

Creation and/versus/of Community

Both the Haida's Potlatch and the Palestinian female suicide bombers' final deeds intended to strengthen the community. They do this by providing orientation points in time that assist in creating social bonds and initiating new members of the community. In this sense, in the context of the "Orientation and Order" theory of sacrifice, they are similar. However from the "Totemic Communion" theory's point of view they differ on at least four accounts. They are both social events, but the community for the Haida is based on clan kinship, while for the Palestinians it is on a much wider, national level. Second, the individual's relationship to the community is different. The Palestinian bomber acts alone with the guidance help of few handlers in secret, while the Haida potlatch giver involves a larger segment of the community. Third, the nature of the former's sacrifice is violent, while the latter is no longer so. Finally, the person giving the Haida's potlatch is personally involved in giving objects directly to the community, and only symbolically sacrificing to the deities. On the other hand the female suicide bombers sacrifice their lives to G-d and hope that this act helps symbolically their wider community, the Palestinian nation. The physical and symbolical directions of the acts are the opposite in the two cultures.

Palestinians believe that they are fighting to establish their own country. Victor's book suggests that most of them envision that independence and sovereignty can be achieved only by violent means. One may disagree with this assessment and question the people's

motivations who advocate this view. Nevertheless a growing number of women resorted to the desperate act of "blowing themselves up" in the Palestinian Intifadas, particularly the second one. These operations were carefully designed by a variety of organizations, including Hamas, Hizbollah, Fatah, and the Al-Aqsa Martyr Brigade. They are encouraged by religious leaders and political leaders. Successful attempts are revered, shown on television. A cult of martyrdom has been built around the dead figures. As Dr, Iyad Sarraj, a psychiatrist, explains, "martyrs are like prophets in our culture, they are holy people, not ordinary soldiers who fight to defend their country." (Victor 29) It is in the interest of the sponsoring organizations to maintain the memory of these people, who are considered heroes. Each of these suicide bombings are remembered as important steps towards future state of Palestine. This active remembrance is maintained by printing and gluing posters of them all over the walls, writing, producing and re-broadcasting the farewell video messages by them. In short, these points of references keep alive their memories and intended as role models for future potential bombers. If/when the Palestinian nationstate will be established these series of bombings will probably be included in the national pantheon, either physical or virtual.

The Haida potlatch functions in a similar way. Until modernity, Western technoculture appeared and started to extinguish local customs each potlatch ceremony was an important social event. It had an economic function of redistributing wealth, had symbolic function of connecting to the ancestors, communal function by adopting new members and personal by giving and exchanging names. All of these aspects are remembered until and after the next potlatch for various reasons. Attempting to stop the decline of the indigenous culture Robert Davidson decided to organize a potlatch, the first one after a very long hiatus. This single event will certainly be revered in Haida memory for times to come. Its significance cannot be

easily compared to other potlatches, because of their recent scarcity. This was the occasion a grandmother announced the names she gave to her children and grandchildren for the first time in public (Steltzter 28), a youth's interest was raised to learn the history of his tribal name (Steltzter 30), a singer received a drum she'll use for the rest of her life (Steltzter 70)... It is clear that the experience Davidson's ceremony created in the community members will serve as a focal point of their lives. Davidson intention in conducting the event corresponds well with Eliade's comment on sacred time: "'old', 'profane', 'historic time can be abolished and mythical 'new' regenerated time established.'" (Eliade 405) He created the potential for a new sense of history.

If sacrifice is a totemic communion, where kins have a communal meal devoted to deity, replacing an original violent event, then the Haida and the Palestinians are on the opposite end in each of these aspects, despite the similarities regarding the social nature of their happenings.

The size and extent of the communities involved is different. Robert Davidson asked help from his family members, and his side of the clanship to put on the event. He then invited not just all members of his clan, but as tradition dictates the other side too and some outsiders too. His intention was to create an event where everybody involved would have a personal connection. At the end 400 people participated.

Community has a different position in the Palestinian suicide bombers' plans, female or male. They prepare for their sacrifice in secrecy. In most cases the immediate family doesn't even know about it. See the case of one of the teenage bombers who on her way to the location of the bombing act "had called her mother to apologize for sneaking out of the house, and to say her good-byes." (Victor 109) Handlers, experts train the individual. The

community gets involved only after the successful attack. First, the sponsoring organization visits the bomber's family and creates a loud celebration right on the spot. They distribute candy to the neighborhood children; encourage the family to show joy instead of grieving. Next, they transform the immediate neighborhood into a kind of shrine, where the martyr's image is plastered all over. (Assuming that the Israeli army doesn't destroy the location first. If they do that helps their agenda because it provides fuel for their anti-Jewish sentiments.) Taking it to the next level they broadcast the video message left behind to the entire population. Thus the affected community has three levels (family, neighborhood, national) and each involved differently in the sacrifice. The most emphasized ones is the highest and largest level, the national, where people do not have a chance to personally know each martyr, but they each (or most) feel a sense of elevation and pride. They believe they are getting closer to the communal goal by each act.

The individuals' relationships to the community are differently accentuated in the two cases. On the surface both sacrifices seem only individual abnegations, giving up something that is dear to her/him: life or valuable handmade objects. However the suicide bomber acts almost alone. A few handlers might know the plan, but the whole organization behind the act remains disconnected. They consciously organize the social links around the attacker keeping the number of people who know the details to a minimum. "In every attack each person involved knows only his immediate superior and has no information about his coconspirators." (Victor 210) The community, nation gets involved only retroactively, after the event, when they celebrate (or in the case of the family secretly mourn) her. The Haida sponsor on the other hand involves an ever widening range of people from the very beginning. The planning is happening openly, his family and kin helps preparing the gifts. The individual

still plays a central role, but he is not the only one doing the sacrifice. During the feast, the ceremony itself everybody is invited and has an active role, as opposed to the Palestinians' passive role of observing after the sacrificed have been made.

Another difference is the timing of the appearance of violence and blood. For the Palestinians the fight is now and daily. They live in a state of physical and mental victimhood, from which one type of escape is this desperate act of violence. The more people a suicide bomber kills the more successful s/he is considered. More than ten is viewed as a triumphant occasion. During the Haida potlatch on the other hand there is no violence displayed at all. W. R. Smith argues "a religious banquet implies a victim." (Smith 280) If we accept this theory the contemporary peaceful potlatch might have evolved from an originally feast, what members participated in "by joint participation in the living flesh and blood of a sacred victim." (Smith 345) Based on my limited knowledge of the potlatch I see it feasible, but not plausible. Nevertheless the difference between the role of violence in the two types of sacrifices is obvious for any observant.

The sacrificers' relationship to the deity is also distinctly different in the two settings. The multitude of organizations encouraging female suicide attacks came from different directions but converged to using similar rhetoric. Some of them are religious organizations who used clerical authority and Qur'an based explanations about the necessity and morality of suicide attacks. They emphasize the heavenly rewards for these killings. The mother of a female suicide bomber believed that her daughter "knew that her destiny was to become the bride of Allah in Paradise." (Victor 100) What higher aspiration can any woman have? Sheik Yassin "enumerated the rewards in Paradise that these female martyrs would receive. (Victor 110) He and others justified their propaganda by taking quotes from the Qur'an that supported

their idea that killing of the enemy is right. And if such quotes didn't exist, for example the precise enumeration of the pleasures and gifts awaiting women in heaven, they invented it. Nevertheless they used religious language to persuade the bombers. Other organizations started out as secular freedom fighters, but later recognized the power of religion in a dominantly Muslim society. Thus they also enhanced their message with religious lingo. Therefore the potential suicide bombers, as most Palestinian, being bombarded with communication praising the attacks in a religiously cloaked text, believes that she primarily acts for G-d when she "blows herself up." This message is reinforced in the, almost always scripted,--"the text has been written for him in advance" (Victor 143)--videos they leave behind, in which they praise G-d. The mixing of the nationalistic goals and religious overtones is the clearest when they pronounce that they wish to die for Allah and for the country. "I want to give back to my country everything I can, in gratitude to G-d," (Victor 189) says the friend of a recent martyr. They believe that the former's will coincides with the perceived interest for the other. I believe that the heavenly promise makes their primary motivation for the act more religious than political. Individual circumstances vary though and the reasons may include psychological, socio-economical reasons, not to mention women's limited choice in a patriarchal society, but Victor's description makes it clear that G-d came first and state second for the 4 women's rationale.

On the other hand deities are rarely mentioned in the Haida community's potlatch, and the book about it. It is all about building the community, making the ties stronger, creating means and interests to preserve the culture. There is no dispute with the state; they don't want legal independence. In this regard they cannot be compared to the Palestinians. But they do want autonomy and potentially support to ensure the existence of the community, tribe as a

whole. In this process they utilize the traditions connecting them to ancestral spirits. Deities, spirits appear only in this context of the analysis. If we look at the acts and words of the celebration deities, explanation of ancient names show up more often, but it is understood, that one needs to focus on the needs of the living community. This is enabled by the ancestors, but the center of attention is the here and now.

I believe I showed that both cultures rely on festivities that create new beginnings, orient the community members in time. But by community the Haida means a more personal intimate one and the Palestinians a wider, national one. The former sacrifices in a peaceful manner for the community's sake first, while the latter in a violent way in G-d's name.

Sover only by violent means

Minimize social links

Kill more than ten

Works Cited and Consulted

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Steltzter, U. A Haida Potlatch. Douglas & McIntyre, 1984.

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Her analysis focused on the question of whether women in that particular society are empowered or exploited when committing these attacks and whether their motivations are primarily political or religious (or psychological or socio-economical.) In both of these questions there are supporting arguments for both sides. Therefore I believe that the answer, as usual for most either/or type for questions is both. One may argue that they have more or less choices in their respective personal situations, or to what extent they have been influenced by political and religious leaders and Nevertheless, no matter of the circumstances and motivations the fact remains that these women decide to go out and kill others and themselves.

Just like He is an individual who is supported by the community