

Does Bad Childrearing Produce Terrorists?
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There is a long tradition on blaming mothers for creating criminal children. We hear about neglect, abuse, and ignorance\227and, of course, bearing children out of wedlock. However, childrearing since the 20th century has improved markedly in the Western world and continues to occupy an important place in the minds of most parents.

But another sort of childrearing is under the microscope today: the traditional childrearing practices in the Muslim World, which psychologists are exploring. Of immediate interest is a new book written by one of Osama bin Laden\222s sons and his mother, Omar and Najwa Bin Laden: Growing Up Bin Laden. Osama Bin Laden marries as often as he pleases and spawns children\227so far 20.

Bin Laden\222s own father, a simple mason who created a construction empire worth billions, seems to have at least provided comfort and educations for his 50 children, from which Osama benefited. However, the internal dynamics of such family life produces lonely, disaffected children and bitter wives. Such families are invariably a pyramid of tyranny with the father the dictator at the apex, followed by eldest son, then other sons, and last daughters, and below them, disposable wives and concubines. Power is not shared.

Omar bin Laden describes life with this extraordinarily wealthy father as a nightmare of deprivation and fanatical religiosity. Osama, during his university experience in Saudi Arabia, had been seduced by the most militant, extreme version of Islam, which has guided his life ever since. He used his wealth to make war against the \223infidels \224

in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and the West (9/11 was financed and organized by him). However, he refused to use his wealth for the benefit of his family. They grew up in Arabia, Sudan, and Afghanistan in the most miserable of conditions, \223without laughter or toys, were routinely beaten, and lost their pets to painful death from poison gas experiments by their father\222s fighters.\224 We have all seen the animal experiments carried out in the training camps. Now we know where the animals came from.

As the young boys came of age, Osama told them to volunteer for suicide missions. \223Omar then knew that his father hated his enemies more than he loved his sons.\224 Israeli President Golda Meir once noted the same thing: \223There will be peace between the Palestinians and Israelis when they love their children more than they hate us.\224 It has not happened yet.

Consider also the young Nigerian who almost blew up a passenger plane over Detroit on Christmas Day. He too comes from a wealthy family in which he was the 16th, and youngest. His wealthy banker father, with two wives and all of those children, provided them with educations, but it seems there was not enough love or direction for this young man. That the boy was willing to commit murder/suicide says much about his nature and childhood and the militant religion that seduced him into its death cult.

Lest these observations seem to be just specific to two families, I would refer you to the Journal of Psychohistory, Volume 29, No. 4 Spring 2002, with three articles that explored the reasons behind suicide bombing. Analyzing child-rearing practices throughout history is something that is not much approached by traditional historians. Superfreakonomics also notes that pregnant women fasting during Ramadan damage their fetuses in ways that have dire consequences later. In addition, the preference for cousin marriages and underage brides in the Muslim world creates genetic nightmares as well.

Whatever problems we have with our own child rearing practices, most of us are diligent (including our Middle East immigrants) about wanting to do the best for them. Having one or two children is very different than having 16, 20, or 50, with traditions that distance an autocratic father and with mothers competing and desperate to survive. Rampant child and wife abuse adds an element of danger\227barely suppressed rage in a child---that can be channeled into a militant death cult.

660 words

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