewed as being in the hands of the ultimate power, the Christian West, and the West itself, by many viewed as the “Great Satan”.⁹ Pape’s remarks on religious divisions are highly relevant in this perspective. But they can also be transposed to refer to intra-religious strife in the region, specifically that between Sunni and Shi’ite Muslims, as well as to divides between militant Sunni Islam and other sects, such as the Barelvis or the Ahmediyas.¹⁰

Other parts of the rationale behind the use of suicide bombers will remain largely the same, one important reason being that they are effective: “Suicide attacks amount to just 3 percent of all terrorist incidents from 1980 through 2003, but account for 48 percent of all the fatalities, making the average suicide terrorist attack twelve times deadlier than other forms of terrorism – even if the immense losses of September 11 are not counted.”¹¹ At the same time, the costs involved are low (if the life of the bomber is not counted, as in fact it is not¹²). Even if reimbursement is paid out to the remaining family,¹³ the technology involved in

⁹ “The Great Satan” is a derogatory epithet for the USA in some Iranian foreign policy statements. Occasionally, these words have also been used for the government of the UK. The term was originally used by Iranian leader Ruhollah Khomeini in his speech on 5 November 1979, to describe the United States which he accused of imperialism and sponsoring of corruption throughout the world. *Wikipedia*, The Great Satan, 29 September 2009.

¹⁰ On 1 July 2010, the shrine of the revered Sufi saint Hazrat Data Ganj Baksh in Lahore, mostly visited by members of the Barelvi sect of Sunni Muslims, was attacked in twin suicide bombings that left at least 50 people dead, a little over a month after over 100 people were killed in attacks on two mosques belonging to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat on 28 May in the same city.

¹¹ Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 6. The same figure is found in Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, p. 12, and a similar figure – 3 per cent produced 45 per cent of the casualties – is found in Merle Miyasato, *Suicide Bombers, Profiles. Methods and Techniques*, Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, KA, 2007, p. 3.

¹² In his book *Suicide Bombers: Allah’s New Martyrs*, Pluto Press, London, 2005, p. 229, Farhad Khosrokhavar writes: “The demography of Muslim countries allows them to mobilize part of their youth for that purpose [of martyrdom] and in order to gain an imaginary dignity in a world that denies them any real dignity.”

¹³ Sums mentioned in this context vary substantially. Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 130, puts the reimbursement paid to families by Hamas and Islamic Jihad during the second Palestinian intifada at between 3000 and 5000 USD. The Jerusalem Post, quoted by Miyasato, *Suicide Bombers, Profiles*, p. 16, states that the families of male suicide bombers receive a reward of 25 000 USD funded by Iraq. Harvey W. Kushner, quoted by David Lester, Bijou Yang and Mark Lindsay in *Suicide Bombers: Are Psychological Profiles Possible?*, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, 27, pp. 283–295, 2004, notes that families may receive 1000 USD per month plus scholarships for siblings of the suicide bomber (p. 285). Martin Schram, in *Avoiding Armageddon*, Basic Books, New York, 2003, p. 263, puts “the bounty” at “at least 10 000 USD, courtesy of neighboring Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Jordan”.

the attack itself is cheap¹⁴ and easily manufactured: “The most common modus operandi, and the one preferred by the majority of organizations, is the detonation of an explosives belt directly attached to the militant’s body. So far, this method has been in use in 53.3 per cent of the cases of suicide terrorism in the world.”¹⁵ The damage done through this simple technique is very high: “While the average fatality quotient in shooting attacks is 2.1 individuals and in attacks executed by means of delaying mechanisms it is 2.01, the average number of fatalities in a suicide attack committed by a terrorist carrying an explosives belt on his/her body is 8.11.” This impressive output is matched by a minimal input: “in most instances where explosives belts are used, the organization does not lose more than one terrorist /.../ In the detonation of a truck bomb, the average number of suicide attackers is 1.3; when it is a car bomb, the number increases to 1.4, whereas, in the case of a boat bomb, the number is 3.3.”¹⁶

Paradoxically, in spite of the fact that Paradise is what awaits the suicide bomber, the organizations that dispatch suicide bombers want to minimize sacrifices on their own side. This is a lack of logic which highlights the hypocrisy involved in these operations. Another such slip is that the dispatchers of suicide bombers seldom want to send members of their own family to Paradise in this way, unless it is someone the family wants to get rid of. Anat Berko writes:

In most cases, the dispatcher does not send one of his own close family. There are exceptions, however, and they are the individuals known to have collaborated with Israel or women who have posed ‘problems to the family honor’. Such people, rather than be murdered or bring shame to their families, take the ‘honorable’ way out, what Ahmad Yassin described as ‘an exceptional solution to the problem’. After their deaths no one dares to speak of the real reason why the *shaheed* or *shaheeda*¹⁷ blew themselves up.¹⁸

Thus, in crude economic terms, the cost-effectiveness of a suicide bomber wearing an explosives belt is extremely high. As the weapon of the underdog, suicide attackers are, indeed, “smart bombs”, not to be equalled by the enemy:

/.../ nearly 70 per cent of suicide terrorism occurrences in the world were aimed at democratic countries or at least countries which uphold fundamental democratic properties such as Israel (33.5 per cent of the incidents), Sri Lanka (19.1 per cent), Russia (4.9 per

¹⁴ According to Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 126, the cost of an explosives belt is estimated at between 1500 and 4300 USD.

¹⁵ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, p. 15.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁷ “*Shaheed*” is the male martyr, “*shaheeda*” the female.

¹⁸ Anat Berko, *The Path to Paradise*, Praeger Security International, Westport, Conn., 2007, p. 174.

cent), Turkey (4.1 per cent) and India (2.4 per cent). These countries are perceived by terrorist groups as more vulnerable because their public is not willing to endure protracted and relentless security threats and is liable to express its dissatisfaction at the voting booth.”¹⁹

The later developments in Pakistan and Afghanistan do not change this picture – both countries are democracies, albeit flawed. Furthermore, as pointed out above, the governments targeted are not only the home governments but, perhaps even more, those which are intervening in the area – all of them democracies. Successful targeting of foreign troops in Afghanistan tends to lead to debates in their countries of origin, questioning the decision to participate in the military effort.

However, as suggested above, the situation in the Middle East during the second intifada, when suicide bombing peaked, differs in many ways from that in the Pakistan/Afghanistan area today. For one thing, suicide terrorism in the latter area has been prolonged compared to the situation in the Middle East. The observation by Ami Pedahzur that “suicide terrorism generally runs its course in short-term campaigns, mostly lasting up to three years”²⁰ does not hold true in the case of Pakistan/Afghanistan, where suicide attacks became prominent some ten years ago²¹ and have only intensified since then.

Another difference concerns the idolization of the suicide bomber, which has characterized Middle East suicide actions and is deemed to have been an important part of the motivation of the individual bomber. Suicide bombing has served as an instant path to fame, turning anonymity, if not social inferiority, into social prestige.²² The suicide bombers were celebrated in the society at large and their families gained a certain kind of fame (as well as money), the funerals became huge political manifestations, and the final words of the bomber were broadcast again and again on TV channels. Places or institutions could be named after suicide bombers and their acts would live on in the mythology of the society.

¹⁹ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, pp. 13–14.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 158.

²¹ “The spate of suicide bombings started in earnest within Pakistan in 2002, with two major suicide attacks perpetrated that year, the attack on a Sunday church service on 17 March and the car bombing outside Karachi’s Sheraton Hotel on 8 May.” Syed Manzar Abbas Zaidi, *Organizational Profiling of Suicide Terrorism: A Pakistani Case Study*, Defence Studies, Vol. 9, No. 3 (September 2009), pp. 420–421.

²² The psychology behind this phenomenon could be compared to the way in which some Western people are attracted to TV appearances during which they are, in fact, humiliated – but the medium itself turns this humiliation into prestige. The importance of being seen, being noted by the world, seems to be the common denominator.

In Pakistan and Afghanistan, on the other hand, suicide bombers remain more or less anonymous, at least in society at large. However, given the deep poverty in the lower strata of society monetary compensation to the remaining family is likely to have been more prominent as a motivation.²³ This assumption is corroborated and complemented with other factors in research describing some Afghan suicide bombers as having “been duped, /being/ mentally deranged, or /.../ merely acting due to financial payments promised to their families, which could reach up to \$23 000.”²⁴ A failed suicide bomber interviewed in a UNAMA report claimed to have been “given ‘tablets’ that intoxicated him and /.../ been warned that he would be beheaded were he to fail to comply with the request.”²⁵

The same report concludes that “at least some suicide bombers in Afghanistan are children, many of whom come from Pakistan. A fair number have been recruited in schools and madrassas situated on the Afghan-Pakistani border.” This trend seems to have continued. In Pakistan, a number of incidents involving very young suicide bombers have been reported in the press, for example, a 13-year-old boy killing 41 people in a market in October 2009²⁶ and a 14-year-old failed suicide bomber interviewed in April 2010.²⁷ When two alleged Taliban militants were arrested in October 2010, a 16-year-old boy was also found in the house, who the militants said they had “hired” for a suicide mission. The boy explained that he had been told that “becoming a suicide bomber was my ticket to heaven, and on the Day of Judgement, I would have nothing to worry about”.²⁸

Furthermore, until recently, women had not been carrying out acts of suicide bombing in the Pakistan/Afghanistan area (even if there may have been a few exceptions), while in the rest of the world they have constituted between 15 and

²³ In *Profiling Discord: Suicide Bombings in the Insurgent Campaign*, The Defense Monitor, September/October 2007, Monica Czwaro quotes academic expert Brian Glyn Williams, who has studied Pashtun suicide bombers: “Many are swayed by the prospect of having their families receive martyrdom payments to alleviate their dire financial circumstances.”

²⁴ Research by Brian Glyn Williams quoted in Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, p. 155. Further examples of the ineptitude of some Afghan suicide bombers are given: one “threw his vest at a patrol, expecting it to detonate by itself”. Another “tried to push his booby-trapped car against the intended targets when it ran out of gas”.

²⁵ Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, p. 155. UNAMA is the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

²⁶ 13-yr-old-kills-41-in-Pak-market/articleshow/5117788.cms, report dated 13 October 2009. Indian sources are used when they are more detailed than other reports, not as the only source for an incident which has taken place. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/>

²⁷ Chris Brummit, *Behind the Scenes of a Pakistani Suicide Bombing*, Associated Press, reported in the newsletter of NewAgeIslam.com on 19 April 2010. New Age Islam is a website published from New Delhi (editor and publisher: Sultan Shahin, E-22, Indra Prastha Apts., 114, I. P. Extension, New Delhi – 110092) under the motto “Mapping an Agenda for the Twenty-First Century”.

²⁸ Reported by the Pakistani daily paper The News on 26 October 2010, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/26-10-2010/Karachi/11958.htm>.

30 per cent of the known suicide attackers.²⁹ Only during the last year has this begun to change and, again, the would-be suicide bombers are very young. In January 2010, two girls from the Swat valley, a 14-year-old and a 16-year-old, were presented to the press, telling how they had volunteered as suicide bombers with a local Taliban unit. They had been made to believe that they would go straight to heaven after carrying out suicide attacks but had changed their minds when they learnt that the Taliban were destroying schools.³⁰ Also in January 2010, a 12-year-old girl from the Bajaur agency told journalists that her Taliban commander brother had trained her as a suicide bomber. She had been told to target a prison in Afghanistan: “The Taleban preached me that I would go to Jannat” (Paradise).³¹

As is apparent from the quote above from Anat Berko’s book,³² compared to male suicide bombers, girls or women may have been driven by different motivations: “/.../ females are less inclined than males to draw on the terrorist group as a way to restore collective identity.”³³ They have been more likely to volunteer than their male colleagues: “/.../ females were more likely to actively seek involvement, and they showed a slight tendency to be recruited more often through exploitation or peer-persuasion.”³⁴ For these women, “exploitation” could be linked to problems connected with the family honour. This was the case of Al-Riashi, the first Hamas female suicide bomber. She “was known to have problems in her marriage and, according to some sources, was sent on a mission by both her husband and lover in order to help avoid the social sanctions which are imposed on an unfaithful woman in a highly conservative society.”³⁵ Barbara Victor “links the first four female Palestinian suicide bombers as having been placed in positions where the act of martyrdom was their sole chance to reclaim

²⁹ Both figures were found in Miyasato, *Suicide Bombers, Profiles*. The lower figure is quoted from Yoram Schweitzer, *Suicide Terrorism: Historical Background and Risk for the Future*, and the higher figure from Rohan Gunaratna, *Suicide Terrorism – A Global Threat*, Jane’s Intelligence Review, 20 October 2000.

³⁰ Times of India, 10 January 2010, <http://epaper.timesofindia.com/Default/Scripting/ArticleWin.asp?>

³¹ The Frontier Post, Peshawar, in English, 13 January 2010, p. 1.

³² See Berko, *The Path to Paradise*.

³³ Karen Jacques and Paul J. Taylor, *Male and Female Suicide Bombers: Different Sexes, Different Reasons?*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 31, pp. 304–326, 2008, p. 321.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

³⁵ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, p. 141. The same case is reported in Berko, *The Path to Paradise*, 2007, p. 115, as well as in Abraham Rabinovich, *Bomber Died to Atone for Infidelity*, *The Australian*, 20 January 2004, where the source given is a report in the Israeli newspaper Yedioth Achronot. It also surfaces in Michael Bond, *The Making of a Suicide Bomber*, *New Scientist*, vol. 182, issue 2447, pp. 34–37. The source of all these reports may have been the same, i.e. the Israeli newspaper report.

the family honor that had been lost by their own actions or the actions of other family members.”³⁶

Thus, for women subjected to strict honour codes, volunteering as a suicide bomber could be quite an attractive alternative to being murdered by their relatives. If the suicide bombing campaign continues to persist, we may well see a growing number of females appear on the Pakistan/Afghanistan arena, where such codes are particularly pervasive. As regards the personality of the individual suicide bomber, research to date seems to be more or less unanimous in its conclusion that the act of suicide bombing should be regarded as generically different from an individualistic suicide. While individualistic suicides seem to be more common in the West, the politico-religious act of suicide bombing tends to take place in developing countries. Ami Pedahzur refers to the comparative research on suicide carried out by the renowned scientist Émile Durkheim towards the end of the 19th century:

According to his view, the phenomenon of individualistic suicide was found to be prevalent at higher rates in Western cultures compared with Eastern cultures. Social scientists who investigated the history of suicide in traditional societies backed up this claim. However, alongside relatively low rates of individualistic suicides in many Asian societies, they also found high rates of altruistic and fatalistic suicide types.³⁷

Generally, suicide bombers have not been found to suffer from depression or any mental disorder believed to cause suicides. In a more recent study, Syed Manzar Abbas Zaidi arrives at the following conclusion: “In fact, not a single identifying characteristic such as affective disorders, traumatic childhood, etc., were found to be prevalent among suicide terrorists.”³⁸ Ami Pedahzur writes:

The majority of suicide bombers are not crazy. Furthermore, they generally are not forced into perpetrating the suicide act. In effect, most suicide terrorists can be described as ordinary people. Studies have shown that they exhibited no suicidal tendencies prior to the act and lived normal lives, although many of them came from conflict-ridden areas where a ‘normal life’ is a relative concept. Most of them were not leading figures in their communities or organizations but they also did not come from the fringes of society. Suicide attackers were generally not highly educated, but also not illiterate. They were not very successful, but, at the same time, not complete failures.

³⁶ Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses, Inside the World of Palestinian Suicide Bombers*, Rodale Press, New York, 2003, quoted in Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005, p. 163.

³⁷ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, pp. 30–32.

³⁸ Zaidi, *Organizational Profiling*, p. 47.

Attackers were both men and women; some were very religious while others were completely secular. Some were politically active for many years and others became active only in the perpetration of their suicide mission.³⁹

Others are less certain about the “normality” of the suicide bombers but have not been able to arrive at any clear psychiatric diagnoses applicable to them.⁴⁰

Pedahzur explains:

One of the conclusions drawn from the attempts to fathom the personality of the suicide terrorist was that not one single personality trait common (as demonstrated by the literature) among suicides /.../ was found to be prevalent among suicide terrorists. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that attempts to use conventional psychoanalytical theories to explain suicides in the realm of suicidal terrorism have produced only partial results. For example, Schneidman's⁴¹ theory perceiving suicide to be consequent upon feelings of hopelessness and helplessness deriving from ungratified psychological needs, may in fact shed light on certain aspects related to suicide terrorists. Suicides, according to this approach, choose the path of taking their own lives when they perceive this option as the only possible way to put an end to the pain they are enduring. Having said that, the main problem in trying to put this theory into practice when explaining suicide terrorism is that it was primarily intended to account for suicide on an individualistic basis and in the case of suicide terrorists, while many of them have been found to suffer from despair on a community or nationalist level, very few of them were in fact subject to despondency due to purely individualistic causes. Furthermore, in contrast to individualistic suicides, suicide terrorists do not have a history of attempts to harm themselves. /.../ Unlike other suicides, the primary goal of suicide bombers is to kill others; their own death only serves the purpose of attaining this goal.⁴²

Farhad Khosrokhavar, on the other hand, does not deny the suicidal dimension of modern martyrdom but ties it to the notion of the sacred:

In this form of martyrdom, sacrifice is certainly experienced as an act dictated by Allah, but the sacrifice is made by an individual in despair, who has given up living and therefore feels that his life has

³⁹ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, pp. 121–122.

⁴⁰ Cf., for instance, Lester, Yang and Lindsay, *Suicide Bombers: Are Psychological Profiles Possible?* or Richard M. Pearlstein, *The Mind of the Political Terrorist*, Scholarly Resources Inc., Wilmington, Del., 1991.

⁴¹ Edwin S. Schneidman, *Definition of Suicide*, Wiley, New York, 1985.

⁴² Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, pp. 34–35.

no meaning in this world. There is a suicidal dimension to modern martyrdom. But unlike the anomic⁴³ suicide who renounces life but has no connection with the sacred, he expresses his disgust with the world by mobilising the sacred and designating the enemy he wants to kill by getting himself killed.”⁴⁴ /.../ “The act of martyrdom oscillates between suicide and the killing of the other, between resignation and self-assertion. There is at once a desire for self-assertion and a realisation that it is impossible. The dilemma is resolved through the destruction of both the self and those who are perceived as obstacles to self-realisation. /.../ The act of martyrdom is given a sacred status, and it therefore guarantees a happy end whereas life on earth is profoundly unhappy.”⁴⁵

Assaf Moghadam concludes: “The causes of suicide attacks are complex and must be found in the interplay of personal motivations, strategic and tactical objectives of the sponsoring groups, and the larger societal and structural factors affecting the bomber and his group.”⁴⁶

2.2 Concluding remarks

This chapter has described some basic reasons why acts of suicide terrorism are used. Common to many places that have seen suicide terrorism is an asymmetric struggle between a powerful and “strong” state and weak and poorly equipped groups of the population that are dissatisfied and view the state as illegitimate. A combination of political alienation and religious divisions in a state increases the risk of suicide terrorism. As an asymmetric means of struggle suicide bombings have the advantage of being very effective, both in terms of cost and flexibility. This is a clear incentive for a weak counterpart to use such means.

The chapter has also elaborated on specifics of suicide terrorism in Pakistan and Afghanistan, where - in contrast to many other places - suicide terrorism is a protracted phenomenon. It has been used consistently for nearly a decade. Bombers in this area are not idolised in the same way as is common in, e.g., the Middle East. Until recently, women have not performed suicide bombings. However, this seems to be changing. One possible explanation might be that the argument outlining the act of suicide bombing as a way to reclaim family honour for a dishonoured woman is gaining ground. The chapter ends in a discussion on possible common individual traits of those performing suicide missions and what these may be. Current literature has found few links between suicide terrorism

⁴³ Anomie, anomy = lack of norms.

⁴⁴ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 27.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

⁴⁶ Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, p. 254.

and individual depression. But one common denominator seems to be despair on a community or societal level. Links to the idea of martyrdom, a radical sacrifice, have also been highlighted. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, this may be part of the explanation but there is also evidence that poor and young people are duped into becoming suicide bombers. In this context, compensation to the remaining family may be another important factor. This dynamic does not explain why the majority of suicide attacks are conducted in Muslim countries by Muslim people. The next chapter addresses this question.

3 Suicide bombers and Islam

The preceding chapter outlined some basic reasons that explain the use of suicide terrorism. In this chapter, possible links between religion, specifically Islam, and suicide terrorism are explored. The first question posed is if there is such a link. This is followed by a discussion on why Muslim societies seem particularly plagued by suicide terrorism today. Some historic examples are given as counterpoints to the current situation.

3.1 Link to Islam?

The prevalent view of researchers on the subject is that the link between suicide terrorism and Islam are weak, at the very best. In the larger perspective, suicide bombers have appeared in many different cultures and societies. As described in the previous chapter, the common denominator is that they have found themselves in the position of the weaker party to an ongoing conflict. Another link which can be observed is that between military weakness, possibly combined with cultural frustration, and suicide bombing. Pape, for instance, goes as far as to link suicide attacks directly to foreign occupation: “The data show that there is little connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, or any of the world’s religions. /.../ Rather, what nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland.”⁴⁷ Today, this is a situation which applies to a number of Muslim countries.

While Pape calculates that Islamic fundamentalism is associated with only about half of the attacks between 1980 and 2003,⁴⁸ this balance has now shifted due to the sharp increase in what Moghadam calls Salafi-Jihadist suicide terrorism, of which Pakistan and Afghanistan is today the major arena. In 2007, 56 suicide attacks took place in Pakistan and 160 attacks were registered in Afghanistan.⁴⁹ These figures could be compared to the global number of 315 suicide attacks registered between 1980 and 2003.⁵⁰ Moghadam contends that:

[e]specially since 9/11, suicide missions by Al Qaeda, its affiliates, and other Salafi-Jihadist groups have risen exponentially, far outnumbering the attacks conducted by the previously dominant groups. Suicide attacks by Al Qaeda and its associates also target far more countries than have other groups before, and its attacks

⁴⁷ Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 16–17.

⁴⁹ Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, p. 152 (Afghanistan) and p. 179 (Pakistan).

⁵⁰ Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 16.

are more deadly. For these reasons, suicide attacks by Al Qaeda and its associated movements are the new epicentre of this deadly phenomenon.⁵¹

At the same time, the divide between the West, as well as some emerging economies in the developing world, on one hand, and stagnated parts of the Muslim world on the other, has deepened. In Pakistan, for instance, India's rapid economic growth is a source of envy, sharpening people's impatience with the sluggish development of their own country's economy. Many Muslims feel that they are now in the position of the world's underdog and scapegoat, a frustration which is felt even more deeply in the light of the dominance of the Muslim culture only a few centuries ago.

However, suicide is forbidden in Islam. In spite of this, as we have seen, Muslim leaders who have wanted to use suicides strategically, such as Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran,⁵² certain Taliban leaders and Osama bin Laden, have found ways to interpret these rules to suit their own purposes in a way that is reminiscent of the methods once used by the Christian Jesuits, who put the end before the means; if the end is "jihad", suicide attacks are not only permitted, but desirable.⁵³ Normally, "jihad" would not be directed towards fellow Muslims. Still, this is the case in most attacks taking place in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Here, the practice of "*takfir*, the labelling of fellow Muslims as kuffar or infidels [comes in as a tool, which] is used to justify scores of suicide bombings against Muslims in places like Afghanistan, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan and Pakistan."⁵⁴

Thus, what is important in this context is that, in global terms, the Muslim world finds itself in a weakened position. The grandeur and cultural, as well as scientific advancement which characterized it not so long ago have been lost and now it is the Western world which spearheads developments in most domains. For young men in many Muslim countries, faced with difficulties in finding jobs, and consequently difficulties in getting married and establishing their adulthood, the West holds tremendous attraction, but at the same time it is largely closed to them. Even if you risk your life and savings on precarious human smuggling routes, you are liable to be sent back when you arrive. This inspires anger mixed with envy, an emotion that is notoriously difficult to handle. On top of this, for

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 251.

⁵² Christoph Reuter, *My Life Is a Weapon*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2004, writes: "Khomeini was the first to offer a religious justification for self-sacrifice in the name of the Islamic cause. He downgraded the *taqiya*, the right to be freed from religious duties in times of crisis in order to avoid danger to life and limb, in favor of one's duty to the jihad, and gave specific meaning and substance to all the self-sacrificial motifs in the Shi'ite tradition that had become mere rituals over the centuries." P. 42.

⁵³ Islam lacks a central authority of the type that the Vatican provides for Catholicism. On a number of issues, it is characterized by an ongoing discussion between different scholars on how to interpret the Quran and the Hadiths, which supplement it.

⁵⁴ Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, p. 266.

the select few who actually manage to get to the West, disappointment can be great when marginalization continues, this time without the support of an extended family.

The case often highlighted as an example of a non-Muslim organization using suicide bombers has been that of the Tamil Tigers, the “Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam” (LTTE), in Sri Lanka. This secular movement, representing mainly Hindus, has been the most spectacular of the non-Muslim organizations which have practised such attacks in recent years. Between 1980 and 2003, the “Tamil tigers have committed 76 of the 315 suicide attacks registered”.⁵⁵ The suicide attackers of the LTTE also contradict the thesis that suicide bombing surfaces primarily as a factor in a struggle between cultures or civilizations. The LTTE attacks have been aimed at the Sri Lankan government as part of an ethnic-nationalist struggle.⁵⁶ (The Basque organization Euzkadi Ta Azkatasuna, ETA, in Spain would be a similar case but, in line with other Western movements, it has not used suicide attacks as a tactic.) Another feature which has distinguished the LTTE from other South Asian organizations using suicide terrorism is the relative prevalence of female suicide bombers, the most famous being Gayatri or Dhanu Rajaratnam who assassinated the Indian politician Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991. Her background shows us that, like suicide tactics, honour culture is not limited to Muslim societies: reportedly, Dhanu had been gang-raped by Indian soldiers,⁵⁷ who also killed her four brothers.⁵⁸ Having been raped, she could not marry: “Acting as a human bomb is an understood and accepted offering for a woman who will never be a mother. Family members often encourage rape victims to join the LTTE.”⁵⁹

Throughout history, suicide attackers have been instrumental in varying political and religious settings.

The world’s first suicide terrorists were probably two militant Jewish revolutionary groups, the Zealots and the Sicarii. Determined to liberate Judea from Roman occupation, these groups used violence to provoke a popular uprising – which historians credit with precipitating the ‘Jewish War’ of A.D. 66 –

⁵⁵ Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Cf. Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, p. 24.

⁵⁷ According to Mia Bloom, there are also sources who claim that it was her mother, not Dhanu herself, who had been raped, in which case Dhanu was avenging her mother. Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, pp. 159–160.

⁵⁸ Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 226.

⁵⁹ Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, p. 160. Bloom is quoting Robert I. Rotberg, *Creating Peace in Sri Lanka: Civil War and Reconciliation*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC, 1999. In a more general context (p. 143), Bloom writes: “What is incredibly compelling about delving into how and why women [have] become suicide bombers is that so many of these women have been raped or sexually abused in the previous conflict either by the representatives of the state or by the insurgents themselves.”

committing numerous public assassinations and other audacious acts of violence in Judea from approximately 4 B.C. to A.D. 70.⁶⁰

A well-known, spectacular case is provided by the Japanese Kamikaze pilots who attacked the US fleet during the last phase of the Second World War:⁶¹ “At Okinawa /.../ in 1945, more than one thousand suicide pilots were used to kill nearly five thousand American service personnel.”⁶² The Kamikaze campaign:

/.../ lasted for ten months, from October 25, 1944, until Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945. In total, some 3,843 pilots gave their lives. These suicide attacks did not stop the Americans but they were four to five times more deadly than conventional strike missions and did impose high costs on the invasion forces. They damaged or sank at least 375 U.S. naval vessels, killed 12,300 American servicemen and wounded another 36,400.⁶³

There are also less well-known examples:

During the rule of the Spaniards in the Philippines, there were /.../ episodes of suicidal acts of terrorism. These were carried out by members of Muslim tribes who objected to Christian expansion in the southern part of the Sulu Archipelago. /.../ With the termination of the Spanish rule in the Philippines in 1898, the Americans took control of the country, including the Muslim areas. American attempts to establish direct control over these areas led to the same methods of warfare. Once again, history showed the considerable strategic advantage of a warrior who is willing to sacrifice his life...⁶⁴

3.2 Concluding remarks

This chapter has discussed and refuted that idea that suicide terrorism has any distinct links to or could be explained by circumstances particular to Islam as a religion. The reasons why suicide terrorism today is mostly found in Muslim societies has more to do with the relative decline of a number of Muslim-dominated states. Shifting balances of power to the disadvantage of these states affect people's and groups' willingness to make sacrifices in the name of

⁶⁰ Pape, *Dying to Win*, pp. 11–12.

⁶¹ Against this background, Raphael Israeli offers *Islamikaze* as the term to be used for jihadist suicide terrorists – without much success. See his *Islamikaze and their Significance*, Terrorism and Political Violence, Vol. 9, No. 3, Autumn 1997.

⁶² Mohammed M. Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, United States Institute of Peace, Washington DC, 2006, p. 4. Hafez is quoting Albert Axell, *Kamikaze: Japan's Suicide Gods*, Longman, New York, 2002.

⁶³ Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 13.

⁶⁴ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, pp. 9–10.

injustice. While historically, religion has played a role in the use of suicide attacks, it is not religion per se that can explain suicide terrorism. However, it can be used as a powerful justification to legitimize terror bombings against Muslim and non-Muslim alike. The next chapter expands on this and explores the role of martyrdom in suicide terrorism.

4 Martyrdom and motivation

The preceding chapter concluded that there is little evidence to support the notion that Islam is a fundamental factor that drives or explains why suicide terrorism is used. However, religion can be used to justify and legitimize suicide terrorism. Religion can also be used as an incitement to recruit suicide terrorists. In this chapter, the concept of martyrdom is explored. The question addressed is to what extent the concept of martyrdom affects suicide terrorism today.

First, the notion of martyrdom in various strands of Islam is explored. After this, the role of martyrdom in suicide terrorism is addressed and the question whether it has a fundamental explanatory power or is more of a motivating factor is asked.

4.1 Martyrdom

A central concept in the phenomenon of suicide bombing is that of martyrdom. Again, there is obviously no exclusive link to Islam. While the martyrdom of Jesus Christ is the very centrepiece of Christianity, his example has been followed by many, from the early Christians striving to assert themselves in hostile surroundings onwards. Farhad Khosrokhavar writes: “If we define martyrdom as self-sacrifice for a sacred cause, it can be found in most religions and particularly the Abrahamic religions. In both Christianity and Islam, it is associated with the notion of bearing witness,⁶⁵ which is itself tied up with the idea of the struggle against injustice and oppression.”⁶⁶ He distinguishes between “defensive martyrdom”, as expressed by among others early Christian martyrs and the Buddhist monks protesting against the Vietnam war through death by self-immolation, and “offensive martyrdom”, which has inspired Muslim as well as Sikh ideas of martyrdom, and combines self-sacrifice with the struggle against irreligious oppressors.⁶⁷ The role of the martyr is dual: “The underlying sense of ‘bearing witness’ makes the martyr both the protagonist of a holy death and a witness to the truth of his faith.”⁶⁸ The violence involved in Muslim martyrdom differs from Christian martyrdom in that it is reciprocal and “closely linked to the other seminal notion of *jihad* or holy war.”⁶⁹

⁶⁵ The word “martyr” derives from the Greek word “martur”, the essential meaning of which is “witness” (Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 6).

⁶⁶ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 6–10.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

The concept of martyrdom differs also between the different strands of Islam:

In Sunni Islam, martyrdom is associated with, or even subordinate to, holy war. In Shi'ite Islam /.../ we find an affective structure centred upon martyrdom."⁷⁰ This makes martyrdom a central pillar in Shi'ite Islam: "Sunni societies do occasionally refer to martyrdom, but it does not have the fundamental significance it has for Shi'ites."⁷¹ "[W]hilst the Sunni world gives jihad a value that is disproportionate to its traditional weight, the characteristic feature of the contemporary Shi'ite world is its overvaluation of martyrdom, interpreted in a new and activist sense."⁷²

The historical background to the importance of martyrdom in Shi'ite Islam is the death of Hussein, the third Shi'ite imam, in 680 during the battle at Karbala in today's Iraq. His death is still celebrated by Shi'ites during the period of Moharram, leading up to processions of flagellants on the day of his death (*Ashura*). While the proportion of Shi'ites of the total number of Muslims worldwide amounts to around 10 per cent, with a concentration of around 73 million in Shi'ite Iran,⁷³ the proportions in Pakistan and Afghanistan (15–20 per cent in Pakistan, less than 10 in Afghanistan⁷⁴) are substantial and sectarian conflict has been a recurring feature in both countries.

Consequently, historical examples of Muslim martyrdom are primarily tied to the Shi'ite brand of Islam. The Assassins, whose name is the root of the word "assassinate",⁷⁵ were a subgroup within the Ismaelists⁷⁶ who, in the 11th century, fought "to re-establish the rule of an Islam free of Sunni religious orthodoxy /.../ [W]hen they executed their designated victims, they knew that they were sentencing themselves to death."⁷⁷ Ariel Glucklich describes them as follows: "The Assassins was an elite terror group within a fragment of Shi'ite Islam. Its members were intensely religious volunteers who undertook suicide missions by assassinating high-profile and well-protected officials while using only a knife."⁷⁸ Pape adds: "What made the Assassins so lethal was that their killers were willing to die to accomplish their missions and often, rather than attempting

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 23.

⁷² Ibid., p. 37.

⁷³ <http://web.worldbank.org>, *Iran, Country Brief*, 29 September 2009.

⁷⁴ Estimates based on a variety of sources. Statistics are unreliable in both countries.

⁷⁵ The word *assassin* is derived from *hashishiyyin*, "those who use hashish", indicating that the use of hashish may have been a factor in the raids carried out by this sect.

⁷⁶ Ismaelism is a form of Shi'ism with seven imams (instead of 12). Cf. Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, pp. 23–25.

⁷⁷ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 24.

⁷⁸ Ariel Glucklich, *Dying for Heaven, Holy Pleasure and Suicide Bombers – Why the Best Qualities of Religion Are Also Its Most Dangerous*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2009, p. 132.

to escape, reveled in their impending death.”⁷⁹ Thus, the Assassins had a largely positive image of the role which they were playing in establishing a new order. This, according Khosrokhavar, is no longer the case for modern-day suicide martyrs:

Modern martyrs, in contrast, act out of hatred for a world in which, as they see it, they are being denied access to a life of ‘dignity’, no matter whether they are Iranian, Palestinian or members of a transnational network such as al-Qaeda. Whereas the sectarian martyrs of the Islam of the pre-modern age were convinced that their actions would bring about the advent of a new world and the destruction of the old, the actions of modern Muslim martyrs are intended to destroy a world in which there is no place for them as citizens of a nation or of an Islamic community.⁸⁰

An intermediary example on the way towards such pessimistic, modern martyrs may be provided by the huge numbers of very young warriors who were dispatched to the front of the war between Iran and Iraq during the period between 1981 and 1988⁸¹ by the revolutionary Khomeini regime established in Iran in 1979. These young boys⁸² were provided with a key around their necks, supposed to be used when they reached the door of Paradise,⁸³ and acted as mine clearers (if necessary, by exploding the mines themselves), as well as an avant-garde in military clashes with the much better-equipped, Western-supported Iraqi army. Their fearlessness is well documented; often they strode to their death chanting religious slogans. Christoph Reuter has interviewed a Lebanese journalist who had the opportunity to watch an onslaught of these child soldiers:

/.../ you could hear them first: a high buzzing sound, as if a swarm of locusts were approaching. The sound swelled: thousands of human mouths coming closer, all of them roaring: ‘Ya Karbala! Ya Hussein! Ya Khomeini!’ as they came. As a human wave, they

⁷⁹ Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 12.

⁸⁰ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 25.

⁸¹ The number of victims in the war between Iraq and Iran is difficult to ascertain. Reuter, *My Life Is a Weapon*, p. 51, assesses the number as “somewhere between 600,000 and one million deaths”, presumably most of them on the Iranian side.

⁸² As in Pakistan and Afghanistan, girls and women have generally not been used as suicide martyrs in Iran.

⁸³ Reuter, *My Life Is a Weapon*, pp. 46–47, relates the case of 14-year-old Ahmed: “They hung the little ‘key to Paradise’ around his neck, and on the back of his somewhat over-large shirt, you could read the slogan: ‘Imam Khomeini has given me special permission to enter Heaven.’” The Lebanese journalist quoted later in the text describes the keys as follows: “At the start of the war, /.../ the keys were still made of iron; they were the kind of outdated keys you’d find in bureaus or cupboards. But on that day at Basra, they were already made of plastic. Iron had probably become too expensive.” *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

emerged from the trenches and dug-outs, from behind ramparts and hillocks; thousands, tens of thousands of them, coming closer and closer. And almost all of them were children, youths, some of them holding Kalashnikovs with difficulty, others just with clenched fists. Every now and then, you could see an older man among them, egging them on.⁸⁴

Every such “human wave” consisted of “tens of thousands of young Iranians /.../. They ran at Iraqi positions until they either won the day or were all dead.”⁸⁵

The appearance of these soldiers on the political arena was a new development: “The theme of martyrdom was appropriated by young people from the working classes. They asserted their willingness to die a holy death not only in rituals, but by staging their own deaths. In doing so, they created a version of Islam that was largely unknown to the dominant tradition.”⁸⁶

Khosrokhavar does not think that this behaviour can be explained simply as a result of indoctrination but, in a reasoning directly applicable to the Pakistan/Afghanistan area, argues that the willingness of these young recruits to die stems from their profound, inner disappointment with political developments:

The Revolution’s failure to meet these aspirations [to emancipate themselves] and the long war launched by Iraq, the brain drain, economic difficulties, and the feeling that the Revolution was in danger of falling apart because of the plotting of evil powers, and the United States in particular, were all factors that inspired a politico-religious attitude that might be described as ‘deadly’ (‘death-dealing’, ‘mortiferous’) religiosity. Given that it was impossible to live in accordance with the aspirations they had cherished at the beginning of the Revolution, these young men concluded that they might as well die and take their enemies with them.⁸⁷

On a psychological level, Khosrokhavar reasons, this type of martyrdom has its place in the process of individuation of young adults:

[M]artyrdom gives individuals who are modern but cannot assert themselves in the way they would like, a formidable ability to assert themselves in death. In the absence of any real individuality or political, economic and cultural autonomy, martyrdom has a remarkable ability to facilitate individuation in death. All the modern aspirations and desires that haunt a disoriented younger

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

⁸⁶ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 39.

⁸⁷ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 47.

generation that is no longer protected by traditional communities and has been abandoned to a purely oneiric⁸⁸ modernity can be realised through martyrdom. It allows young men to become individuals because it promises them that, when they die, they will have all the things they have been denied in life, namely a paradisiacal existence. /.../ It gives meaning and dignity to those who have been dispossessed of them.⁸⁹

4.2 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, the notion of Islamic martyrdom as a phenomenon coupled to suicide terrorism has been explored. First, the Shi'ite martyrdom tradition is defined. Unlike the Sunni strand of Islam, Shi'ite Islam has a long tradition of venerating martyrs and the concept of martyrdom. The role of martyrs in post-revolutionary Iran is especially highlighted. During the war with Iraq, thousands of young boys sacrificed themselves, motivated by the notion that they would become martyrs and win direct access to paradise.

The same phenomenon is seen amongst suicide terrorists in Pakistan and Afghanistan today. But the motivating role of martyrdom is not sufficient to offer a holistic explanation as to why suicide terrorism is used or why certain people undertake suicide bombings.

⁸⁸ Oneiric = illusory, existing only in dreams.

⁸⁹ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 49.

5 The Concept of Inversion

As described in chapter 4, the concept of martyrdom has undergone a radical inversion since the early days of Christian martyrs. This chapter introduces the concept of inversion and the role it might have played in the establishment of suicide terrorism as a weapon of struggle in Pakistan and Afghanistan. First, inversion - the transformation of things into their opposite - is defined. Thereafter, inversion of the views on death and family values is addressed. The link between inversion and suicide terrorism is then explored.

5.1 Inversion

With regard to post-revolutionary Iran, Farhad Khosrokhavar describes the inversion or transformation of the idea and ideal of martyrdom:

[Whereas death] was once a risk to be taken, [it] now became a 'burning desire', an 'unquenchable thirst' (as some Iranian martyrs put it in their testimonies), or a need to water, through death, the tree of Islam, which requires blood if it is to go on living. We have here a complex anthropological configuration in which incompatible elements come to play. This makes martyrs unstable. They need an institution /.../ to accomplish their task and to make the transition from life to death. /.../ Such young men are constantly torn between a hatred that eventually takes over the whole of their lives and a despair that no longer allows them to project their hopes into the future, and they find it difficult to gain their balance. This affect *can be transcribed onto another register*⁹⁰ where the desire for life is transformed into a wish for death."⁹¹

The hatred described above:

/.../ is very similar to the resentment described by Nietzsche [which] involves two elements. On the one hand, things are inverted into their opposite: what looks like love is in reality hatred, and what looks like magnanimity is in fact cowardice. On the other hand, reflexivity takes the place of spontaneity. It is 'natural' to live one's life and to position oneself in relation to others. If one is determined from the outset by the gaze of the other, one can no longer live spontaneously.⁹² /.../ There is a

⁹⁰ Emphasis added.

⁹¹ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 50.

⁹² It would be interesting to analyse the modern-day phenomenon of anorexia in these terms of martyrdom and *ressentiment*, reflexivity versus spontaneity. Could it be a largely female parallel to the largely male martyrdom syndrome that Khosrokhavar describes? The research on anorexia, so

second dimension to resentment, and it might be described as irrational. The hatred for the opposed group (the radical Islamist's hatred of the West, the anti-Semite's hatred of the Jew, or the radical Jew or Hindu's hatred of the Muslim, for example) is so great that it literally becomes an obsession and makes the believer unable to adopt anything other than a deadly strategy: killing the other at all costs, being killed, or both at once."⁹³

In other ways as well, martyrdom produces:

/.../ an inversion of effects. Death normally provokes fear and sadness. Yet the texts speak of the radiant joy of martyrs, of their satisfied smiles and even of their laughter at the moment of their execution. On the whole, the literature of martyrology speaks of the equanimity of martyrs and their yearning for death, and of affects characterized by inner happiness, and sometimes even exultation. This type of attitude can also be found in the Iranian, Lebanese or Palestinian martyrs of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁹⁴

The same serenity or apparent happiness in the suicide attacker has been noted in media reports of suicide bombings in the Pakistan/Afghanistan area.

Another type of inversion which occurs in the process of jihad is that of *family values*:

Like many terrorist organizations, al Qaeda does not have a formal recruitment strategy, rather it relies on familial ties and relationships /.../ Al Qaeda members recruit from their own family and national/social groups, /.../ the concept of 'brotherhood' draws on the concept that familial ties in the Islamic world are binding.

far, does not seem to have come up with a cohesive explanation of the self-inflicted suffering (and sometimes death) that it involves. One thing that emerges, however, is the protest/refusal to make the transition into adulthood under circumstances which are "determined /.../ by the gaze of the other". This protest is played out graphically on the body of the victim, which loses its menstrual cycles, as well as "female" shapes. Conversely, if anorexics are regarded as victims, maybe suicide bombers should also be put into that category, rather than that of terrorists. As Neil Altman writes: "Treating another as simply evil denies him /.../ recognition, treats him as an object, just as the suicide bomber denies humanity and subjectivity to his victims." Neil Altman, *On Suicide Bombing*, International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 51–67, 2008.

⁹³ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, pp. 58–59.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

Al Qaeda members refer to each other as ‘brother’ and tend to view the organization as their extended family.⁹⁵

In some cases, this extended family replaces the biological family, as recruits are told to keep away from contacting their relatives for security reasons and concentrate on developing loyalty to the group.⁹⁶ At the same time, biological family ties are present all the way to the suicide act and beyond, as the suicide bomber is understood to be able to prepare the ground for some 70 family members to enter Paradise on a straight ticket. Through his/her sacrifice, the extended family is immunized against punishment for their sins and will be able to reunite in the hereafter.⁹⁷ Should that scheme not work out, there will at least be monetary compensation⁹⁸ – the suicide bomber serves both the ideological “brotherhood” and the biological family in an act which is ultimately binding.

In this process, also in order to disengage the suicide attacker from the suffering of his victims, the creation of “in groups and out groups” is central: “Salafi-Jihadist ideology helps to create this dichotomy of good-versus-evil by dividing the world between true Muslims and *kuffar*, or infidels. /.../ From the perspective of the Salafi Jihad, the West, Christians, Jews, and the Shia are regarded as defiled, degenerate, bereft of any sense of decency, unjust and cruel.”⁹⁹

The suicide bombing act could also be seen as reconciliatory:

Martyrdom provides believers with an opportunity to make their peace with their families. Palestinian families experience great tensions as a result of their failed modernization. All these problems come to focus on the family, which becomes a source of friction between young and old, between fathers and sons, and between various members of what can often be an extended family. Martyrdom provides an opportunity to put an end to these tensions.

⁹⁵ Jerrold M. Post, *Killing in the Name of God: Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda*, The Counterproliferation Papers, Future Warfare Series No. 18, USAF Counterproliferation Center, p. 18.

⁹⁶ On the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Chris Jasparro writes: “Youths from different areas, clans, tribes and ethnic groups are indoctrinated and trained together. Disconnected from traditional social networks and divisions, their loyalty is to each other, their cause and their leaders, not to their local identity groups or traditional social and cultural hierarchies. /.../ As time passed, on both sides of the border, a fertile and growing supply of youths was left vulnerable by the breakdown of tribal systems, limited state educational opportunities, lack of jobs and displacement caused by war.” Chris Jasparro, *Generation Kill, Insurgent Youth Movements*, Jane’s Intelligence Review, August 2009.

⁹⁷ Cf., for instance, Israeli, *Islamikaze and their Significance*, p. 106, as well as Berko, *The Path to Paradise*, p. 164.

⁹⁸ Cf. footnote 13.

⁹⁹ Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, p. 255.

/.../ The sacrifice ensures that family members will sit at the side of Allah. They will be treated with all the respect due to those whose sons die for the holy cause. In this world, they lead insignificant lives without dignity, but the situation will be reversed in the next world.”¹⁰⁰

At the same time, the suicide mission is an act of self-purification: the suicide attackers “believe that [God] rewards the martyr by washing away all of the martyr’s sins. /.../ The belief that martyrdom erases all one’s sins in one fell swoop may explain why a number of suicide bombers had criminal backgrounds.”¹⁰¹

On a more political level, it is interesting to note how the Taliban manage to invert the concept of *stability*. This process can be observed most clearly in parts of Afghanistan. By creating instability, through suicide attacks and otherwise, the Taliban manage to project the image that only they can be effective providers of stability in the longer term. Although most civilian casualties are in fact caused by the Taliban,¹⁰² they manage to blame the international forces for them – with considerable success. The underlying assumption seems to be that without the intervention of foreign troops the warfare would cease, and there would be no more attacks from any side. Therefore if, for instance, the Taliban lock civilians into their houses when they know that an aerial attack is imminent, the foreign forces have to carry the blame for the losses.

The act of suicide martyrdom is often compared with a *wedding*. Speaking about the Iranian martyrs, Reuter writes:

Many of the deaths were celebrated with a tradition that would find favor many years later with Sunni Palestinian suicide assassins in their encampments in Gaza: the macabre-seeming designation of death as a wedding celebration. Strictly speaking, it takes its inspiration from events in the Shi’ite tradition: Qasim, Hussein’s nephew, fell at Karbala shortly before his wedding, and his wedding tent then became the repository of his dead body. It thus became the custom with unmarried men killed in the war to put a miniature version of the traditional Iranian wedding table with mirrors and candles in the display cabinets above their graves.¹⁰³

For men, the wedding imagery could also be understood in somewhat more concrete terms – as a reflection of the belief that 72 virgins (*houris*) are waiting

¹⁰⁰ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, pp. 136–137. The chapter is about the Palestinian situation but is deemed to be applicable also to the Pakistan/Afghanistan area.

¹⁰¹ Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, p. 257.

¹⁰² A UN report released on 10 August 2010 blamed militant groups for causing 76 per cent of the casualties, up from 53 per cent the previous year.

¹⁰³ Reuter, *My Life Is a Weapon*, pp. 48–49.

for their arrival in Paradise. For women suicide martyrs, it is less clear what the recompense may be;¹⁰⁴ nevertheless the wedding theme is used by them as well. One of them was Sana Mhaydli, a 17 year-old Lebanese girl who

left a video of herself saying good-bye to her family. It expresses all martyrs' favourite themes. The first is the transformation of sadness into joy. She then explains the reasons for her actions: the struggle against the oppressor. The third theme is the identification of the martyr's death with marriage, which calls for festivities, a rejection of sadness and the need for collective joy. Sana, for instance, declared: 'May your joy burst out on the day I die, as though it was my wedding day'.¹⁰⁵

Here it should be kept in mind that weddings are a central pillar in the lives of Middle Eastern families, and this applies to Pakistan and Afghanistan as well – possibly to an even higher degree. Families are liable to run up huge debts in order to be able to celebrate their weddings in style, weddings provide a rare occasion for young boys and girls to meet and size each other up, and dancing is allowed at weddings, sometimes even boys and girls dancing together (albeit under the gaze of the older generation). In short – despite the fact that the couple marrying may be quite disturbed, as most marriages are arranged, the couple has received no sexual education and family expectations may be high regarding the “delivery” of the wedding night (a blood-stained sheet) – weddings provide the high points of existence in traditional families, a release in an otherwise very strict society. To add to the confusion, the bride, who is assumed (as just observed, in many cases falsely so) to be happy, is required by tradition to look sad. So does she look sad because she is sad or because she wants to be a good daughter/wife?

Thus, even when the marriage act is not an inverted interpretation of death, there might be several layers of pretence involved in the relatively straightforward event of a regular wedding.

5.2 Concluding remarks

This chapter has introduced the concept of inversion and linked it to the earlier discussion on the role of martyrdom in suicide terrorism. Inversion refers to the turning or transforming of ideas into their opposite. Fear of death is turned into

¹⁰⁴ Anat Berko, in her book *The Path to Paradise*, asks a number of would-be female suicide bombers about this aspect. A common answer is that the female martyr would become one of the 72 virgins. But there are also dissenters who prefer a role as a minder of the virgins, possibly because they do not think that serving men in Paradise, as well as on earth, corresponds to their idea of bliss.

¹⁰⁵ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 147.

the joy of dying for a cause. Family or clan punishment for perceived crimes or sins are turned into the privilege of honouring and serving the family. There is also an inverted logic that couples the act of suicide terrorism to the act of getting married; a wedding. Thus, as was the case with Islam or the concept of martyrdom, inversion cannot fully explain why suicide terrorism occurs, but it is an important factor in motivating and justifying suicide terrorism in the view of potential terrorists, their families and social networks.

This and former chapters have explored reasons behind suicide terrorism, established and described some explanations as to why suicide terrorism is undertaken and why individuals decide to become suicide bombers. Other possible explanations, most prominently the role of religion and Islam, have been refuted as the sole determining factor behind the phenomenon. The following chapter puts these conclusions into the perspective of specific developments in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

6 Political Development in Pakistan and Afghanistan

The previous five chapters have dealt with general explanations relevant to the presence of suicide terrorism in a given society or state. One conclusion has been that while each area and each era is, to some extent, unique, there are also certain common denominators. This and the following chapters set out to describe the specific context and setting within which suicide terrorism in Pakistan and Afghanistan has evolved.

6.1 Pakistan and Afghanistan

The creation of the state of Pakistan was based on the idea of establishing, in connection with the partition of the British Indian Empire, a safe haven for the Muslims of the subcontinent; a state of their own where they could run their own affairs and develop freely without being discriminated against by the Hindu majority. Islam was adopted as the state religion for the geographically divided country¹⁰⁶ but was not necessarily viewed as the sole guideline for the development of the nation, at least not in its more rigid forms. The founding father of Pakistan, Mohamed Ali Jinnah, was a Westernized intellectual who told the Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947: “You may belong to any religion or caste or creed ... that has nothing to do with the business of the state. You are free, free to go to your temples; you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan.”¹⁰⁷ According to this historic address, the new state of Pakistan would be built on three solid foundations: it would be a secular country, a welfare state and a united nation.

However, by the end of 1948 Jinnah was already dead, only one year into the existence of the new state, and the two trends which have characterized its further development are militarization and growing religious fundamentalism. The first military coup took place in 1958, when General Ayub Khan seized power, to be followed by a number of subsequent military takeovers, the latest to date being the one by General Pervez Musharraf in 1999. Democratic government has been restored in between periods of military rule, and was restored again after elections in February 2008. However, it is still tainted by feudal structures, bad governance and lack of rule of law, as well as by a

¹⁰⁶ Until Bangladesh was created in 1971, Pakistan consisted of a western and an eastern part, on either side of India. Its capital was Karachi, until Islamabad was created during the 1960s.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted from an article by Amir Mir published on NewAgeIslam.com (cf. foot note 28) on 5 August 2010, source: Outlookindia.com.
http://www.newageislam.com/NewAgeIslamRadicalIslamismAndJihad_1.aspx?ArticleID=3239.

continued dominant role for the armed forces, not only in the military but also in the political and economic sectors.

Islamization of the state structures took root during the rule of another military coup-maker, General Zia ul-Haq, in 1978–88. It coincided with the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, when Pakistan served as a channel of military support to the Afghan mujahedin, primarily from the United States and Saudi Arabia. This was the last eruption of the cold war rivalry. A few years after the USSR had left Afghanistan in 1989, the USA emerged as the world's sole superpower, while Afghanistan and Pakistan, in particular its western parts, were left with the bitter harvest of continuing warfare between Afghan leaders, massive flows of refugees, an excess of weapons ("the Kalashnikov culture") and growing strains on traditional cultural norms. The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan during the 1990s took place in response to the havoc and suffering brought by feuding warlords, and as such was initially welcomed by large parts of the population.

After the al-Qaeda attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001, the tables were turned and Afghanistan was again invaded, this time as the first target in the "global war on terror". The prevailing balance of forces, in short realpolitik, forced Pakistan, whose army and security services had nurtured and backed the Taliban regime, to switch loyalties more or less overnight. Now, its armed forces were expected to turn their weapons towards their ex-allies, a volte-face which failed to sink in with all of its cadres. After almost a decade of military effort, the initial goals of the Bonn process¹⁰⁸ to democratize, as well as stabilize, Afghanistan are being scaled down. Different exit strategies are being discussed, possibly leading to a re-emergence of Taliban elements in power, at least in the southern and eastern parts of the country, while warlords would enhance their leading roles, never quite relinquished, in the north and west.

Such a solution would be in line with the enduring idea among the Pakistani military of the necessity to have "strategic depth" in Afghanistan, which also serves as one of the staging areas of the unresolved conflict between Pakistan and India. The focal point of this conflict is the disputed territory of Kashmir, the major part of which has been integrated into India. Like its western border with Afghanistan, Pakistan's eastern border with India is partly provisional: the Line of Control is the result of an armistice in 1949 intended to be followed by a referendum in Kashmir which has not hitherto been held. As long as this conflict remains unresolved and enmity prevails between India and Pakistan, the generals calling the shots in Islamabad will remain anxious to keep a firm grip on whoever is in power on the other side of Pakistan's western border.

¹⁰⁸ An international conference in Bonn in December 2001 arrived at an agreement charting Afghanistan's road to democracy. The Bonn process ended when a parliamentary election was held in September 2005.

Thus, since its birth in 1947, not only has Pakistan been unable to settle into the role originally envisaged as a safe national home for the Muslims of the subcontinent, but it has become increasingly unsafe during recent years. Its different parts, notably the FATA¹⁰⁹ and the province of Balochistan but also parts of the north and east, have not been amalgamated into a functioning unity, its borders have not been finally decided, its minorities have not been protected and its people are suffering under persisting feudal structures, marked inequalities in welfare and economic standards, recurrent terrorist attacks and sprees of target killings, as well as bad governance and corruption. While both the earthquake in October 2005 and the flood disaster in August 2010 have caused tremendous human suffering, these two natural disasters¹¹⁰ are also symbolic: the national home is cracking up, its roof is leaking, its walls are crumbling and its foundations are giving way.

The situation in Afghanistan is no less precarious after more than three decades of almost uninterrupted warfare. Hopes for a turning point were high after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, and then to some extent also after the Taliban takeover some years later and, again, after the Bonn conference in 2001 – but, by and large, these hopes have been frustrated as insecurity has grown over recent years. Large parts of the civilian population are squeezed between warring parties and factions, seeking the safest way out, disillusioned with the West and with the federal government, trusting nobody but their next of kin.

In spite of the remarkable resilience of both the Afghan and the Pakistani populations, the social fabric of both societies is overstretched and the nation state is riddled with fault lines. When the state fails, other forces come into play, among them tribalism, religious fundamentalism and sectarianism. Modernization is very much present on the global arena, to be envied or hated – these societies under pressure are partly choosing to go in the reverse direction. Fundamentalism literally means going back to the roots. But reverting to fundamentalist ideals is a dream made impossible by the dynamics of global economic and political developments. The traditional society no longer exists. What is on offer is a distorted, retrogressive version of it, a fertile ground for “inversions”, the act of turning basic values upside down.

¹⁰⁹ The Federally Administered Tribal Areas, FATA, are situated along the Durand Line separating Afghanistan and Pakistan, and have never been fully incorporated into the state of Pakistan but enjoy a semi-autonomous status.

¹¹⁰ With man-made components, as in most natural disasters.

6.2 Concluding remarks

This chapter has outlined the modern political history of Pakistan and Afghanistan. It has shown that developments in both countries have had integral effect on one another. The complicated regional rivalry that both countries are locked into, is mixed with domestic difficulties, both political and economic, that currently trouble both countries. This complicated setting has paved the way for radical and violent struggle against respective state structures and turned the region into a breeding ground for suicide terrorism.

7 Inversion facilitators in Pakistan/Afghanistan

As we have seen in previous chapters, inversions are prevalent in the anatomy of suicide bombing. Basic concepts are turned upside down: the desire for life is inverted into a wish for death, humiliation is turned into dignity, inferiority is inverted into prestige, and utter shame (as in the case of unfaithful women) can be transformed into iconic status. In order for this to happen on an individual, psychological level, the surrounding society must, in some way or another, if not support, at least approve it. Ami Pedahzur reasons: “[A]re cultural factors responsible for the widespread legitimacy accorded to suicide terrorists? Or, alternatively, under certain political, economic and social conditions, will certain societies reveal more of a predisposition towards supporting this type of action? I contend that while the answer to the first question is negative, the second question may be answered in the positive.”¹¹¹ Later on in his book, he concludes: “In sum, a supportive social environment has a decisive influence, both on the organization’s decision to adopt suicide terrorism and to continue to pursue this strategy, as well as on the individual who decides to join the organization in order to take part in the suicide mission.”¹¹²

While inversions are not unknown in any society, Pakistan and Afghanistan could, perhaps, be said to be particularly inversion-prone. Both are countries on the brink of collapse, with the social fabric stretched thin. At the same time, it should be noted that these societies are not homogeneous, neither with each other, nor within themselves. In fact, the huge internal differences in life conditions between, for example, rich and poor, men and women, city and countryside, different ethnic groups, different religions or strands of Islam, mountain areas and lowlands constitute important factors in the problems that both countries are grappling with today. In the following, however, I will restrict myself to aspects which I believe are relevant for the strata of both these societies which can be assumed (in the absence of further research in this area) to procure the suicide bombers.

7.1 Rote learning, the role of madrassas

First and foremost, there is the lack in both countries of qualitative education, fostering critical thinking. In Pakistan, the social sectors have long – under military as well as civilian rule – been short-changed in national budgets that have been favourable primarily to the security sector. According to the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER), government spending on

¹¹¹ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, p. 29.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 32.

education is the lowest in the world, at 1.9 per cent of gross domestic product.¹¹³ One reason for this has been the security threat coming from, or perceived to be coming from India and the ensuing rivalry with a much bigger neighbour, among other things in terms of developing military technology. As the national education system has steadily declined, a private system has grown strong but it remains outside the realm of possibilities for the poor majority.

Consequently, Pakistan has the lowest net enrolment ratio among the South Asian countries. It also has the highest school drop-out ratio in the region; 30 per cent of the children enrolled in primary schools have no prospects of making it to grade five. Out of an age group of approximately 27 million children between 10 and 12 years old, over 21 million do not go to school. Around 10 million of these are engaged in child labour.¹¹⁴

For poor parents, the system of religious schools, madrassas, provides a way out, not only in terms of educating their children but also for feeding and clothing them. It is a wholesale solution: the children are handed over to the mullahs. While Afghan children are also sent to this type of madrassa, particularly among those Afghans who remain as refugees in Pakistan, the main problem there is that the education system, albeit rudimentary in the first place, has been shattered during three decades of continuous conflict. Despite reconstruction efforts concentrated on the education sector, it will take a long time to rise from the ashes. It should also be noted that Afghans of decision-making age have largely missed out on the opportunities offered by the reconstruction of the education sector.¹¹⁵

In the Middle East, the role of imprisonment in forging the necessary psychological framework of suicide bombing has been pointed out in several studies, for example, by Ami Pedahzur:

In the case of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, commitment to the organization, its ideology and its members was forged in many instances during the long periods members of these groups spent incarcerated together. Israeli prisons in effect replaced the institution of the army boot camp where rites of passage into group membership and identification with the cause are more commonly performed.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Press release from PILER in reaction to a statement from Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani advocating further privatization of the school system, Karachi, 31 October 2010.
<http://www.piler.org.pk>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ The overall adult literacy rate in Afghanistan is estimated at 36 per cent, while for adult women the estimate is 21 per cent. For Pakistan, the overall adult literacy rate is estimated at 55 per cent, with the rate for women only slightly more than half of the rate for men.

¹¹⁶ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, pp. 128–129.

In Pakistan, the madrassas may be assigned a similar role. The number of madrassas has grown substantially during recent decades. While nobody has a complete overview of the madrassa system, which is divided into different streams of Islam, the number of schools is estimated at around 12 000, with nearly 2 million students. Approximately 80 per cent of these students are calculated to be in Deobandi madrasas – Deobandi being the strand of Islam which is at the root of the Taliban movement.¹¹⁷ Repeated efforts by the Pakistani government to rein in the madrassa system and put it under the control of government institutions, among other things where the curriculum to be taught is concerned, seem to have been largely unsuccessful. The madrassas have their own funding and are able to act independently of the surrounding society so long as they are not physically attacked. In one rare instance where a physical attack was carried out, it had disastrous consequences: the military onslaught on the Red Mosque in the centre of Islamabad in July 2007 is generally regarded as the turning point when suicide attacks took firm root in Pakistan. The attack took place after half a year of increasing provocation on the part of its madrassa leaders and students. The mosque has subsequently been reopened and the surviving religious leader reinstalled.

Some of the more prominent organizations running madrassas in Pakistan started doing so during the fight against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan during the 1980s, very much in the spirit of jihad. Few journalists have been allowed to visit madrassas and not much first-hand information is available on life within the madrassa walls. However, one visit was carried out in 2005 by the Pakistani journalist Zahid Hussein to Darul Uloom Haqqania, near Peshawar, an institution from which many of the Taliban leaders have graduated. He describes the madrassa system as follows::

The students are subjected to a regime as harsh as any jail and physical abuse is commonplace. In many schools, students are put in chains and heavy iron fetters for the slightest violation of rules. There are almost no extracurricular activities. /.../ Television and radio are banned. Teaching is very rudimentary and students are taught religion from a highly traditional perspective. /.../ At the primary stage, pupils learn how to read, memorise and recite the Koran. /.../ Divided along sectarian lines, these institutions are driven by the zeal to outnumber and dominate rival sects.¹¹⁸

I have also been able to visit a few madrassas in Pakistan, presumably not among the most militant ones, as they were chosen by their organization. Two of them

¹¹⁷ These figures were found in an article published in a network discussing the blasphemy law in Pakistan on 19 September 2009. The figures given by Zahid Hussein in “*University of Jihad*” *Teaches Students Hate and Bigotry*, The Times (UK), 15 July 2005, are 13 000 schools with an enrolment of close to 1.7 million.

¹¹⁸ Hussein, “*University of Jihad*” *Teaches Students Hate and Bigotry*.

were female madrassas, run by the Jama'at-e-Islami,¹¹⁹ in Lahore. I also had a small madrassa as a neighbour in Islamabad, located a couple of blocks down the road from my residence. The most striking impression from these contacts remains the “otherness” of each party: my own “otherness” as a visitor, treated with due respect but looked upon as an alien, someone to whom basic truths should be gently explained, but without any hope of real comprehension on my part; and the “otherness” of the madrassa boys in their surrounding society, small angel-like beings in newly starched shirts and turbans moving around in groups on their Friday out in the streets of one of Islamabad’s wealthier districts. But mostly they were seen through the big window on the road side of the building, sitting closely together on the carpeted floor – sometimes bowing their heads rhythmically when learning by heart, sometimes lying down to rest in close groups.

Originally, madrassas were established as part of a mosque and the schooling these boys (and now girls) receive is not primarily geared towards getting a job in today’s secular society. It is more of a one-way street into the religious hierarchies or substructures. The boys could become priests, “mullahs”, or go on to higher academic learning and become “maulanas”. However, the need for fresh mullahs and maulanas hardly corresponds to the number of madrassa students. As for the girls, I asked them about their plans for the future and their response was uniform: they would go back home to their villages, get married and fulfil the roles of a good Muslim woman but pay back the privilege of having been educated by offering classes to less fortunate women in their homes. Thus, whatever messages were taught will be multiplied and spread within wider sections of society.

The possibility of developing individual, critical thinking in the madrassa environment must be close to zero. First of all, the pupils or students come from a collective society, where individualism is only in its initial stages and practised primarily by the rich strata in society, people who would send their children to private schools, not madrassas. Second, they live closely together in small, closed-off quarters where secular society does not reach. Should anybody be strong enough to deviate from the norm established by the clergy running the school, not only possible punishments (cf. the quotation above, p. 43) but also the psychological pressure must be a huge deterrent. The alternative of returning home, even if it were permitted, may not be there, since the poverty of the family was often the main factor in the decision to send the children to the madrassa in the first place. Many of these youths are trapped – and they had better like it.

As long as the conflict between Pakistan and India persists, making for a privileged Pakistani army that swallows a large part of the national budget, the

¹¹⁹ The Jama'at-e-Islami (= Islamic Party) of Pakistan is a fundamentalist religious party founded in 1941 by Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903–79). It is not part of the Deobandi movement.

education sector is likely to remain relegated to the back burner. Glaring class divides and growing economic hardship in wide sections of a fast-growing population also suggest the continued viability of the madrassa option. While the great majority of madrassas are not primarily geared towards churning out 'jihadists', there is enough militancy around to feed the growing number of violent fundamentalist or sectarian movements for the foreseeable future. According to one estimate, "[i]n 2006, madrassah students made up 25 per cent of the Afghan Taliban's fighting strength, with local recruits comprising another 15 to 25 per cent."¹²⁰

Demography is another factor in this picture:

In Pakistan, 63 per cent of the population (approximately 103 million people) is estimated to be under the age of 25 while youth literacy is only 53 per cent. /.../ Recruiting and indoctrinating youths provides the Taliban with a way of challenging local authority as well as providing a source of unity, purpose and identity among rural and tribal youth where weakened traditional systems and national governments cannot.¹²¹

7.2 Respect for and the status of women

Another factor, of a different calibre but nevertheless relevant to illustrate the inversions characterizing society, is the position of women. The underlying assumption for upholding purdah,¹²² as is often underlined in conversations with both men and women in favour of it, is the *respect* and high regard accorded to women. Sometimes, this respect could be more valued than life itself. In a report on the difficulty of moving people threatened by floods, one of the affected women states: "I cannot imagine staying in a room with strangers. On TV I have seen dozens of men and women lying in one space."¹²³ The report goes on to explain: "Like many women in southern areas of Punjab Province, she has never been to school, observes strict 'purdah' /.../ and says she has never spent a night outside her own home. 'Even death may be better than camp life for me', she said."¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Jaspardo, *Generation Kill*, p. 10.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 13 and 10.

¹²² Purdah is the term for strict separation of the genders. Its original meaning being "curtain", it keeps men and women in different spheres of the society, in practice the women at home and the men as actors in society.

¹²³ Report by IRIN, humanitarian news and analysis – a project of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), datelined Multan, 4 August 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?Reportid=90060>.

¹²⁴ Report by IRIN, humanitarian news and analysis – a project of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), datelined Multan, 4 August 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?Reportid=90060>.

Even if many women have thus adopted the concept of respect leading to purdah, they have not asked for the role of carrier of family honour, but been born into it. It is a heavy role, indeed, to shoulder and it is striking how much attention is paid to women's bodies in this context. This emphasis on the body is most obviously exemplified by the rules and regulations concerning the way a woman may and may not dress. But there are also examples of more intrusive arguments, for instance the intricate discussion on the relation between the first appearance of pubic hair and the possibility of marrying a very young girl off to a much older man, or the public statement by the then chairman of the Afghan Supreme Court, that women judges could not be considered as members of the Court, since they were menstruating, thus periodically unclean and unfit to enter a mosque. In both instances, the girl or woman is herself reified. In extreme cases, it is as if her body were a public domain, which could be used, among other things, to provide punishment for transgressions committed by other members of her family.¹²⁵ Similarly, young girls could be given over to another family as a seal of a reconciliation process after, for instance, a murder or another serious crime resulting in blood feuds. Thus, the much-acclaimed respect accorded to women does not include the privacy of their bodies in other ways than the prescribed necessity to completely cover them up, regardless of climate. Notably, it does not include the right for a wife to deny her husband sexual intercourse: "Your women are your fields, therefore go to your fields as you please."¹²⁶

Here is also the basis for another case of inversion, i.e. the ease with which "respect" is turned into abuse, physical or otherwise, once the woman questions the limitations or demands imposed upon her. The respect is contingent upon the woman's voluntary submission to social rules which in fact oppress her. And when it is lost, sanctions are harsh. The number of honour killings is difficult to assess, but a recent Pakistani study, based on media reports, has recorded 1,957 cases over four years.¹²⁷ As unreported cases can be assumed to be numerous, a fair calculation could land in the vicinity of two to three honour killings per day, the overwhelming majority of the victims being women. So pervasive is the shame of the transgressor of honour codes that, once murdered, she may not be buried. Instead, her body may be disposed of, and her name is never to be mentioned again. If she is buried, her tombstone should not carry her name.

For Afghanistan, the number of recorded honour killings is lower, even taking into account the difference in size of population between the two countries: for

¹²⁵ The most well-known of these cases is perhaps that of Mukhtar Mai, who, as part of a process of customary law, was gang-raped in a village in Pakistan in June 2002 to compensate for her younger brother's alleged relationship with a girl from another clan.

¹²⁶ From the Hadith Collection by "Imam" Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Ismail Bukhari, vol. 2, p. 729, (Kitab Tafsir, chapter 597, Hadith 1641). Bukhari's rendition of hadiths is considered authentic by conservative mullahs.

¹²⁷ Reported on Public Broadcasting Service, a TV station based in Arlington, Va., USA. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/health/jan-june09/pakistan_0406.html.

2005, a study published by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission in September 2006 recorded 1,664 cases of violence against women – including 47 cases of honour killings. For January-September 2006, the figure was 704 cases of different types of violence – including 20 honour killings: “Women and young girls are being strangled, beaten to death, and burned by their fathers, brothers, and uncles for refusing to enter arranged marriages or for committing adultery. In some cases, rape or sexual-assault victims are being killed in macabre efforts at preserving family honor.”¹²⁸ A more recent estimation of gender-based violence is reported by IRIN on 6 August 2010: “A data base maintained by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs has recorded over 1,900 cases of violence against women /.../ in the past two years, but it is based on reported cases only and is therefore assumed to underestimate the true situation.”¹²⁹ On 3 August 2010, the Afghan newspaper Anis wrote in its editorial:

The human rights commission has recently reported 400 incidents of violence throughout Afghanistan and all 400 incidents have left victims behind. Self-immolation, suicide and mysterious deaths of women stem from violence, as women who are fed up with cruelty and injustice take their own lives. Underestimating women’s potential, forced marriages, marrying girls to settle blood feuds and imposition of bad traditions on women violate the human and religious rights of women.¹³⁰

According to my own observations, a complicating aspect for males growing up in this traditional society is that its strongest relational link is that between mother and son. The link between mother and daughter, which tends to be the stronger one in the West, is often not developed to its fullest potential, one reason for this being that the daughter will leave the family once she is married. This is also one of the reasons why daughters, in stark contrast to sons, are often regarded as a burden. The cost involved in their upbringing is, in a way, a lost investment, the benefit of which will be reaped by another family. Part of it, though, can be retrieved through the bride price, which tends to be higher the younger the bride. One reason for the high value of a child bride is her purity – she is assumed to be too young to have had any sexual feelings or experiences and to be malleable wife material.

The sons, on the other hand, tend to be accorded the full attention of their mothers, who will also, when the time comes, be active in selecting their

¹²⁸ Reported by the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), an organization founded in 1977 to promote peace, freedom, democracy and women’s rights. <http://www.rawa.org/honorkilling.htm>.

¹²⁹ Reported by IRIN (cf. foot note 122). <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?Reportid=90083>.

¹³⁰ Reported (in English) by BBC Monitoring Afghanistan News on 9 August 2010.

partners. The resulting bond is strong. As Anat Berko observes with regard to the Middle East: “The mother is the most significant figure for both the dispatchers and the suicide bombers. Any conversation about their mothers causes a great rush of emotion and usually makes them cry.”¹³¹ This is particularly significant in a society where crying is a release normally unavailable to men: “Unlike women, men cannot cry for fear of losing face or looking ‘effeminate’.”¹³² The same phenomenon can be observed in traditional Pakistani or Afghan families.

In discussing the possibility of borderline disorders among suicide bombers, Ami Pedahzur remarks:

In many traditional societies, the father fills the role of the central figure in the education of his sons. However, these fathers are often removed from their children so that the greater part of the burden of educating the children falls on the mother, who is an oppressed figure in patriarchal and conservative societies. In many cases, the mothers transfer a great deal of the pain they feel onto their sons and create much frustration in them. These childhood experiences cause these young boys to become introverted and shy in comparison to their peers and foster in them the tendency to be attracted to charismatic figures. These are the type of youths that recruiters from terrorist organizations are looking for, according to some researchers.¹³³

After the arranged marriage, the daughter-in-law is expected to move in with her husband’s family, where she will remain subservient to her mother-in-law. If a son is born, her status will be improved and, if all goes well, her son will also eventually provide her with a daughter-in-law, thus closing the circle. The respect accorded to a woman is gained through her dealings, or lack of dealings, with men – it is not something that comes with her individuality as a human being.

Furthermore, it could be added that – possibly because of the mixture of a feudal class society with a lingering caste system – the respect linked to status in Pakistani¹³⁴ society is, by Western standards, grossly exaggerated. There can be special *ambulances*, set aside for VIPs. Special entrances for VIPs are not enough; there can be other, even more special entrances for VVIPs and, if need be, even for VVVIPs. The classification of VIP is thus devalued and could, by certain status-conscious persons (who would like to be VVIPs), even be

¹³¹ Berko, *The Path to Paradise*, p. 7. This tendency to start crying when speaking of their mothers can be corroborated by my own conversations with traditional Pakistani men.

¹³² Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 117. In this chapter, Khosrokhavar writes about the Palestinians but the observation would no less valid for the Pashtuns. It takes a son’s love of his mother to overcome this barrier.

¹³³ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, p. 35.

¹³⁴ Afghan society is more egalitarian in this respect.

experienced as a humiliation. The respect accorded is also tightly linked to certain occasions, where the status of a person is known, accepted and not overshadowed by others with even higher status.

The downside of this is, of course, lack of status. In Pakistani society, lack of status can be observed to be equally exaggerated. Servants, for instance, are often treated as invisible beings. Women, on the other hand, especially in the Pashtun areas of both Pakistan and Afghanistan (and more generally in Afghanistan as a whole), are, in fact, invisible. If not confined to their homes, they are hidden behind burqas or other types of veiling. In this case, however, as opposed to that of servants, invisibility follows from (inverted) respect. This makes for a lopsided society, where half of the population is kept as more or less a family secret. A young, male Swedish journalist visiting Afghanistan, whom I recently interviewed, felt that, while it was important always to ask after the health of the family members of the Afghans he was interacting with, this imperative stopped short of the possible sisters. Inquiring even into the existence of sisters felt like a transgression, something that could be connected to lewd motives.

The lack of respect, perceived or real, is also documented as one important force driving the suicide bombers. Writing about those members of al-Qaeda who planned the attacks on the World Trade Center, Farhad Khosrokhavar observes:

It was their feeling of humiliation by proxy that led them to begin the struggle. /.../ They felt that Islam was being treated badly and that Muslims were being repressed. They also felt that the Islam that had once been at the centre of the civilised world, that had been domineering and self-confident, was now nothing more than a periphery that had been manipulated and marginalised by a truculent and immoral West intent upon offending and humiliating it so as to take away its followers' dignity and destroy the last bulwark against its illegitimate hegemony.¹³⁵

Thus, the act of suicide bombing could be perceived as re-empowering a society which has long been humiliated by a stronger oppressor:

As strange as it may sound, in certain societies that perceive themselves as weak and who feel hopeless and oppressed by a powerful enemy, suicide terrorism, with its potential to cause considerable pain, damage and confusion to the aggressor, can empower that society. It may even offer hope that things will eventually change; it may at least ensure that the aggressor suffers.”¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, pp. 227–228.

¹³⁶ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, p. 159.

Neil Altman observes: “It is not for nothing that extreme humiliation is called ‘mortification’, that is, being rendered dead. People may prefer to be dead than to live in a state of abjection and mortification, but they may also find that the intent to kill others while one kills oneself confers a sense of agency and perverse dignity.”¹³⁷

In the mechanisms behind the emergence of suicide bombings, lack of respect or outright humiliation is also seen as a central concept:

If we are to understand the mental universe of al-Qaeda’s new martyrs, two major ideas have to be taken into consideration. The first is that of their feeling of humiliation and the second is that of Western arrogance. Several kinds of humiliation are involved, and three are of particular significance to this type of martyr. First, there is the humiliation they experience in everyday life because they feel that they have been economically marginalised and made to feel socially inferior /.../. Second, thanks to the media, they experience the humiliation of the Muslim world in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq or Palestine. Mechanisms of identification then lead to the internalisation of that feeling. Finally, there is sometimes a sense that their immersion in the Western world has defiled them.¹³⁸

Assaf Moghadam arrives at a similar conclusion:

Based on the statements by suicide bombers examined here, there are strong indications that many of them volunteer to perpetrate a suicide attack in order to restore their honor and, by extension, the honor of an Islam that they believe to have been subjected to repeated humiliation by the West over centuries and up to the present. /.../ Many Muslims feel a growing sense that they are personally impotent in the face of the wholesale denigration of Muslims by an evil West. Groups employing suicide bombings exploit these feelings, suggesting time and again that conducting a suicide bombing is an act of heroism and manliness. Appeals to ordinary Muslims to ‘act like men’ are evidenced in repeated claims on the part of the organization that Western countries dishonor Muslim women.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Altman, *On Suicide Bombing*, p. 58.

¹³⁸ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 152. Here, Khosrokhavar is writing about the diaspora but the arguments still seem relevant.

¹³⁹ Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, pp. 256–257.

7.3 The Hudood Ordinance, the concept of “zina”

The Hudood¹⁴⁰ Ordinance was instituted in Pakistan by President Zia ul-Haq in 1979 as part of the Islamization campaign which took place during his regime. The Ordinance was intended to implement Islamic sharia law, by enforcing punishments mentioned in the Quran and sunnah¹⁴¹ for *zina* (extramarital sex), *qazf* (false accusation of zina), theft and the drinking of alcohol. It made adultery a crime against the state punishable by death and blurred the line between rape and consensual intercourse. Not until a few years ago was it amended – by the Protection of Women Act introduced by President Musharraf on December 1st 2006. This Act, which allows rape to be prosecutable under the secular Penal Code, was welcomed but deemed insufficient by Pakistani women’s organizations (most of whom would like to see the Hudood Ordinance totally repealed). In some religious quarters, on the other hand, it has never been accepted and in December 2010, the Federal Sharia Court initiated an attempt to reverse important aspects of it.

Until the new Act was instituted, one of the consequences of the rules of the *Hudood* Ordinance regarding *zina* and *qazf* had been that a woman who had been raped but could not produce four male witnesses of good standing to prove it could be jailed on the ground of false accusation and/or adultery if she was married or “fornication” if she was unmarried. As rape appears to be relatively common in the sexually overheated Pakistani society and the requirement of four witnesses was, of course,¹⁴² impossible to fulfil, thousands of rape victims have been filling the female sections of Pakistani jails¹⁴³ while the perpetrators of the crime have gone unpunished. In spite of the introduction of the Protection of Women Act, similar practices continue. In an article published on 26 October 2010, Iftikhar Murshed mentions the figure of “some 7,000 women languishing in prison, 88 per cent of whom, according to the National Commission for the Status of Women, have been incarcerated on charges of unproven adultery.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Literally, *hudood* means limit, in the sense of restriction.

¹⁴¹ Sunnah is an Arabic word for habit, usual practice. In Islam, it refers to sayings and living habits of the Prophet Mohammed.

¹⁴² Even if witnesses were to be present, it is difficult to imagine men of good reputation in society standing by, watching the act.

¹⁴³ According to a report by the Pakistani National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) “an estimated 80% of women” in jail in 2003 were there because “they had failed to prove rape charges and were consequently convicted of adultery”. The report is quoted in *Jails and Prisoners, State of Human Rights 2004*, published by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, HRCP.

¹⁴⁴ S. Iftikhar Murshed, *Women, Violence and the Law*, article printed by the Pakistani daily The News and found in the newsletter of New Age Islam (see footnote 28), dated 26 October 2010.

While the *Hudood* Ordinance is not per se gender-specific, it has, in practice, by and large been translated into violence against women. Remarkably, the development during recent years points towards increased violence, in the wake of growing Taliban influence:

In 2005, in Multan a man stoned his wife to death for adultery – the first such incident in Pakistan. Two years later, three people were stoned to death for adultery in the same locality. /.../ From this point onwards, the brutality of attacks against women by militants becomes more pronounced. In 2006, two female teachers of a vocational training school run by the [Asian Development Bank] ADB were shot dead in Orakzai Agency. In 2007, a woman, along with two men, was stoned and then shot dead for alleged adultery in Alamguzar village in Khyber Agency. Later the same year, Islamic militants beheaded two women they accused of prostitution. In March 2008, a couple were stoned to death when the Taliban declared them guilty of adultery. This incident happened near Ghalanai in Mohmand Agency. This couple had actually managed to run away to Nowshera, a ‘settled’ area run by the provincial government, yet they were caught and brought back for the slaughter. There are news reports that another woman was killed for ‘prostitution’ in Kurza Bandai by the local Taliban this year because she refused to give up her teaching job in Mingora: she was a widow and needed to support her children.¹⁴⁵

In September 2010 one of these atrocities was filmed:

The woman's head was covered with a sack, her hands were tied and she was tethered to the ground – while a group of turbaned, bearded men hurled rocks at her, breaking her bones and then crushing her skull. According to reports in the press, she had been walking unescorted and was presumed guilty of adultery. The barbarity, allegedly perpetrated by the Taliban in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), was shown on Dubai's Al Aan television. The same footage was televised by a private Pakistani channel on Sept 28 and the story also featured that day in the local print media.¹⁴⁶

However, this news failed to have an impact: “There was no reaction from civil society, no politician demanded that the government bring the criminals to justice, no resolution was passed by parliament expressing concern over the

Murshed is the publisher of the quarterly *Criterion*.

http://www.newageislam.com/NewAgeIslamIslamWomenAndFeminism_1.aspx?ArticleID=3584

¹⁴⁵ Nazish Brohi, article in the Pakistani newspaper *The News*, 11 April 2009.

¹⁴⁶ Murshed, *Women, Violence and the Law*.

outrage, no statement emanated from the president or the prime minister condemning the incident, and the atrocity faded from public memory because the woman was a nonentity and did not matter.”¹⁴⁷

In Afghanistan, the situation has until recently been less well documented and *Hudood* laws do not exist in the formalized legal system. The concept of *zina*, however, is very much present in the informal justice system, as well as in the Taliban version of sharia law applied in many areas – and these are the justice systems which prevail. According to a 2007 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), as much as 80 per cent of all disputes are dealt with through traditional dispute resolution mechanisms.¹⁴⁸ These mechanisms, “usually composed of male elders and based on local customs and interpretations of Islamic law, do not, as is commonly argued, offer basic but equal justice to all. They are monopolised by local strongmen and their decisions are geared against women, who are barred from participating, the poor, and individuals disadvantaged by family or tribal affiliation.”¹⁴⁹

One of the reasons why informal justice is still extensively applied is that the formal legal system remains highly dysfunctional. This is an area where international intervention has been particularly inadequate, while political will on the part of the government has also been lacking. As in many other areas, lack of coordination has hampered the effect of those efforts which have in fact been made. For instance, “numerous prisons were rehabilitated to meet humanitarian standards only to be filled once more with many innocent prisoners, including hundreds of women and girls incarcerated for ‘moral crimes’, such as running away from home — crimes that appear nowhere in Afghan law.”¹⁵⁰

Extramarital sexual relations, whether forced or consensual, are included in these ‘moral crimes’, and women are the primary victims. Reports dated August 2010 tell the story of a widow, living in a remote village in the north-west of Afghanistan, who was executed by the Taliban after she had given birth to a stillborn child.¹⁵¹ As the Taliban commander explained, the woman’s husband had “died four years ago and /.../ his widow had lived alone. The execution order was given by a local Taliban judge, Qazi Ahmad.” In another instance, reported in August 2010, a 35-year-old widow was killed: “According to reports, the Taleban sentenced a widow to death on charges of having illegal relations /.../ It is said that the woman had had a relationship with a man who had promised to

¹⁴⁷ Ibid..

¹⁴⁸ The UNODC report is quoted by Nader Nadery, a commissioner in the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, in a parliamentary brief.
<http://www.parliamentarybrief.com/2010/09/peace-needs-to-get-serious-about-justice#all>.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ According to a report on Tolo TV on 9 August 2010, the woman was first flogged with 200 lashes and later shot dead in public.

marry her and she had got pregnant by him. The Taleban arrested the woman, aborted her foetus, and afterwards gave her 200 lashes in public. Afterwards, the Taleban hanged and shot her.”¹⁵² The amount of violence used here surely goes beyond the call of duty for a court, albeit a Taliban one.

Another report from August 2010 describes the first public execution by stoning carried out by the Taliban since they were ousted in 2001: a young couple who had eloped but been lured back to their village in northern Kunduz were stoned to death by hundreds of their neighbours, including some family members.

Perhaps most worrisome were signs of support for the action from mainstream religious authorities in Afghanistan. The head of the Ulema Council¹⁵³ in Kunduz Province, Mawlawi Abdul Yaqub, interviewed by telephone, said Monday that stoning to death was the appropriate punishment for an illegal sexual relationship /.../. And less than a week earlier, the national Ulema Council brought together 350 religious scholars in a meeting with government religious officials, who issued a joint statement on Aug. 10 calling for more punishment under Shariah law, apparently referring to stoning, amputations and lashings.”¹⁵⁴

As it turned out, this execution had been filmed by somebody carrying a cell phone. When this film reached the public in early 2011, it caused an outcry, inside as well as outside Afghanistan. Promises to prosecute the perpetrators were made. If these are fulfilled, it will constitute an unusual beach with the tradition of impunity in these cases.

It is remarkable that the *Hudood* Ordinance remained in place in Pakistan during a series of governments following the (still unexplained) death of Zia ul-Haq in a plane crash in southern Punjab in August 1988. The installation of a female Prime Minister during the two periods of the 1990s when Benazir Bhutto was in power brought no change. The governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif both set up commissions to investigate the *Hudood* Ordinance, both of which recommended amending certain aspects of the law, but the strength of the opposition to any move to alter it was such that neither government followed through. This strength also became apparent in the debate which preceded and still surrounds the introduction of the Women’s Protection Act. Not only were

¹⁵² Reported in the Daily Afghanistan, the first independent newspaper of Afghanistan, published in Kabul in Dari and English, 10 August 2010, reproduced in BBC Monitoring Afghanistan. The Afghan newspaper is very critical of the deed: “Therefore, the Taleban who claim that they are defending the holy Islamic laws, are in fact by carrying out such actions inflicting such harm on Islam that even the enemies of Islam could not do. The people should know that the Taleban are a militant, criminal and puppet group that has nothing to do with Islam and is dispatched to this country for furthering outsiders’ objectives.”

¹⁵³ An Ulema Council is a body of Islamic clerics with religious authority in a region.

¹⁵⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/17/world/asia/17stoning.html>.

the religious political parties up in arms but large sections of the secular parties were also vehemently opposed to the scrapping of rules regarding *zina*. Immorality would reign, ran the arguments, the removal of the *Hudood* regulations would open the floodgates and Pakistan would become like the decadent West. Demonstrations were held, tempers running high. Faced with this resistance, President Musharraf, whose action had been prompted mainly by pressure from Western donors, retreated from the original intent to abolish the *Hudood* Ordinance and limited the reform to the introduction of the Act.

Even if women should no longer be put in jail in Pakistan on the sole ground of having been raped, rape victims in both Pakistan and Afghanistan continue to be severely punished by society and perpetrators of rape continue to go unscathed. Rape victims are stigmatized and ostracized, deemed unfit for marriage (as they are no longer virgins)¹⁵⁵ and thus a continued burden on their family, and sometimes expelled from their homes. A woman who is strong enough to report a rape runs a palpable risk of being raped again, this time in the police station. Many rape victims are forced to marry their rapists, as the only solution to compensate for the loss of virginity. In practice, this makes rape a viable method of acquiring a bride who would otherwise be unavailable. Another way to handle a rejection is to disfigure the face of the recalcitrant girl by throwing acid on it, thus preventing her, it is assumed, from marrying anybody else. In these cases, as well, impunity is the norm rather than the exception.

7.4 The “blasphemy laws”

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan are Islamic republics. Among Muslim-majority countries, Pakistan has the strictest regulations against blasphemy, incorporated into various sections of its Criminal Code, some of which is a heritage from the colonial era. Article 295 forbids damaging or defiling a place of worship or a sacred object in a general way. More specifically, Article 295-A forbids offending religious feelings and Article 295-B forbids defiling the Quran. Article 295-C, which was added during the regime of General Zia ul-Haq and biased the law against the country’s minorities, forbids defaming the Prophet Mohammed. Except for Article 295-C, the provisions of Article 295 require intention on the part of the accused for the crime to have been committed. Defiling the Quran merits imprisonment for life; defaming Prophet Mohammed merits death. This is the background to the riots in both Afghanistan and Pakistan during the winter of 2006, when the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed were being spread across the Muslim world. As we have seen, the offence of defaming the Prophet Mohammed merits death regardless of the intention of the person committing the

¹⁵⁵ Cf. the fate of Dhanu, the Sri Lankan suicide bomber who killed Rajiv Gandhi.

blasphemy. Similarly, riots have erupted on several occasions in Afghanistan, when rumours were spread accusing foreign soldiers of defiling the Quran.

The following paragraphs of the Pakistani Criminal Code go into further details. Article 298 states: "Whoever, with the deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of any person, utters any word or makes any sound in the hearing of that person or makes any gesture in the sight of that person or places any object in the sight of that person, shall be punished with imprisonment /.../ for a term which may extend to one year /.../." Articles 298-B and 298-C, again an addition from the regime of Zia ul-Haq¹⁵⁶, prohibit the Ahmediyya from behaving as Muslims, calling themselves Muslims, proselytizing, or "in any manner whatsoever" offending the religious feelings of Muslims.

Apart from targeting minorities in a disproportionate way, the regulations against blasphemy lend themselves to arbitrariness and outright abuse, with the death penalty for defamation of the Prophet increasing the stakes. The offence itself cannot be debated, as the blasphemy cannot be repeated. The judges handling these cases work under tremendous pressure, as an acquittal means that religious rage might well turn against them.¹⁵⁷ It is not uncommon for persons who are being tried for, or even declared innocent of, blasphemy charges to be murdered by religiously-incited mobs or individuals. Thus, the "blasphemy laws" can be used to do away with enemies on the basis of rumours or incorrect information or to instigate terrorist attacks against religious minorities - and are, indeed, used for these purposes. For instance, in July 2009, hundreds of members of Sipah-e-Sahaba, a banned Sunni organization, torched homes and killed Christians in the Punjabi city of Gojra and in the nearby village of Korian. The violence was triggered by unconfirmed information that a Christian had defiled a Quran.

During the last months of 2010, a much debated blasphemy case concerned Aasia Bibi,¹⁵⁸ an illiterate 45-year-old mother of five children. According to details collected by the Ansar Burney Trust, she had been working as a farmhand in fields together with Muslim women, when she was asked to fetch drinking water. Some of the Muslim women refused to drink the water as it had been brought by a Christian woman and was therefore "dirty and unclean" (*haram*). In the following dispute Aasia allegedly uttered some "not very good words for the Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him)". The incident was forgotten until a few days later, when she was attacked by a mob. The police was called and she was taken to the police station, allegedly for protection. However, the police then registered a blasphemy case against her and held her in isolation for well over a

¹⁵⁶ The basis for these articles was provided in Ordinance XX promulgated in 1985.

¹⁵⁷ In 1997, the Lahore High Court Judge Arif Iqbal Bhatti, who had acquitted two Christians accused of blasphemy in 1995, was shot dead.

¹⁵⁸ "Bibi" is a honorific used for women. Her full name, Aasia Noreen, does not appear as often in the press.

year before a district court in Sheikhpura in Punjab sentenced her to death in November 2010.¹⁵⁹

The sentence caused an outrage which echoed beyond Pakistan's borders and President Zardari ordered a review of the case. In November a ministerial inquiry concluded that the district court verdict had been legally unsound, following which, however, the Lahore High Court ordered a bar on the President's possibility to pardon the sentenced woman. Religious extremists were increasingly mobilizing against an acquittal – i.a., in a Friday sermon, Maulana Yusuf Qureshi, a cleric at the Mohabat Khan mosque in Peshawar, announced a reward of 500 000 Pakistani rupies for anyone who would kill Aasia Bibi. Qureshi announced that: "We expect her to be hanged and if she is not hanged then we will ask the mujahideen and the Taliban to kill her." He also said that the money would be paid out of the mosque's fund¹⁶⁰ and his actions have not led to any legal consequence.

In this atmosphere of religious frenzy and with Aasia Bibi still in custody, another victim was targeted. In early January 2011, Salman Taseer, the Governor of Punjab, was killed by one of his own security guards in a marketplace in Islamabad, with the rest of his security team in the role of passive bystanders. News photographs show the perpetrator smiling serenely after having pumped a score of bullets into the body of his victim and being calmly arrested by the police.

Taseer had been one of few influential politicians to publicly offer support to Aasia Bibi and, when visiting her in jail, had also criticized the blasphemy regulations, saying they were "black laws" which needed to be reformed. With the twisted logic applied by religious extremists this made him a blasphemer himself. In his court testimony, his killer, Mumtaz Qadri, proudly declared that he had only been executing Allah's will.

In a blatant inversion of values, the role of hero in this chain of event is attributed to Qadri by a large number of religious leaders and their followers. While being taken into police custody, he was showered with rose petals. A great number of lawyers offered to defend him without charge. The religious honorific of "Ghazi" (fighter, conqueror) has been bestowed on him and his act has been supported by a large number of clerics, i.a. belonging to the supposedly moderate Barelvi sect, of which Qadri himself is also a member.

¹⁵⁹ This account of the events is taken from a statement by Ansar Burney, former minister for human rights, published on 12 November 2010 on Socialist Pakistan News. Other accounts may differ in details but follow largely the same pattern. Some mention the fact that an unrelated dispute was part of the picture, either a family quarrel or a land dispute.
socialist_pakistan_news@yahoogroups.com

¹⁶⁰ Information contained in a public call by the Jinnah Institute Caucus on Blasphemy Laws, published in Islamabad on 10 December 2010.

For the funeral of Salman Taseer, on the other hand, it was difficult to find a cleric willing to carry it out. The government has backtracked on any attempts to reform the blasphemy laws and other critics of these laws have been forced into hiding. In some comments, the fact that Taseer was “a liberal” is held up, as if that could be a reason for the murder. Even expressing sympathy for Taseer now carries a tangible risk – if the defender of an alleged blasphemer himself becomes a blasphemer, deserving to die, then by extension, the defender of the defender might meet the same fate. A climate of fear is created, the silence of which serves to promote further lawlessness.

7.5 Hyperbole

The way we use words is important, albeit less often explicitly defined. The purpose of language is to formulate thoughts, observations, sensations and emotions in a way which corresponds as closely as possible to their substance. It is possible that, if the words used start to deviate from the substance to be expressed, the substance is also contaminated. This is where the use of hyperbole comes into the picture. It may be part of every language to some extent. In the West, we tend to use it with ironic quotation marks implied, as when a certain item of fashion could be “to-die-for”. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, the exaggerated ways of expression are less ironic, more like wishful thinking. It is as if the problems besetting these societies make it imperative to develop a rhetoric which paints a much rosier picture than the one at hand – a sort of compensation for a dreary day-to-day existence, as if façades are becoming increasingly necessary in order to detract attention from the cracks in the national home itself.

A slightly different type of recurrent expression, which is significant in the context of this study, is the routine way in which both the Pakistani and the Afghan governments, although presumably they do not share jihadi ideas of martyrdom, state that whoever lost his life in a confrontation with insurgents was “martyred” or “became a *shaheed*”. Regardless of actual circumstances, it puts death into a heroic setting, which could bring some consolation to the remaining family.

These exaggerations may seem innocent enough, but it is not impossible that the state-sponsored references to e.g. *martyrdom* serve to blur the vision in a more generalized way, creating gaps which allow inversions to gain ground. Distortion of reality could be driven to a head, where lying could become almost unconscious. This could facilitate a political discourse in which facts are relegated to a secondary level. For instance, having said that one would do a certain thing becomes almost equal to the fact of having actually done it. An example which comes to mind is the recurrent promises of compensation which Pakistani authorities are prone to issue whenever a disaster of some kind has

taken place: a big accident, a flooding, a devastating insurgent attack, and so on. These promises do not necessarily mean that compensation will actually be paid out, even if, in most cases, it does happen.¹⁶¹ In terms of substance, some uncertainty remains.

The next step is the distortion of facts as a legitimate means to an end, often a political one. The double-talk of the Musharraf regime concerning Pakistan's commitment to participate in the "global war on terror" served to hide the fact that, while certain al Qaeda-affiliated wanted persons were indeed hunted down and delivered, Taliban leaders could continue to plan the insurgency in Afghanistan from safe houses in Quetta and Peshawar. In an oblique way, the lack of sincerity came out in the open when the elections in Afghanistan in 2004 (presidential) and 2005 (parliamentary and provincial) were carried out without too much insurgent activity, and President Musharraf could not stop himself from taking the credit for this.¹⁶² The pattern has not been substantially changed by the installation of a democratically elected government in 2008. Despite vehement rebuttals of accusations that Pakistan was protecting important Afghan Taliban leaders, the Pakistani security services were able to arrest a number of such leaders in Karachi in February 2010. The most important of these was Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a deputy of the Afghan Taliban chief Mullah Omar. (According to some reports, he has subsequently been released – again, the situation is diffuse.) Obviously, the generals remain in charge of regional policy, an anomaly which is understood by most Pakistanis, including the politicians who are being bypassed.

A more concrete example, from my own experience, was provided in a meeting which the European Union (EU) ambassadors had with the then Pakistani Minister of the Interior after the first attack against the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad in the autumn of 2004. The Minister had requested this meeting in order to explain to us that what had happened was the unfortunate consequence of a complicated short-circuit, something which was demonstrated by experts showing graphs and charts of the electrical system of the hotel. In spite of knowing enough to understand that this explanation was absurd, I think most of us left the meeting, if not convinced, then at least with a shadow of a doubt that this had been a premeditated attack. (Since then, the hotel has been attacked twice. The most recent attack, in September 2008, destroyed large parts of it and killed over 50 people.)

The local audience is less gullible. Pakistanis, as well as Afghans, generally assume that what they are told by their political leaders is to be interpreted as, at

¹⁶¹ Often, as during the major earthquake in October 2006, Islamist organizations are well ahead of the regular authorities in coming to the assistance of victims, which, of course, goes a long way in building the acceptance or approval of these organizations. This pattern was also discernible after the flood disaster in the summer of 2010.

¹⁶² Based on statements by Musharraf published by media during this period.

best, a declaration of intent, rather than an actual commitment. Thus, political apathy or cynicism is rampant. Trust in common systems is low – people are left to their own devices, or those of informal groups, such as the extended family or community, to cope with whatever disasters or problems befall them.

I would suggest that this lack of confidence is a possible component in the frustration that leads individuals to carry out suicide bombings and their surrounding societies to accept them as a legitimate method in a political struggle. This would imply that suicide bombings are directed, as they often are, towards domestic authorities, in particular the police,¹⁶³ not only as a result of the link that these authorities are assumed to have with the West, in particular the USA, but also as targets in their own right. Frustration is multiple and points in different directions. It concerns the hegemony of the West and the oppression or humiliations ascribed to Western agents, but it is also about the corruption and general inadequacy of the Pakistani or Afghan government and their different agencies.

All this is happening in the era of globalization. The challenge of modernization cannot be avoided: it seeps through the television screens, the Internet and other means of communication. Denial will not help; it will still be there. However, the fruits of modernization cannot be reaped by the non-privileged majority – the world order, the domestic class hierarchy and the distress of the national situation stand in the way. One solution to the resulting disappointment and frustration is to invert modernity itself, go back to the Middle Ages, or even further, to the era of the Prophet Mohammed in the 7th century.

¹⁶³ In 2007 alone, more than 925 Afghan policemen were killed in Taliban ambushes. (This figure was found in the article *Record Level of Violence* by AP writer Jason Straziuso, datelined 1 January 2008, and published by The Independent, UK.)

8 Conclusions

What this study has tried to do is to draw a line between the increasing number of suicide bombings in Pakistan and Afghanistan, these two countries being viewed as a more or less cohesive area in this regard, and certain phenomena in these societies which defy the common logic of right and wrong. Impunity for serious crimes such as rape, going hand in hand with harsh punishments for the victims of these crimes, is a case in point. This is viewed as “inversion”, the tipping of values upside down. It is suggested that the acceptance by large parts of society of such blatant inversion of the roles of victim and perpetrator cannot but have a detrimental influence on the value system as a whole. What can be observed constitutes erosion, in this case through the medium of gender, of the basic concepts of right and wrong.

While, of course, there can be no direct link between the practice of inverted justice and the prevalence of suicide bombings, suicide bombers could be situated in the context of inversion – in this case, the desire to live a decent life is inverted into the desire to die and, while dying, kill others. The practice of punishing rape victims is not new to the society. The phenomenon of suicide bombing, on the other hand, is a recent one, starting to gain momentum from 2007 in Pakistan, and a few years earlier in Afghanistan. The public outcry one might expect would surround this development has, by and large, not been strong. No effective fatwas are known to have been issued against the killing of a growing number of innocent victims in these blasts, the media are divided in their attitudes towards the phenomenon and civil society has not been strong, or united, enough to have an impact. Dysfunctional governments seem to have lost control and political leaders prefer to pretend that all is well.

The backdrop to the emergence of suicide bombings in this region is one of a continuing security, political and economic crisis, with the social fabric stretched thin, approaching breaking point. In the case of Pakistan, a recent article describes it as follows:

Our stoicism, and that of our leaders, is the consequence of living for years in a state of crisis. Indeed, notably over the last two decades, periods of genuine order have been less and less frequent. We have seen a swift descent into a state of lawlessness, where today it is hard to say if the biggest threat comes from the north, with at least seven separate militant forces operating across it, the south where death squads stroll through Karachi, or areas of Punjab

where organisations with jihadist or sectarian motives continue to operate without any real check.¹⁶⁴

Against this background, and keeping the phenomenon of “inversion” in mind, three areas stand out as more crucial than others if developments are to be turned around: the education sector, gender relations, and the judiciary.

At the root of Pakistan’s problems is a highly dysfunctional education system. The public school system is totally inadequate, leaving poor families who cannot afford private school fees with the option of handing over their children to religious schools, madrassas, some of which are the recruiting ground for militant movements. Huge and determined efforts are needed to reform the education sector – but as long as the present situation prevails in the region, the military is likely to remain the priority in terms of budgetary resources. In Afghanistan it is more a matter of building a new education system from scratch, an effort which has been ongoing with international assistance but, again, is overshadowed by the needs of the security sector.

Empowerment of women is equally central and relations between the genders need to be defused. If women take an active part in all spheres of society, this will produce a better balance in the societies as a whole and reduce the tendency to tip into inversions of different kinds. Balanced societies will be less prone to accept suicide bombings. This will not be an easy task, however, as long as the Taliban keep gaining ground; the gender hierarchy is at the very heart of Taliban thinking.¹⁶⁵ It is possible that the rigidity of this position is enhanced by the crisis itself.¹⁶⁶ In any case, however difficult, women’s rights must not be sold out in whatever settlements that come about with the Taliban.

The parallel failure by governments to build a functional justice sector is an important factor contributing to the advance of the Taliban movements in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Taliban-style justice might be appreciated for its swiftness, but it will enhance traditional values, not least regarding gender

¹⁶⁴ Kamila Hyat, *Pakistan: The Neros of Our Time*, article in the Pakistani daily The News, reprinted in the newsletter of New Age Islam (see footnote 28) on 30 October 2010.
http://www.newageislam.com/NewAgeIslamIslamicSociety_1.aspx?ArticleID=3604.

¹⁶⁵ Moghadam writes: “To motivate Afghans to fight the jihad, organizations use tactics similar to those used in Iraq. In particular, they attempt to appeal to young Afghans’ sense of honor and manhood. According to a report published by Jamestown Foundation, video tapes are played in madrassas for Afghan students in which Western women are shown wearing bikinis while going to discotheques. In addition, these seminary students are taught that Afghan girls employed by Western NGOs are sexually exploited by the male employees.” Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, p. 158.

¹⁶⁶ Khosrokhavar writes: “The crisis of modernisation is leading to a new kind of patriarchalism. As the positions of men and women and their respective standings in society become more problematic, men tend to make roles within the family more rigid to compensate for the general crisis affecting the role of the individual in an increasingly anonymous world where the communitarian roles of the past no longer apply.” Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 218.

hierarchy. The justice system of both countries needs to be cleansed of the pervasive incompetence, as well as corruption. In Afghanistan, this is an area where the failure of the international community stands out as particularly painful.

At the same time, there are limits to what can be done by outsiders – limitations which are likely to have increased during the last decade of international intervention in Afghanistan. The great majority of the victims of today's suicide terrorism in Pakistan and Afghanistan are Muslims and the response to this growing threat should come from within the Muslim world. Western-led interventions, such as the "global war on terror", will tend to backfire, as they will add to the jihadists' argument that the West is trying to destroy Islam, an argument which resonates within circles much larger than those which might support terrorism. What the West could do now would be more in the vein of quiet support to moderate and non-violent forces in the ideological struggle taking place within the Muslim world, while facilitating economic development in these countries and promoting a more equitable world order.¹⁶⁷

It follows that suicide bombing in the Pakistan/Afghanistan area cannot be treated as a distinct kind of warfare which could be eliminated by military means. Killing people who want to die is pointless in terms of coming to grips with the problem;¹⁶⁸ it can serve only as a case-by-case measure to limit the number of victims in each attack. The message of the suicide bombers is loud and clear: it is about squaring the odds in a world order which is perceived to oppress Muslims and about the frustration created, not only by the perceived intrusion/occupation¹⁶⁹ by arrogant Western governments but also by the perceived corruption and inadequacy of their respective national governments. This message has to be taken seriously.

¹⁶⁷ Assaf Moghadam concludes: "As Muslims gear up for this debate, Western states can respectfully convey to moderate Muslims what most of them already know, namely that the credibility of the Salafi Jihad suffers from a fundamental contradiction: on the one hand, Salafi-Jihadists claim to act for the benefit of Muslims; on the other hand, however, Muslims suffer the consequences of Salafi-Jihadist ideology and terrorism more than any other group." Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, p. 265.

¹⁶⁸ Neil Altman writes: "[H]aving the intention to die makes one immune from all traditional measures meant to dissuade or intimidate. The overwhelming military might of the occupier is disabled. /.../ In this way, a small group or even a sole individual may become in a sense more powerful than a super-power whose strength rests on military might. Retaliatory action on the part of the adversary not only is ineffective but actually is reframed as carrying out the *wishes* of the bomber. So, I posit, the suicidal intent makes possible a sense of effective agency among those who are powerless in conventional terms." Altman, *On Suicide Bombing*, p. 52.

¹⁶⁹ According to Robert A. Pape, occupation comes close to being a *sine qua non* for the occurrence of suicide attacks: "Absent the goal to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from the territory that the terrorists view as their homeland or prize greatly, suicide terrorism hardly occurs." Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. xiii of Foreword.

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