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The Roots of Islam: An Analytic Note¹

What was it about the operation of Desert Storm that gave such offence to the hard-line core of Islam? What was the transference that triggered the formation of Al-Qaida, the emergence of Osama Bin Laden as a champion of the faith, precipitated the destruction of the World Trade Towers, ushered in the ongoing "War on Terror", the invasion of Afghanistan, the end of the Taliban, the attack on Iraq, the toppling of Saddam Hussein, the re-emergence of Iraq's Shia majority, the escalation of suicide bombing and the increase of terrorist activity across the world?

To start with there was the desecration of the Holy Land of Islam. Infidel bases in Saudi Arabia. Infidel tanks churning up sacred desert. Women working and fighting alongside men and polluting sacred space. Decadent western culture seeping as a toxic influence into the very heart of holiness. Already the Saudi leaders were seen as apostate leading to the call to the faithful to remove them, to purify the state and re-impose the rule of Sharia. Effectively the battle-lines between good and evil had been drawn in the sand.

To understand that process we must look more closely at the very heart of Islam.

The pilgrimage of the Hajj culminates in the seven-fold circling of the Kaaba in the focal point of the great open-air mosque of Mecca and considered by Muslims everywhere to be the most sacred spot on earth.

The process is a classic example of a primal defence reinforcement ritual. The ancient Black Stone, set in the Eastern corner of the cubic shrine, is kissed and touched by every pilgrim in order to remove his sin. Legend has it that the stone was once white but has been turned black by absorbing the evil projected into it. The pollution-absorbing sink at the heart of the sacred space maintains the idealisation process. Holiness or absolute goodness is sustained in the annulus between the Stone and the outer boundary of the faithful, beyond which lies the domain of evil, the devil, the great satan. The regressed uterine space of the great mosque becomes the container of the pollution-exchange process, the placenta of Islam, the Omphallos of the Moslem world.

The magic stone itself is reputed to have been given by God to Adam to cleanse him from sin. (There are clear parallels to the sin-absorbing role of the Christ figure in Christian mythology and in the ritual of the mass). If the object is in fact a meteorite then it was indeed delivered from the heavens. Certainly the stone with its shrine was a centre of cultic worship from time immemorial, associated with fertility rites, the three goddesses (three pillars of stone still support the roof) and the

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awe of the feminine. The intense gender splitting in Islam hides the female elements beneath a black cloth.

The developed construct of Islam carries within it the prohibition of radical critique on pain of death. It is therefore not only a very powerful system of collusion-defence, but also a second-order system of defence preservation. If I were myself a Muslim, the last few comments alone would render me vulnerable to the Fatwah. The analysis of the personal psychodynamics of Muhammad that follows breaks the most profound taboo of all.

In the dynamics of complex systems, initial conditions are critical to the formation of presenting topology, so it is to the origins of Islam in the personal psychodynamics of Muhammad and his contemporary social context that we must turn our attention if we are to understand the forces driving the current psychodrama.

Muhammad's family belonged to the clan of Hashim, part of the tribe of Quraysh which dominated Mecca and made up most of its population. Hashim was not one of its more important clans but had some religious prestige derived from its hereditary right to certain offices attached to the Kaaba. The best records we have indicate that Muhammad was born in 570 CE, the "year of the elephant". The reference is understood to be to the year in which an Abyssinian ruler of Yemen sent an expedition to destroy the Kaaba. The expedition, which was a disastrous failure, is said in Muslim tradition to have included an elephant.

Abdallah, the father of Muhammad, died before his son was born. It is possible that he was killed as a martyr defending the Kaaba from the Abyssinian attack. Muhammad's mother, Amina, died while he was still a young child. Certainly the young orphan had been subject to a profound in-utero bereavement trauma laying down primitive defences well before his birth. Early mother-loss would have re-activated the imprint and reinforced the defences.

Brought up by the extended family, he showed early brilliance as a commercial administrator and found employment with a wealthy merchant widow. By the time he was twenty-five she had offered herself to him in marriage, and he replaced the dead husband in the life of the bereaved woman.

It was fifteen years later, at the age of forty, that Muhammad had his first "mystical" or prophetic, experience that was to be the conception point of the new religion. One of the most widespread traditions is that it occurred while he was in a state of solitary withdrawal in a cave on Mount Hira, outside Mecca. Here he "had a vision of the angel Gabriel and an experience of great pain and pressure, so that he thought he was going to die". Commanded to recite words, he felt incapable and ignorant. Eventually he was given the words which constitute the start of Chapter 96 of the Koran;

*Recite in the name of your Lord who created,
Created man from blood congealed.
Recite! Your Lord is the most beneficent
Who taught by the pen,
Taught men that which they did not know.*

The episode is a perfect example of mid-life presentation of fixated pre-natal trauma. The context is the womb-like mountain cave associated with a site of cultic

goddess-worship. The state is one of solitary withdrawal or regression. The experience is of pressure, pain and fear of death. The ground is the intra-uterine experience of a maternal environment convulsed in grief. References to congealed blood may indicate a near miscarriage associated with premature contraction precipitated by the shock bereavement. The classic defence is that of fixation, suspension of time so that the trauma does not complete but stays as a boundary condition, an event horizon of tolerable space and time. Regression is to the pre-trauma state of deep uterine life while the father was still alive, present in the maternal environment, with voice audible to the unborn child. The process of idealisation is absolute. Retreat from the experienced hell of traumatic impingement is to the post-trauma time of pre-trauma space cleansed of all negativities. It is a paradisaical state of re-connection to the un-dead. Subsequent defensive presentation is a mode of psychotic hallucination, re-repression of the emergent trauma, male-female splitting, and the imposition of recitation of the written word as defence against anxiety. The experience was life-transforming and repetitive in order to hold the defensive boundary with psychotic grief and terror which constantly threatened to emerge. Any challenge to the psychotic defence threatened to re-voke the primary trauma and was therefore suppressed with total prohibition.

Like-minded followers quickly gathered around the new holy man finding that the intensity of his process effectively defended them also from intolerable anxiety. The deviant group inevitably became the target of negative transference from the Meccan culture and they were violently expelled. He sent many followers to take refuge in Christian Abyssinia while he tried unsuccessfully to find support in the neighbouring mountain town of Ab Taif. He was eventually persuaded to move with some followers to the predominantly agricultural settlement of Yathrib, (later to be renamed Medina) some 200 miles to the north of Mecca. Here he established the first Muslim community. The cult grew rapidly around its psychotic leader who also proved to be a fanatical and successful war-lord. He led attacks on Meccan trade caravans and won an escalating sequence of battles with Meccan forces. Local tribal groups joined the movement accepting the discipline of Islam as the price for protection. Up to this point the prayers were said facing the holy site of Jerusalem. The Jews in Medina, however, were the only group to hold out against the new construct. The process of transference and counter-transference at the inter-group boundary led to mutual demonisation and the displacement of the focal holy site from Jerusalem to the Kaaba in Mecca. By 630 he was able to take control of Mecca virtually unopposed. The Kaaba, already the focal point of Islam was cleansed of all its pagan statues, relics and practices. Eventually the ancient sacred site of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, now seen from the perspective of the new faith to have been desecrated by the apostasy of the Jewish infidels, was cleansed in 691 CE and crowned with the Dome of the Rock, becoming the third most sacred site of Islam and the provocative sign of abomination both to Judaism and to Christianity. The defence constructs are also reinforced and differentiated by the practice of ritual genital mutilation. Neo-natal circumcision trauma is applied to Jewish males (and incidentally to many American males too). Circumcision of Muslim males takes place in latency. Female circumcision, though slowly declining, is still common in some Islamic cultures, but is not inherent in the faith. The rest, as they say, is history.

The detailed analysis is essential if we are to understand the psychodynamics at the heart of contemporary Islam. The intense, primitive psychotic defences implicit in the personal process of the founder, are explicit in the construct, rituals, behaviour and dynamics of the followers. The defensive pearl has accreted around the grit of pre-natal bereavement trauma.

So the shadow side of the Desert Storm was the desecration of sacred space. The presence of the infidel out-group brings into active focus the psychotic idealisation and projective transference mechanisms at the heart of the construct. It should not therefore be surprising that the system throws up in Osama Bin Laden, a champion whose personal dynamics and capacity to mobilise cult-like followership into violent activity are congruent with the dynamics of Muhammad himself. He is the avenger, the defender, the purifier, the restorer, seeking to re-establish the effectiveness of the core defences of Islam which are perceived to have been violated, compromised and eroded.

He faced a leader who has also undergone a profound religious conversion experience after similarly profligate earlier lifestyle. The dynamics of the Southern Baptists are not far removed from those of Sunni Islam. As a child George Bush was also subject to intense bereavement shock, having lived through the devastating illness and death from leukaemia of his sister Robin followed by the depressive collapse of his mother. As family cheer-leader he learnt to defend against overwhelming grief by splitting and denial. Politically he had come to power after the most evenly split election in American history. The twin candidates were separated judiciously, one was crowned, the other symbolically killed. Heartland conservative conformity was elevated at the expense of liberal boundary and environmental diversity. The President needed an external enemy onto whom to project internal negativity and unify his power-base in the electorate. The two systems were complementary. Bush and Bin Laden were made for each other.