

## **“The Post Victim Ethical Exemption Syndrome: an Outgrowth of Humiliation”.**

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“Feelings of humiliation may lead to three major consequences, a) to **depression** and **apathy**, b) they may nurture an urge to retaliate with inflicting humiliation (in humiliation entrepreneurs such as Hitler; **genocide, terrorism**), or c) they may lead to **constructive social change** (Mandela).” Taken from Lindner, Evelin G. (2004). [\*Humiliation in a Globalizing World: Does Humiliation Become the Most Disruptive Force?\*](#) New York, NY: Paper prepared for the "Workshop on Humiliation and Violent Conflict," November 18-19, 2004 at Columbia University.

It is clear that the current morass that is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is caused, in part, by the effects of humiliation. Without understanding this, little progress is going to be made in helping to solve this clash. Thus, educating people about the psychological impact of this confrontation is one of the core functions of the Manhattanville College Center for Middle East Understanding ([http://www.mville.edu/world\\_religions/forum.htm](http://www.mville.edu/world_religions/forum.htm)).

Righteous infanticide does not suddenly spring out of nowhere. The way in which Israelis and Palestinians currently justify the killing of each other’s children is nothing short of mind-boggling. Believe it or not, there is logic behind this inexcusable, murderous attitude. One reason for this kind of thinking is something I call “The Post Victim Ethical Exemption (PVEE) Syndrome.” Much like Vietnam’s post-traumatic stress disorder, the impact of this malady is often subtle yet powerful. Many persons who are affected by either condition are not conscious of the fact that they have it or even when or exactly how they got it.

Persons affected by the PVEE syndrome often defend, minimize and/or rationalize the most outrageous attitudes held and acts carried out by themselves or members of their particular group. When you talk to such people, you will quickly find that the reason that they take such a usually untenable position is because “their people” either are or have been victimized by one or more other groups. This is the golden rule turned on its head- “Do bad unto others *because* they (or someone else) did something bad to you.” It is a deceptively simple and somewhat pervasive point of view that you find among the Israelis and Palestinians as they respond to the outrage of the day carried out by the other side.

The Israeli PVEE narrative goes something like this – Since Jews have been victimized over millennia by various people and countries (the holocaust being exhibit “A”) they are justified in doing whatever they need to do to make sure that the oft repeated phrase, “never again”, is a reality. Further justification for their version of this syndrome is found in the supposed “nature” of their adversaries this time - primarily Arabs and Muslims. According to many Israelis and Jews, Palestinians promote a “culture of martyrdom” wherein they teach their children to hate and blow up innocent people. Consequently, so the logic goes, whatever the state of Israel does to defend itself is justified. Extra judicial killings, group punishment, torture and yes, righteous infanticides are all aggressively defended. Thus, actions that would be seen as abnormally abhorrent and distasteful when practiced by any other modern democracy are consistently justified because of Israel’s (Jews’) humiliation due to its current or post victim status.

The Palestinian PVEE narrative takes shape in a slightly different way. It goes like this- Since Palestinians are innocent victims of Zionism and the collective might of the anti-Muslim, Western “Crusader” mentality, they are justified in doing whatever they need to do in order to

fight back against such imperialism. Evidence they cite in support of this view includes the overwhelming amount of monetary, material and moral support supplied to Israel by the United States and the recent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq by “coalition” forces. Additionally, gross negative distortions of Islam in the western Media and provocative statements by prominent US Christian clergy are cited as additional proof of the bona fide victim status of the Palestinians. Anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and anti-Palestinian conspiracy theories abound in such a negatively-charged atmosphere. With senior Muslim clerics issuing religious rulings justifying suicide bombings, it is small wonder that many young Palestinians believe that it is okay to ambush civilians, fire rockets into densely populated Israeli neighborhoods and yes, commit righteous infanticide. Thus, actions that would otherwise be seen as abnormally abhorrent and distasteful by most learned Muslim jurists, are consistently justified because of the Palestinians (Muslims’) humiliation due to its current or past victim status.

As is clear, the PVEE syndrome can be dangerous indeed. In the current case it feeds the seemingly endless cycles of gut-wrenching violence in Israel/Palestine. Since I am an African-American Muslim, I belong to at least two groups that tend to be afflicted with this syndrome—Muslims and African Americans. Having gone through the American Civil Rights movement in the 1960’s and working as the executive director of a civil rights/Black nationalist organization in the 1970’s, I know, first hand, how debilitating and devastating this syndrome can be. At its worst, it leads to the carnage we see in the Middle East. In its less bloody manifestations, oppressed groups like African Americans often use it as an excuse for not working assertively to free themselves from oppression. After all, if I always have been or always will be victimized by “the man”, of what use is any concerted positive effort by me aimed at changing my condition?