

Article

Framing the Intentions of Suicide Bombers

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Abstract: Despite the extensive information known about suicide bombings, widely-varying intentions have been used by many scholars to explain the religious motivations for the violence: these events are framed by participants as religious experiences, raising complex questions about the relationship between religious experience and violence. Recent studies use the vocabulary of religious studies—sacrifice, martyr, witness—to locate “cultures of violence” in a specific psychic structure, in a specific religion, or in religion in general; this paper compares three major studies that are representative of contemporary debate about religious experience. Ivan Strenski’s approach offers the broadest view, grounding suicide bombings in specific Islamic shaping of religious experience by a (non-normative) view of self-sacrifice emboldened by notions of jihad. Gideon Aran reconstructs a much narrower frame, a mutual attachment by bombers and their enemies around motivations from the redemptive capacity of blood (spilling and collecting). Ruth Stein psychoanalyzes the mind of a specific suicide bomber, Mohammed Atta, locating a complex web of love and hate as a motivation. These studies, each in a different way, demonstrate just how elusive the intentions of bombers remain and the sheer range of frameworks that might illuminate the aims of individuals who engage in suicide bombings.

Keywords: suicide; sacrifice; martyrdom; Islam; psychoanalysis; religious experience



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1. Introduction

Mohammed Atta’s letter, found in his suitcase after the 9/11 attack, begins his to-do list with “Making an oath to die” (Stein 2009, p. 143); this statement, part of a much longer set of preparations, raises questions about intentionality, religious experience and violence. The statement seems distinct and clear, as do many of the facts about the suicide, but the vow has been swept up in major scholarly debates about violence. Since the attack, the vocabulary of religious studies—sacrifice, martyr, witness—has been used by many scholars as the source of violent motivations; this paper examines three important studies which, while all full of deep insights, demonstrate how elusive the relationship is between intention, religious discourse, and suicide.

From a phenomenological viewpoint, the question is how intention is located and described. Perhaps the core of the religious experience is inherently violent or, instead, specific theological doctrines constitute a “culture of violence”.¹ Or perhaps an individual struggle with internal psychic forces can lead to violent actions, as argued by psychoanalytic theory.² Here, an intersection between psychoanalytic thinking and phenomenology has the potential to clarify intentions that result in religious violence.³ Is violence located in a specific psychic structure instead of being an expression of some form of spirituality that valorizes violence?

Three important studies of suicide bombers, one focused on an entire religion, one more specifically focused on Palestinian bombers and one on a particular individual, present a range of frameworks for thinking about these issues. Each of these studies is a fruitful approach, and together, the three studies exemplify many of the current important theories regarding cultures of violence. Ivan Strenski argues that violence is located in a specific Islamic framework of self-sacrifice and jihad (Strenski 2003). This study is one of

the best articulations of prevalent theorizing that connects suicide bombers, specifically to Islamic theology. Religious experiences are more likely to explode into violence because of specific theological doctrines, even, as Strenski argues, if they are not “normative” Islam. In a second study, Gideon Aran does a particularly good job of critiquing many popular claims about Palestinian suicide bombers. He emphasizes instead a symbiotic attachment to the atoning power of blood shared by both Palestinian bombers and the Orthodox Jewish Israelis who gather the shattered bodies (Aran 2018). The meaning of blood determines human intention for both Muslims and Jews, even if this framework is embraced by a limited circle. In the third study, Ruth Stein argued it was possible, even necessary, to reconstruct the psychological stance of bombers in order to understand their intentions (Stein 2009). Her framework overlaps in part with Strenski’s but raises important issues of specific modes of self-recognition amid psychic conflicts. The enigma of weaponized suicide is made sense of through investigation of psychic forces, including, most dramatically, love.

These three studies advance the discussion and deserve close attention; these scholars all employ models of sacrifice and martyrdom; these models are not just theological doctrines but are strategies used for ascribing human intentionality and, to anticipate where this paper is headed, may overshoot the capacity of religious models to serve as explanatory devices for extra-ordinary events. All of the frameworks can potentially articulate motivations for religious action, but the frameworks over-determine the intentions of specific individuals; they need to be scrutinized for the assumptions that undergird so much contemporary debate about religion (often Islam) and violence, here particularized to suicide bombers.

2. Suicide Bombers, Altruistic Suicide and Islamic Sacrifice

Ivan Strenski posits a specific Islamic theology as the motivation for suicide bombing even as he critiques other similar claims (Strenski 2003). He supplements Raphael Israeli’s jihad-based explanations of suicide bombers: “There is more to ‘human bombers’ than *jihad*, and certainly more than suicide. There is sacrifice . . . A great part of that ‘Islamic frame of reference’ for the ‘human bombings’ is sacrifice” (Strenski 2003, p. 4); this strategy links religious violence with a minority strand of Islam which he labels “non-normative” to avoid a blanket condemnation of Islam as a violent religion.

For his framework, Strenski begins with Durkheim’s notion of altruistic suicide: a death marked by cultural approval and understood to benefit the social order.⁴ This capacious model includes everything from a widow killing herself after her husband’s death to an elder killing himself when he becomes seriously ill. Employing the label is dependent on careful analysis of social roles. Altruism is shaped by local ideas of the social good. The “social good” dimension of these deaths depends on the norms of a particular group. Suicide bombers fit into this general category because their actions are understood to benefit their society.⁵

For Strenski, sacrifice is the model through which suicide bombers intentionally enact their social roles. A culture of violence can be located in Islamic sacrifice since the bombers see themselves as sacrifices offered to Allah, fulfilling a specific transparent role deeply entrenched in and articulated by Islamic theology. The theology of sacrifice is intertwined with militant jihadism that results in both self-sacrifice and the killing of civilians.

With this interpretation, Strenski moves away from Durkheim’s point. While altruistic suicide is a social role, sacrifice is, in contrast, a specific religious ritual.⁶ Sacrifice is a multivalent ritual offering an array of meanings. Sacrifice as a ritual can signify a gift to the deity (Strenski 2003, p. 21), but it does not have to, as the dense history of scholarship on sacrifice illustrates. Sacrifice rituals do not have any necessary meaning since they include in their very structure a substitution: the item sacrificed *always stands for something else*, as brilliantly pointed out by Hubert and Mauss (Hubert and Mauss 1964). Interpreting the meaning of the transformational capacity of sacrifice (to bestow a gift, atone for a sin)

depends on understanding the “standing for” relationship and seeing how it is interpreted in a specific setting (Valeri 1985).⁷

By shifting the frame from altruistic suicide to sacrifice, Strenski has made a major interpretive move. Altruistic suicide does not include a specific moralizing valence, but sacrifice does. Sacrifice can be used metaphorically, as in sacrificing by funding a child’s college education rather than taking a vacation. Not everyone would agree that this is a “sacrifice”. Strenski notes the higher social value given to sacrifice but still attempts to use it as a neutral Durkheimian frame for suicide bombers.

With the shift to sacrifice, we immediately become caught up in theological controversies. Strenski describes Islamic suicide bombing as convoluted since it contradicts the Koranic emphasis on life (Strenski 2003, p. 15). However, within the interpretive framework of martyrdom, dying is an act done for life. In Durkheim’s terms, altruistic suicide is *never* convoluted because it is seen as done for the social good. Whether Strenski’s description is accurate will be entirely in the eye of the beholder because it is a post-hoc evaluation that can be applied to deaths but may not be the motivation.

Suicide bombers may or may not engage in these specific modes of moralizing. Many do not use sacrificial terminology. Nor is this necessarily their subjective experience, a point we will return to below with consideration of psychic motivations. The model of a self-sacrificing martyr is not unique to Islam, which further muddles the issue. Christians had the same “active conception of warrior martyr” (Strenski 2003, p. 11), as do Jews; these religions do not have “jihad” but do not need it to explain either suicide martyrdom or homicide. Given a combination of opportunity and/or necessity, Christians and Jews will kill people and retroactively justify the killing as divinely sanctioned. In addition, self-immolation in Sri Lanka is carried out by Buddhist monks, putting a quick end to simple theories of violent versus non-violent religions.⁸

Overall, Islamic ideas about sacrifice, with or without jihad, are not a sufficient explanation for locating the intentions of suicide bombers, or how they channel spiritual experiences into the specific suicide missions they undertake. Many Muslims do not engage in suicide bombing, and many individuals from other religions do. While Strenski begins with Durkheim, and while he outlines several historical examples of suicides, he does not address the social context in which these suicide bombings take place.⁹ The existence of sacrifice and martyrdom traditions in a religion does not narrow religious motivations for action to these alone. Altruistic suicides, as a category, attempt to avoid deciding which deaths warrant greater morality by broadly pointing out that something that looks violent must be admitted to have a social value, but it does not limit the intentions behind suicide to a few broad patterns.

3. The Cult of Blood and the Role of the Victim

A fascinating example of how an interpretation of a death as a martyrdom claim is a strategy for making sense of events and not an explanation of intentions is outlined by Gideon Aran in his study of suicide bombers (Aran 2018). Aran emphasizes the unique character of Palestinian suicide bombers who willingly chose an inevitable death intimately intertwined with the death of the victims (Aran 2018, pp. 6, 7); this assured death offers heightened symbolic meaning (Aran 2018, p. 9) and separates these bombers from others on similar missions who may or may not die in the process.¹⁰

Given the level of interest in and study of Palestinian suicide bombers, a more extensive but still extremely limited set of data about the backgrounds and psychological testing of bombers has been compiled. Aran uses this slim data to negate popular but misguided generalizations about suicide bombers. They are neither psychotics nor fanatics (Aran 2018, p. 59). The bombers tend, with exceptions, to be unmarried, middle class, from towns or small cities. Bombers are not major activists in familiar Palestinian organizations; long-term activism in these organizations may be evidence of a different kind of investment and self-perception; they have a tendency towards “dependent avoidant” personalities, which means that they highly value fitting in and are insecure socially. Overall, as in the case

of suicide in general, prediction about specific individuals is weak, and profiles fit many individuals who do not become suicide bombers. Any match between specific psychic forces and their expression in religious violence is not strong.

Aran illuminates how some Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Israelis participate with some of the suicide bombers and their handlers in a specific interpretation of death as an atoning martyrdom. For these Jews, to kill oneself for one's belief, even Muslim belief, can be interpreted as sanctification—and even if the bombers themselves did not make that argument; this interpretation negates and re-purposes a bombing event away from any political intentions the bombers or their handlers may proclaim. It is worthwhile to emphasize that the similar interpretations of deaths happen only among *some* Palestinians and *some* Israelis. The Ultra-Orthodox who appear on the scene of death to collect all the body fragments, including those of the bomber's, agree with some of the Palestinians because they share a common interpretive framework of blood, atonement and redemption. The suicide bombers are esteemed by these Jews for their willingness to fully devote themselves via their deaths. For some Muslims, the bomber is redeemed by his death, again even if that is not the view of the bomber. The deaths of Israelis killed in the bombing serve to atone for their sins, which in their case stem from their secular lifestyles (Aran 2018, p. 198).¹¹ Their deaths turn them into valued martyrs no matter what lives they led.¹² Not surprisingly, some Palestinians and Israelis will agree over and against others of their contemporaries, as flexible models of martyrdom move across borders between Jews, Christians and Muslims. Other co-religionists will find the idea appalling, just as was true of the widely varying attitudes towards martyrdom found among ancient Christians.¹³ For these Jews and Muslims, any such framework would be rejected as a cult of death on all sides. Again, the very specific historical setting is central. Martyrdom as a framework might be more popular than expected in Israel due to the domination of a religious minority as official interpreters of religion and a secular wish for every death to have some kind of meaning.

Every death on either side of a conflict can be seen as martyrdom, but this vantage works as a post-facto interpretation and not as a personal motivation or intention. Martyrdom as a religious model offers a very broad potential application. Every person who is killed by the Israelis, for example, can be called a witness/martyr; this interpretation has nothing to do with how the individuals died or how they understood the role of religious experience in their lives.

Aran's point is that Palestinians and Israelis share interpretive models and that these commonly-held models confuse boundaries that these individuals would otherwise strictly enforce. What draws the people together is the framework, which can be more important than the event itself in terms of its impact on both retro-determining the meaning of an event and leading to reactions to the event as well. While he cites Strenski, Aran focuses on a much broader set of possible intentions and rewards for the bomber; these may overlap with ideas related to sacrifice, but they complicate sacrificial models since individual rewards might include promise of an afterlife, financial gain and a heroic reputation (Aran 2018).¹⁴ This rich mix of many factors is hard to prioritize; none of the factors may be determinative in a particular case.

The symbiotic framework between some Jews and some Palestinians is the most convincing part of his study: "Together, the Palestinians and the Israelis create the image of the suicide terrorist as dedicated and potent" (Aran 2018, p. 36). The physical threat of the bombers is secondary to the psychological fears they engender, a point shared by Aran and Asad.¹⁵ For those Israelis who do not share the Ultra-Orthodox framework of seeing the deaths of their fellows Israelis as redemption from their sins, both suicide and homicide can seem to be an attack on the moral order (Aran 2018, p. 282). As an attack on the moral order, the bombings can be compared to other attacks on the moral order, including those from police and armies.

Strenski's jihad-plus-sacrifice and Aran's atonement model do not discuss the question of what kind of sacrifice martyrdom is. Hebrew Scriptures do not recognize self-

sacrificing rituals, which first appear in *Second Maccabees* with the emergence of early Judaism (van Henten 1997). Martyrdom is not an inherent part of all sacrificial systems, especially in those systems where human blood would pollute the altar. What is special about martyrdom is that the sacrificer and the victim are the same, creating a new representational system whereby the one offering themselves is promised a personal post-death existence with the deity. Unlike other forms of sacrifice, martyrdom is never a tool of the powerful: its dimension of protest may supplement or even replace other possible meanings such as gift or reward-seeking, even if those are part of the broader conceptions of sacrifice. In addition, attitudes towards martyrdom are ambivalent; too much of a desire to kill oneself is frowned upon by religious institutions and may raise suspicion; this ambivalent stance may be because the act can be disruptive socially and may accrue too much power to the one willing to die or there may be reasons for suspecting the individuals (their social status, for example). Martyrs, who may have one view of their actions, face a world in which opinions about martyrdom wax and wane. At some historical points, in very specific settings, the acts of martyrs, including those who kill other people, may have a magical quality.¹⁶ Their deaths can be a rallying point for the larger society, accruing prestige and encouraging copy-cat behaviors. At other times martyrs and their champions may be frustrated that their actions are not viewed more positively. Suicide bombers might be shocked if they knew that post-death, their actions were evaluated as failures, not achieving any concrete results or even leading to a political setback. Why these evaluations shift around is not clear. Novelty can have a certain amount of brute power that can wear off. Sometimes activists can misread their cultural context. A backlash may be so strong it invalidates the events as rallying points. The group targeted by the bombers may be more or less successful in response.

Aran cites Atta's letter, in this case as evidence of the ritualized nature of Atta's preparation for his mission (Aran 2018, pp. 188–89). Taking an oath to die can be viewed as the height of personal religious experience or as the most rote action possible. One model speaks to intention, one rejects it entirely.

4. Applied Psychoanalytic Approaches to Suicide Bombers

Ruth Stein's ambitious study, built around lead hijacker Mohammed Atta's letter, takes a psychoanalytic approach to suicide bombers (Stein 2009).¹⁷ Stein is well aware of the thorny problems she faces in doing applied psychoanalysis based on psychobiography. Freud and Erikson wrote compelling psychobiographies (Stein 2009, p. x), but since these major works, psychobiography has fallen on hard times. Her approach is stated succinctly: "Informed, intuitive-imaginative synthesizing of various and contradictory sites of knowledge, supported by psychoanalytic theory, enables us to project ourselves into the minds that dwell behind the written, televised, or otherwise mediated expression" (Stein 2009, p. 4). Here an interesting dialogue between phenomenology and psychoanalysis enters, two "styles of thinking" about the subjective and intersubjective.¹⁸

Human culture is not entirely separate from psychic structure (Stein 2009, p. 17). Drawing a connection between culture and psyche has been used in interesting and successful ways recently, particularly in the areas of the experiences of mourning and trauma.¹⁹ Applied psychoanalysis of the Star Wars movies is facilitated by the explicit depiction of Oedipal rivalry; as a fantasy story it offers more explicit and less repressed imagery than the idiosyncratic offerings of a specific individual (Paul 1987).²⁰ Few personal dreams would be that clear.

Stein presents her work as applied psychoanalysis. She is, however, not applying psychoanalysis to a shared cultural product such as a myth but instead is focusing on a specific mind; it is as if she were carrying out the analysis of an individual based on very limited evidence, a single text found after his death. She lacks the deep knowledge she has about her patients.

It should also be noted that Stein does not draw upon Freud's theories of sacrifice as an unconscious model for Atta. Presumably she finds no help in Freud's very distinct model,

where the sacrificial system both memorializes and atones for the murder of the Father (Freud 1953). Stein's analytic theory does center on a similar notion of ambivalence, that is, the paradox that individuals kill out of love, and not just hate. Hate may be transformed into love to help the individual sidestep worries about their destructive capacities. The identificatory love Atta had for the deity was idealizing to the extreme. The all-powerful father served as an idealized internal object that offered an opportunity of merger.²¹ Stein presumes that Atta, and to some extent the other bombers, attempted to repair a basic self-loathing through killing themselves (Stein 2009, p. 70). Their action represents a return to the pre-Oedipal father and a banishment of the mother (Stein 2009, pp. 40, 41). God offers them a phallus, and their belief in that phallus, their merger with it, leads to a manic triumph; this triumph is enacted via their death and the deaths of their victims.

Every aspect of this argument, from the attempt to diagnose a person from afar to the motivations for suicide, is subject to debate. The act of suicide can be a homoerotic merger with the Father or a regressive merger with the pre-Oedipal Mother. The specific case would depend on details, many more details than Stein had access to. To make up for this problem, she bolsters her theory with clinical examples of men who did not separate from their fathers. Instead of competing with their father, these men surrendered. Stein's patients, however, did not commit suicide or become terrorists. Her rich portrait is a possible interpretation of why someone might become a suicide bomber, but it does not explain Atta's actions, much less the other 9/11 bombers'.

Stein's book is only in small part a psychobiography, including few details of Mohammed Atta's life. The "mind" she is trying to study shifts from Atta's to that of "Islam" and even to "religion". Here we see again the problem for scholars of sifting personal forces and experience from their cultural expressions. As with so much research on suicide bombers, the study presents an oversimplified, even stereotyped, picture of Islam. She relies on questionable presentations of Islam from scholars such as Mark Anspach, who argues that some religions including Islam operate at the "tribal" level (Anspach 1991). The religion is "pre-modern" and thus unable to achieve the modern secular distinction between religion and politics.²²

Stein's implicit argument is that Islamic theology offers the same psychic construct as Atta's, that is, his inability to separate from his father is channeled into Islamic ritual action (martyrdom), which leads to, in her words, "evil". Stein writes, "Islam gave the faithful the promise of immortality in exchange for total submission to God" (Stein 2009, p. 55). If his psychic forces had been in better balance, or if he belonged to a different religion, the end result would presumably have been a rejection of violence. This argument proves too much. Similar claims appear in Jewish and Christian texts written centuries before Mohammed. Other suicide bombers with different psychical structures and belonging to different religions, as well as the widespread use of violence by secular individuals, belie this particular way of aligning psychic experience and cultural expression.

Stein also analyses the "mind" of religion itself. The final possibility, that religion itself may be the culprit, is sober news about what might seem to be the best forms of religion available. The suicide bombers challenge the "cherished belief that monotheism is the most evolved form of religion" (Stein 2009, p. 49). Stein toggles back and forth between the idea that religion is supposed to be a force for good and the worry that "[r]eligion can become perverted" (Stein 2009, p. 72). Alternately her study can be read as evidence that religious institutions may have a weak hand to play against the psychic forces that Stein has outlined. The transcendental spirituality that is certainly part of Islamic religious expression, including Atta's, was, in her own argument, not strong enough to thwart actions he undertook out of love. Stein felt a "shame of helplessness" in the face of 9/11, a stance that powerfully demonstrates the mental impact of suicide bombings far beyond their physical threat.

5. Conclusions

Each of these studies is helpful in part because they are each “state-of-the-art” studies. Strenski’s analysis of Islamic theology critiques many other studies which are less careful in their analysis of Islamic theology, making simple equations between Islam and violence. Aran makes short shrift of widely-held but incorrect assumptions about suicide bombers and articulates a fascinating window on the events shared by some Jews and Muslims. Stein’s study is the work of a master clinician and is valuable for, among other points, connecting violence to love and a wish to merge with an idealized father image.

Despite these strengths, we see the limits of even these careful studies. Islamic theology may imagine a sacrifice rewarded by immortality as an organizing principle for human death wishes but that is far from accounting for Atta’s intention. Suicide bombing may be said to atone for sins, but this may be the meaning given by observers, not the architects; it is the observers who are locked in a struggle as they appropriate the deaths, as the bombers’ handlers do, about who is the real victim. Even a master clinician can only offer what seems highly speculative in the face of the limited evidence Atta’s letter represents.

Interpretive models abound, going back as far as the story of Samson bringing the house down to kill himself and the Philistines (*Judges* 16, 23–31) but suicide bombings are dramatic and out-of-the-ordinary events. The decision to undertake a suicide bombing mission might have been the result of coercion, persuasion, confusion or exhaustion, of spiritual love for God or hatred for specific humans. Avishai Margalit describes a Palestinian suicide bombing as a “spectacular revenge” for family members or friends killed by the Israeli Army, an event far beyond the usual limitations of an individual to attract attention to a cause (Margalit 2003).²³

Suicide bombing is not part of any regular religious practice and as such, remains in part anomalous and enigmatic. Freud emphasized the mysteries of human motivations and the lengthy struggle to gain any insight into them. “There is in Freud’s account no simple way in which a death decided by the individual for himself can be explained” (Asad 2007, p. 52). Durkheim insists that culture plays a role in what seems to be an individual decision, but for good reason, did not substitute the term “sacrifice” for altruistic suicide. Shared interpretive meanings may extend between presumed enemies, while acts of people who share religious traditions seem beyond comprehension to each other. Central to the dilemma is that suicide and homicide can have unforeseen consequences because of the fear, awe, disgust and general contagion these events engender. All this tells us little about the complex and perhaps, as Stein notes, even contradictory intentions of the participants.

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Notes

- 1 Violence is connected with monotheism in Regina Schwartz’ influential studies (Schwartz 1997).
- 2 For a discussion of the theoretical interactions between psychoanalysis and phenomenology, see (Csordas 2012).
- 3 See for example Stolorow’s psychoanalytic/phenomenological notion of “emotional dwelling” (Stolorow 2013). See also (Stolorow et al. 2002).
- 4 Durkheim distinguishes between altruistic suicide and other types of suicide such as Egoistic. For altruistic, see (Durkheim 1951, pp. 217–40).
- 5 Asad, who otherwise parts ways with Strenski, agrees on this point (Asad 2007, p. 77).
- 6 From the vast scholarship on sacrifice, Hubert and Mauss’ study is foundational (Hubert and Mauss 1964).
- 7 On the specific point of sacrifice, Hubert and Mauss are much more helpful than Durkheim, whose notion of sacrifice combined gift and communion in an unlikely interpretation of Australian Aboriginal religion (Durkheim 1915).
- 8 For an interesting consideration of this topic that intersects with issues raised in this article see (Abeysekara 2001).

- 9 This context could be, as argued by [Asad \(2007\)](#), a political conflict, or a personal issue, as discussed below.
- 10 To what extent the means (detonation) and the mingling of the bombers with their victims before detonation is historically contingent, that is, due to the specific circumstances of how the Palestinians live, and to what extent it is based on a conscious choice or set of goals constructed by the Palestinians is not clear.
- 11 The large majority of suicide bombings in Israel have taken place in areas frequented by secular Israelis.
- 12 See the discussion of the re-evaluation of Ze'ev McMahon, an American emigrant to the Israeli-occupied Territories with an extensive history of violence, after he was killed by a Palestinian in ([Shipler 1986](#), p. 155).
- 13 For a discussion of the varied attitudes towards martyrdom in early Christianity see ([Moss 2013](#)).
- 14 As of Summer 2022, a Palestinian compensation program for widows and orphans of suicide bombers—known to opponents as “Pay for Slay”—is a major sticking point in upgrading the relationship between the Palestinian Authority and the United States Government.
- 15 For Asad’s detailed analysis see reaction of fear see ([Asad 2007](#)).
- 16 “This use of a new metaphor gives a group a sense of power and optimism, as if one overcomes the problems of the world by a new understanding” ([Aran 2018](#), p. 272).
- 17 Stein is known primarily for her clinical and theoretical writings such as ([Stein 1998](#)) and ([Stein 2005](#)): this is her only major study that involved applied psychoanalysis. Stein’s work is lauded by psychoanalysts as seen in the book jacket blurbs from Jessica Benjamin and Peter Fonagy.
- 18 For “styles of thinking,” see ([Merleau-Ponty 1962](#), p. viii).
- 19 See, for example, ([Oliver 2004](#)).
- 20 Paul’s point is that taboos can be lessened when a tale is presented as belonging generally to the culture and not to a specific person.
- 21 For suicide as merger see ([Jones 1996](#)), also ([Asch 1980](#)).
- 22 For perspective on the many distortions of the Islamic religion still popular, see ([Shryock 2010](#)).
- 23 Some, Margalit argues, will frame suicide bombings “more as a sign of the desperation of the Palestinians than as acts of terror” ([Margalit 2003](#)).

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