

*C h a p t e r*

**THE MORAL  
INFRASTRUCTURE OF  
CHIEF PERPETRATORS  
OF PALESTINIAN  
SUICIDAL TERRORISM**

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“**W**arrior of the Emperor, you are strictly forbidden to return from battle alive. Your task demands your death. Your body will fall on the field of battle, but your soul will live on. It has chosen for your body to die to achieve victory!” According to the Samurai Bushido code (Steimatsky 1997:86), the preferred form of death is as a hero on the battlefield. At the turn of the nineteenth century the Moro fighters of the Philippines took part in a 13-year war between Spanish colonial forces and the U.S. army. These devout Muslims believed in Jihad and the reward of heaven granted to those willing to kill themselves for the cause.

Similar views can be found among some groups of orthodox Muslims today who believe that the devout person has a task to serve God. It is an obligation that can be achieved through the believer’s death if not in life (see Israeli 1997 on “Islamikaza”; Tantawy on “Fatwa”; and Ajami 2001). This manner of death is considered holy (“*astashad*”) rather than suicidal (“*intahar*”), and it is a product of unwavering faith that leads the individual towards self mortification (Forman 1988). This approach may embody the essence of the chief-perpetrators’ (those who recruit volunteers, equip them and send them to commit terrorist attacks) message to all suicide terrorists (see Merari 1993 on the definition of terrorism).

Some explanations for suicide terrorism focus on the personal characteristics of the perpetrators or on motivations such as finding a legitimate means of clearing their name—“redemption through the gutter” (Shoham 1980). But that’s obviously not the whole story. A recent review of the “Genesis of suicide terrorism” (Atram 2003) confirms what has already been reiterated in the literature: “Contemporary suicide terrorists from the Middle East...have no appreciable psychopathology and are as educated and well-off as surrounding populations” (p.1534).

Terrorists need compelling motives for suicide attacks, but the actual bomber is at the end of a chain that starts with the recruiter. One can only wonder about the moral considerations that allow the recruiter to send somebody to die while killing other people who are neither known nor responsible for any action against him or her. By Western and many other standards, this is a very serious crime (Friedlander 1986; Iviasky 1967; Israeli 1997).

What kind of moral world does the recruiter live in? Do they have moral dilemmas? If so, do these dilemmas differ from regular, everyday people or are they similar to habitual criminals? Based on the assumption that an individual's moral infrastructure is reflected in his or her moral judgment, the present study is aimed at shading some light on chief terrorists' moral judgment.

### **Moral Judgment**

The cognitive-developmental approach (e.g., Piaget 1932; Rest, Turiel, and Kohlberg 1994; Demetriou 1988) has a central role in research on morality and the moral development of individuals. Prominent theorists in this field base their thinking on structuralist, constructivist, and phenomenological assumptions. This approach assumes that moral development takes place in gradual stages until adulthood when he or she can be distinguished by a consistent judgmental level or profile (Addad and Benezech 1987). There are claims that emotional processes and social learning take part in moral development as well (e.g., Schwartz 1997; Pizarro 2000).

The cognitive-developmental approach has long been paradigmatic, mixing theoretical with psychometric thinking. The paradigm is based partly on the phenomenological assumption according to which an individual's morality should

be reflected in his or her verbal reasoning in conditions of moral dilemmas (e.g., Colby and Kohlberg 1987). For example, followers of this approach measure individual morality with the responses given by subjects who are exposed to a number of standardized dilemmas (six are included in Kohlberg's test).

Such testing cannot address circumstantial reasons (see Wolf 2001:25-26). For example, if the news is full of stories about a horrible terrorist attack, people might react differently to a related moral dilemma. Moreover, individuals differ in their sensitivity to such information. Introducing allowances for such incidents would, by definition, make the tests non-reliable. As such, these tests cannot identify the circumstantial backdrop behind variability in moral judgments and functioning. The flag bearers of this criticism are mainly functionalists, who emphasizes circumstantial and situational aspects of morality and moral judgment.

According to Lock (1983) and Nissan (1984), individuals usually make moral choices that are consistent with the moral approach of meaningful people in their lives. They are also influenced by the expectations, perceptions, norms, and values accepted by their society. Individuals might stray from society's moral codes because of overriding personal considerations, and then justify these actions even though they contradict the values they internalized. In other words, morality and moral judgment depend in part on circumstances. It follows that individuals do not strive for moral perfection. Their moral code is more like a dynamic marketplace of values.

Based on his prominent "Functional Theory of Cognition," Anderson (1991, 1996) describes how individual morality is reflected in the psychodynamics of blaming and avoiding blame. Searching for a guilty party and assigning

blame takes place when events do not work out as expected. Blame is a function of information from two sources: *culpa*—responsibility for a harmful or potentially harmful act, and *consequences*—the results of such an act.

According to Wolf's (2001) notion of *modular morality* the blame framework provides a basis for judgments from different perspectives, mainly *perpetrator* and *victim*. The moral judgment and behavior of an individual should change according to the perspective taken at a given moment—perpetrator, victim or bystander. This approach is apparently relevant to acts of terrorism, as demonstrated by Wolf and Wolf (2000, 2002) who exemplified modularity in moral judgment of terror made by potential victims of terrorist acts (citizens of Israel). Unlike the focus of these studies on victims of terror, the present study focuses on perpetrators, specifically on those who recruit people to commit suicide terrorism (chief perpetrators).

Overall, the cognitive-developmental and functionalist approaches share the view that an individual's morality should be reflected in his or her moral judgment. They differ, however, in their assumptions regarding the nature of individual morality. They also differ in the kind of methodology and results they offer. The cognitive developmental approach would argue that criminal morality should typify chief perpetrators. According to the functional approach, such perpetrators' differentiate between morality in a nationalistic context (which leads them to commit acts of terror) and morality in domestic contexts.

These approaches seem to address two different and complementary aspects of human morality. One aspect is relatively consistent while the other is sensitive to situational effects. The present study is exploratory in nature. Using a combined (qualitative and quantitative) design it was deliber-

ated to shed a two-angled light on the moral judgment of chief perpetrators of terrorism. The main goal was to unravel the complication involved in the fact that these terrorists live consecutively and independently in two mutually incompatible worlds. In one world—deadly terrorism—they are responsible for unimaginable cruel and deadly deeds, while compassion and mature responsibility typify their approach to the other world—their own family.

## **Method**

### *Design*

The current study focuses on five Palestinian Arabs who were used to recruit other Arabs to commit acts of suicide terror, and are serving life prison terms in Israeli jails (access to perpetrators who are not in jail was impossible). The small number of recruiters obviously limited the size of the two control groups: Five prisoners serving life sentences for murder, and seven prisoners serving sentences for minor crimes, all Arabs. Each participant took part in two personal meetings with the interviewer (a female criminologist). The meetings were designed first to examine the moral baseline of each participant, then to attempt to soften their approach to victims of suicide terror.

### *Participants*

The five chief perpetrators facilitated acts of suicide terror between the years 1993 and 1996. They are currently serving several life sentences in high security prisons in Israel. They have similar primordial, social, and educational backgrounds. The five murderers and the seven petty criminals (who

committed minor crimes such as robbery and violence, and served several-month prison sentences) are similar to the chief perpetrators in terms of personal, social, and educational background. Two participants from the third group withdrew after the first meeting. The age range of all participants is 21 to 35.

### *Instruments*

Transcripts of the first round of interviews were given to two senior Middle East scholars (both hold academic degrees in Middle Eastern Studies and serve as senior consultants for Israeli security services) for a content analysis. Each interviewer was asked to analyze the personal transcripts independently in order to list and label the major subject categories. The two experts then meet to compare their categories and select a final set for analysis. The following categories were found: *morality, family, father deprivation, life as a refugee, moral dilemmas, inferiority feelings, and criminality*. Then, the frequency with which the content in each category was counted. Based on these frequency distributions, each participant was assigned median values according to the main content areas chosen. In the second round of interviews, quantitative measures were taken using the below listed three scales, each based on a different design.

The relative graphic scale (30 cm) includes 31 ranks. Anchor stimuli (deliberated to promote calibration of the scale; see Anderson 1982:47-48) were as follows: A picture of young children (a reminder of the participant's family) at the lower side of the scale and an icon of sorrowful face at the higher side of the scale. The participant was asked: "Where were you when you made the decision to do what you did?" This question was asked twice, the first referring to the time

the decision was made, and the second referring to the time of the interview.

The independent graphic rating scale (30 cm; 0-10) featured the following end anchors: a rock at one end and a feather at the other (representing heavy to light). Each participant was asked two questions: (1) How weighty (strong) are your people? (the nationalist aspect) and (2) “How weighty (strong) is your family?” This measure also related to two points in time: then and now.

The functional graphic rating scale (0-10) featured the following end anchors: A face with a neutral expression at the lower end and a smiling face at the higher end. The participants were asked to make value judgments about hypothetical suicide attacks after they were told about the degree of justification (little, some, and much) for the act and the degree of damage caused (minor, moderate, and major). This variation of the method of “*functional measurement*” (Anderson 1982, 1991, 1996) included a description of nine incidents. Each incident was presented to the participant in the following way:

Think of someone like you, not anyone in particular, that was very (or moderately, or not very) determined in sending people to perform suicide attacks, and the people injured were (women and children, soldiers and children, women or soldiers). We (the Israeli interviewer) know that the status of bombers is related to the number and type of people injured. We also know that you think there is more honor in injuring soldiers than in injuring women and children. (Thus, the participant is led to differentiate between the offensive acts and the victims.) How much respect do you have for this person?

The episodes were ordered arbitrarily. Following this complex measurement phase, a freely open and interactive conversation focused on the participant's family, childhood, inner conflicts and moral dilemmas, attempting to facilitate sympathy and empathy toward victims of violence. After the conversation, the above measurements and test were administered again to the participants (the "after" measurement).

### *Procedure*

Two interviews were conducted with each prisoner at various jails in Israel. The prisoners were not handcuffed. The interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed.

**First Meeting.** The interviewer created an empathetic and straightforward atmosphere throughout the interview. Most interviews began with the participant asking why he had been singled out for the interview. He was assured that other prisoners are participating in the study as well, and their names were mentioned. The first part of the interview was an open and informal conversation about home and family (i.e., childhood, parents, siblings, and friends). The participant was told that he does not have to address the reason for his imprisonment.

As the conversation developed, the prisoner felt increasingly comfortable and was willing to speak freely about events and feelings, including longing for his family and personal dilemmas. The first meeting lasted about three hours, and the participant was told that the interviewer would return. The content of the interviews was tape-recorded.

**Second Meeting.** The second personal meeting took place about two weeks later. The interviewer told the participant that she had read the content of the first meeting, that she understood the difficulties and distress expressed by the

participant, and that she wanted to ask a number of additional questions. She then presented the three scales to the participant, as described above: (1) the relative graphic scale portraying the friction between national and family sentiments; (2) the independent graphic scale portraying the friction between national and individual considerations; and (3) a functional measurement scale calling for judgment of a series of incidents.

The interviewer then initiated a conversation designed to influence the participant's approach towards victims of violent acts. The interviewer's approach was deliberately empathetic. The participants appeared to be highly affected as a result, as evidenced by the flood of emotion and longing expressed, especially for their mothers, children, and wives. Whenever the participant expressed some human identification with his victims he received verbal reinforcement from the interviewer. At the end of the conversation the three scales were administered a second time.

## **Results and Discussion**

This section discusses the analysis of the findings according to qualitative and quantitative arrangements. The qualitative content analysis resulted in the following seven categories:

1. Morality, values, and moral judgment; hence "*Morality*."
2. The basic family group; hence "*Family*."
3. The refugee experience; hence "*Refugee*."
4. Person dilemmas at the moral and practical level; hence "*Dilemmas*."
5. A sense of inferiority and discrimination; hence "*Inferiority*."
6. Father deprivation due to death or a dysfunctional role;

hence “*Father*.”

7. The criminal life of the participant or his family; hence “*Criminality*.”

The frequency with which each participant mentioned these topics is presented below. A qualitative analysis of the data permitted general conclusions to be reached about each participant and group. The quantitative analysis relates to the ratings given by the participants in the second interview, before and after the conversation. Two kinds of data were produced by the (third) primary measurement, *functional judgments*: (1) Moral Ratio (MRh), which reflect the relative weight assigned to the humanistic base (characterizing the victims by types—women, children, soldiers, or all three), and overall justification (Ju) of suicide terror. The MRh calculation was performed according to the following formula:

$$\mathbf{MRh = J/(J + D)} \quad \mathbf{(1)}$$

“D” and “J” represent the independent weight of damage and justification, respectively. These values were reached by calculating the difference between the averages of the marginal rows of the original data matrix for each participant. The range of MRh values is 0-1; the closer to 1, the greater the weight given to the humanist element. The relative values for damage (MRd) are as follows:

$$\mathbf{MRd = 1 - MRh} \quad \mathbf{(2)}$$

The calculation of Ju, Justification of terrorist acts, was performed as a simple average of all data cells.

Measurements were also performed using the two other scales: A relative scale (RI) and an independent scale

(II). The analysis was simple: For RI, the higher the value assigned by the participant, the greater the importance assigned to family. The calculation was performed according to the following equations:

$$\text{Then: Length of scale} = \text{RI ("before")} \quad (3)$$

$$\text{Now: Length of scale} = \text{RI ("after")} \quad (4)$$

For the first question, in which participants were asked about “then,” the calculation was performed according to the following equation:

$$\text{Length of scale} = \text{RI for "then"} \quad (5)$$

Scale II (independent) was calculated according to the following equation:

$$\text{"Before" and "After" measures: Individual + Family}/(\text{National} + \text{Individual} + \text{Family}) \quad (6)$$

The results and combined analysis of the two types of measurements, qualitative and quantitative, are presented separately for each of the three groups of participants, beginning with the chief perpetrators (this study’s target group) and followed by those convicted of murderer and, lastly, minor crimes. This order provides background for analyzing the responses of the chief perpetrators.

### *Chief Perpetrators*

**Qualitative Analysis.** Table 1 presents the frequency distribution for each of the seven categories identified in the *content analysis* of the interviews with chief perpetrators. This analy-

sis was conducted independently by two distinguished eastern specialists. There was a 94 percent fit between them. They agreed upon the content of the remaining 6 percent in an ad hoc conversation.

The frequencies in Table 1 show that the content related to *the moral base of the national struggle* (Category 1) are most frequent (except Participant 4) and is apparently the most meaningful category for the chief perpetrators. For significance testing, a non-parametric test is required due to the qualitative nature of the scale.

The only available test, “Friedman” (Siegel 1956), indicates that the source of the observed effect is the difference between Categories 1-5 and Categories 6-7 ( $p < .01$ ). Such an inference is not sufficiently informative. Thus, due to the relatively small number of participants inferences based on visual inspection of the results had to be made. Therefore, the following analysis of the qualitative tables is based on a comparison of the values shown (for individual participants, between participants, and between categories).

The Palestinian struggle is justified in the eyes of the beholders. Some said, however, they would not hurt children. Participant 1, who mentioned this with a considerable frequency (44 times), said: “I’ve always liked children, whether they’re Jewish or Arab. If I see a picture of a small child I take it. I saw terror attacks against Israel on television.

**Table 1. Frequency of Results of the Content Analysis for the Five Chief Perpetrators**

Category Participant no.	A Morality	B Family	C Refugee	D Dilemma	E Inferiority	F Father	G Criminality
1	44	18	31	27	30	6	3
2	18	11	16	14	20	5	0
3	24	17	11	23	13	15	5
4	16	57	14	12	3	1	3
5	17	12	20	12	10	9	8
<b>median</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>

I couldn't watch if they showed a dead or injured child. I remember the child that was killed at 'Apropo' (a restaurant bombing), and it feels like a knife in my back."

Generally, the chief perpetrators interviewed seem to be searching for ways to justify their terrorist activities, in part by pointing to parallel activities performed by Israel. In the words of Participant 1: "People were motivated to do that car bomb attack, because they themselves were injured, their brothers and sisters, their family, girls and boys, young children, adults." Moral justification is mentioned most frequently in the interviews with chief perpetrators, as if they were trying to say that the struggle is moral and not without its dilemmas regarding injury to women and children. They felt it necessary to de-humanize and de-legitimize the Israeli side in order to justify their terrorist activities. They drew a clear distinction between attacking soldiers, which was considered legitimate, and attacking women and children. Moral quandaries were spoken about in various ways throughout the interviews, even when participants spoke about very personal matters, such as whether or not to remain married after receiving a long prison sentence and the implications of that decision for a beloved wife.

The *family* as an overriding value was a prominent theme in the interviews with the chief perpetrators. In the words of Participant 1: "There's a good atmosphere at home, very strong ties, we all love each other, can't part from each other. That isn't the reason there are problems. A person can have problems with himself...You give to mother and father what they deserve. Everyone would feel they have someone who supports them. All my life, what's been important to me is my family. I don't even think about myself. I can't do it; brothers, sister, Father, Mother, family, clan. I can't leave them."

Another important theme was the participants' experience as *refugees*, as illustrated in the interview with participant 4: "I agreed to help wanted Hamas members. There's something that pushes me to do it. I'm always looking for my faith and my honor...My parents ran away in '48 ..." When the participants talked about their families, most mentioned events in 1948. They said it was national sentiment and awareness of their problems that pushed them into terrorism. For example, Participant 4 said, "Before '48, my father lived in the last village on the Gaza side. When the Palestinians left, they went to a refugee camp. Some of the members of the village are still in Gaza, but they have no land."

The significance attributed to *ideology* was another prominent theme in both interviews. As Participant 3 said, "The things that happened in the Intifada, those aren't the main thing to me. The main thing is, who am I, where was I, what happened to my land, who is my father, where is his land." Generally, the national struggle between Israel and the Palestinians played a prominent role in the interviews. The participants said that the occupation led them to recruit themselves for the struggle.

The fourth ranked topic was *moral dilemmas*. For example, Participant 1 said, "In the world I live in, I've got to go through a few processes. As a Palestinian, I have to decide between living with my mother's family and the family in the camp or just leaving...rising up and doing what I did. It was my last choice in life. Either go to jail or stay with my parents. The dilemmas were primarily inner struggles about the heavy price the family would have to pay for the participant's choice of terror. In the words of Participant 3: "I considered whether to leave my wife. When I got married I was wanted. After I was married a month I was arrested."

The fifth-ranked topic was the *sense of inferiority* and discrimination. Some participants spoke about the sense of humiliation felt on various occasions. An example given by Participant 1: “I couldn’t find a job, I was 18 years old. In the end, I found one at a Tel Aviv restaurant...It was hard for me there. I cleaned up, and that wasn’t for me, didn’t go along with my psychological state...”

*Bitterness and anger* about Israel and the Israeli establishment was mentioned in various ways. For example, Participant 2 said, “They let (of jail) out criminals who stole, murderers, not criminals who committed security crimes. Most of the people here are from (the) Fatah (organization). There are high level people... there is racism and no family on your side. You treat all Arabs like criminals.” Participant 1: “When I worked in Israel and had to go through checkpoints, they used to leave us standing at Checkpoint Erez for two, three hours.”

*Father deprivation* was another meaningful topic. Though not mentioned with frequency, it relates to the sense of pain of losing a father due to death (in three instances), arrest, or a second marriage (to someone other than the participant’s mother). Participant 3 mentioned the topic 15 times; for example: “When I was 10 years old, my father died of leukemia. My father was very strict when we were young. Even though we were minors, it was important to him that we be able to do everything...He taught us how to be men. Daughters spend time with their mothers, and sons learn from their fathers. I remember that my father used to give me more responsibility.” The recorded matter reflected the need for a father’s love or, primarily, the need for a moral compass. The father was also mentioned as a source of security. The pain was apparent in the words of Participant 5: “I was a year old when my father was put in prison, and he stayed there until I

was 8...That had an impact on me...Why did they take my father?" Every participant lacked a father in some way or another, and in every case this deficiency seemed to influence their lives.

There was no mention of a criminal way of life or of a family that exhibited criminal patterns of behavior. These people and their families led normal lives. Families appeared to be consistent with the accepted norms. A combination of personal difficulties and nationalist consciousness led the participants to take the father's place and choose to become chief perpetrators.

Overall, three content areas are evident from the interviews: First, *the moral base of a struggle* and the stress imparted to the view that their acts are justified because they are victims. Second, *the family* and the capacious importance attributed to it. The participants described their families as normal, usually quite poor but not referred to as economically destitute; parents encouraged their children to be educated and there were good relations among family members. The participants described themselves as dominant figures in their families. Third, *the refugee experience*, which is referred to as something significant in their lives.

**Quantitative Analysis.** The ratings given by the participants before and after the conversation in the second session were analyzed. The two primary measurements were humanism (MRh) and justification of violence (Ju). The former represents the relative weight assigned to victims' suffering, is the most important measure. The latter represents the degree of justification given for acts committed by the participant.

There were two, somewhat marginal, measures—RI and II. The former is a relative scale designed to represent the weight given to the nationalist element as opposed to the

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**Table 2. Relative Weight Attributed to Justification and Severity of Judgment by the Five Chief Perpetrators, Before and After the Interview (according to the measurements described in the report)**

Participant	MRh		Ju		II		RI		then
	before	after	before	after	before	after	before	after	
1	.59	.64	7.2	2.7	.80	.90	.80	.80	.50
2	.15	.84	6.1	4.3	.41	.59	.52	.67	.52
3	.76	.92	4.83	4.72	.18	.21	.80	.13	.67
4	.78	.88	5.28	3.05	1.0	.91	1.00	1.00	.47
5	.95	.96	3.55	0.25	.70	.73	.57	.55	.42

family element, and the latter is an independent scale designed to represent the same tendency. The two latter measures are simple and somewhat restricted in their ability to reflect perception changes as a result of the interview.

Table 2 reflects a humanistic shift after the interview. This tendency is particularly reflected in MRh and is evidenced in a t-test for matched samples (Garrett and Woodworth 1964),  $t(1,4) = 2.82$ ,  $p < .05$ . According to the table, there was a decrease in justification for terrorist violence following the interview (Ju),  $t(1,4) = 3.80$ ,  $p < .05$ . The measure of RI gives further evidence that the conversation in-between the two measurements in the second session affected the chief perpetrators.

In summary, chief perpetrators seem to live in two orthogonal worlds—family and terrorism. Despite their intensive and extensive involvement in non-human terrorism, following appropriate facilitation they show sparks of humanism.

***Murderers***

**Qualitative Analysis.** As a summary of the five murderers' verbal reasoning, Table 3 presents the individual frequency for

each of the seven primary content areas, according to the content analysis previously described. These inmates were found to relate very often to their families (Category 2). As Participant 6 said, “The most important person to me is my mother...It was right to leave her, to go to work and send money...” The murderers also longed for their children and were especially worried about their safety and their basic needs, as mentioned by Participant 7: “To me, the children are men. Where will boys go? Who has the hardest time? I’m worried. If I don’t worry, who will? Outside, I help the whole family. My father, my mother, my sister. Participant 9 mentions this content area 37 times: “If anyone bothers me, my father will go to that person’s father. His blood would boil if anyone told him that his son is walking around, just walking around happy and carefree.” The father is described as someone who totally organizes the beholder’s life. His wife, he discovered, was a poor match. The father helped him find a new wife in an attempt to put his life in order. Participant 10, who mentioned the family 38 times, said “It’s an honor to live with my mother for a year, a year and a half. We’re forbidden to get married and leave our mothers immediately. It’s as if you’re hurting her.”

The chief perpetrators spoke of the central place of the family, their willingness to take on the responsibility of help-

**Table 3. Frequency of Results of the Content Analysis for the Five Murderers**

Category Participant no.	A Morality	B Family	C Refugee	D Dilemma	E Inferiority	F Father	G Criminality
6	3	15	0	7	5	5	24
7	9	36	0	11	0	2	12
8	1	42	2	5	3	6	15
9	4	53	10	3	2	6	21
10	5	29	5	9	0	3	29
<b>median</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>

**Table 4.**  
**Relative Weight Attributed to Justification and Severity of Judgment**  
**by the Group of Murderers, Before and After the Interview**

Participant	MRh		Ju		II		RI		then
	before	after	before	after	before	after	before	after	
6	1.00	1.0	5.0	3.3	.50	.50	1.0	.70	.43
7	.88	.80	5.9	5.7	1.0	.80	1.0	1.0	.17
8	.97	1.00	4.22	3.88	1.00	.91	.97	1.00	.23
9	.85	.66	4.77	3.39	1.00	.83	1.00	1.00	.50
10	.33	.50	3.72	2.20	.50	.69	1.00	.67	.73

ing their families, and their sense of respect for their families. The murderers mentioned their families more frequently. They described a situation where the family had to take care of them and help them organize their daily lives because of their involvement in crime. These participants stressed the absence of a father at home, or the father’s inability to influence his own children and set limits for their proper behavior.

The murderers also related heavily to the criminal way of life. In the words of Participant 6 (who mentioned the topic 70 times), “It was hard to steal. I’d like to continue on the honest road, to work, get money, not steal. I don’t like that way...I ruined my life, and it turned out that I’m in prison.” In summary, the murderers, as opposed to the chief perpetrators, rarely related to refugee status, even though both groups had come from refugee camps.

**Quantitative Analysis.** This analysis related to the ratings given by participants before and after the conversation in the second session. According to MRh, which reflects the relative weight assigned to humanism, there is no apparent trend that can be attributed to the manipulative conversation with the interviewer. In the case of two participants, 7 and 9, change occurred in the opposite direction, a decrease in the importance assigned to humanism. In the case of participants 6 and 8, almost no change was recorded for this measure. The

apparent lack of effect was supported by the results of a test for paired samples,  $t(1,4) < 1$ . On the other hand, there was a significant decrease for justification of violence (Ju), similar to that found for chief perpetrators,  $t(1,4) = 3.76$ ,  $p < .05$ . No effect was recorded for the other measures ( $t < 1$ ). Generally, according to the two primary measures, there is a non-integrative element in the judgments of the murderers.

### *Minor offenders*

**Qualitative Analysis.** Table 5 presents the frequency of content for each of the seven categories recorded in the first interview session with prisoners convicted of minor offenses. Two of them refused to take part in a second interview. As with the murderers, family and family solidarity appeared with a considerable frequency (Mdn = 33). In the words of Participant 15, who mentioned the topic 50 times, “Up until now, when I came home and saw my mother and father, I kissed my mother’s hand...I never eat breakfast without my mother, like a little boy...I just go to the neighborhood to ask my sisters if they need anything for school.”

These participants left their homes for the first time when they were imprisoned, and they expressed feelings of

**Table 5.**  
**Frequency of Results of the Content Analysis for the Seven Prisoners Convicted of Minor Offences**

Category Participant no.	A Morality	B Family	C Refugee	D Dilemma	E Inferiority	F Father	G Criminality
11	0	29	0	2	0	0	12
12	9	43	0	13	2	6	1
13	12	33	0	11	4	14	40
14	0	23	0	0	6	13	10
15	7	50	0	3	1	0	0
16	4	43	0	5	5	0	4
17	6	44	2	14	5	30	5
<b>median</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>

pain and longing for their families, particularly their mothers. Like the murderers and unlike the chief perpetrators, refugee status was not mentioned as a problem. The words of Participant 17 are particularly instructive: “I don’t think about the Intifada...I don’t care about anyone...I don’t like the Intifada. That’s being done by crazy people. Sit quietly. What business of yours is it? Go to work! There’s no food at home.”

The topic of a criminal life was prominent for these inmates, though not as prominent as for the murderers. One example is Participant 13, who spoke often (40 times) about a criminal life and attached great importance to it: “My brother is out of a job, does nothing to help himself. He’s a drug addict. Drives my mother crazy. And I’m in prison for a year...I’m here for stealing a car. Another brother is in prison for Ecstasy and drug trips...For 15 years, every week my mother went to a different prison...Three years ago, three of us were in prison, including my little brother...We were all in prison. One stole, one drank, one didn’t go to school...”

Five participants from this group chose a criminal life willingly or as the result of being in a criminal environment. The chief perpetrators, on the other hand, came from normative families.

Moral dilemmas were rarely mentioned by these inmates. Like the murderers, they frequently mentioned the lack of a father, due to death or involvement in crime or other reasons. Participant 17 said: “My father used to beat me, but he has a good heart. He wasn’t at home. He wanted money [for drugs], and I used to give him money...” This sort of report differed from those of the chief perpetrators, whose fathers were absent due to death or incarceration for security offenses.

Overall the minor offenders and the murderers are similar for most categories, apart from the obvious category of a criminal life, which was somewhat less intensive for the

former. They provide an informative contrast to the chief perpetrators, whose moral uniqueness is reflected in terms of *morality, refugee status, dilemmas, and sense of inferiority*. These topics were mentioned more often by chief perpetrators.

**Quantitative Analysis.** This analysis relates to ratings given by each participant before and after the manipulative conversation in the second session. Contradictory trends in terms of *functional measurement* were apparent from a comparison to the minor crimes group: A decline in humanism (MRh),  $t(1,4) = 2.53, p < .05$ , as opposed to a decline in justification for violence (Ju),  $t(1,4) = 3.21, p < .05$ . No effect was found in the other measures. It should be noted that the downward trend in justification of violence matched that of the group of murderers. Regarding the relative scale (RI) and the independent scale (II), a minor increase was noted in only three instances for the importance attributed to the family. The chief perpetrators, on the other hand, showed a major increase for this area, while the murderers showed a decrease.

Before the manipulative conversation the minor offenders assigned the highest importance to humanism (MRh), and there was downward trend after the discussion in the second session, similar to the murderers. Regarding justification of violence, there was a downward trend for all three groups. For the minor offenders there was no such difference

**Table 6.**  
**Relative Weight Attributed to Justification and Severity of Judgment**  
**by the Seven Prisoners Convicted of Minor Offences,**  
**Before and After the Interview**

Participant	MRh		Ju		II		RI		then
	before	after	before	after	before	after	before	after	
11	.88	.30	4.11	4.78	.59	.67	1.0	1.0	.50
12	.94	.75	3.17	0.44	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	.60
13	.82	1.00	4.44	1.55	.91	.77	1.0	1.0	.50
14	.76	.69	3.05	2.61	.67	.74	1.0	1.0	.50
15	.97	.79	3.39	1.78	.83	.67	.93	.97	.93

MORAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF CHIEF PERPETRATORS

in the importance assigned to family, which was high from the start. It appears that these inmates have not adopted a criminal identity and they see themselves as belonging to normative society. There is an apparent common denominator between murderers and minor offenders—a decline in humanism in terms of weighting and an increase in humanism in terms of justification of terror. The chief perpetrators are unique in this regard, showing a shift toward a humanist relation to victims.

*The Main Line of Findings*

Descriptive statistics (median and range) for the three groups of participants are presented in Table 7 (first session). The distribution of frequencies points to the uniqueness of the chief perpetrators in four of the seven categories: *Morality*, *refugee status*, *dilemmas*, and a *sense of inferiority*. From a vertical perspective, the chief perpetrators appear to have a different moral orientation (Mdn = 18) from that of the murderers (4) and the minor offenders (6).

The uniqueness of the chief perpetrators, compared to the other inmates shows up in Table 8 in terms of quantitative measures (second session). *Humanism*, originally weighed

**Table 7.**  
**Summary of Qualitative Measurements: Non-parametric Data, Median Values, and Range for Each Group of Participants**

Participants	A Morality	B Family	C Refugee	D Dilemma	E Inferiority	F Father	G Criminality
Perpetrators (n=5)	18 28 (16-44)	17 46 (11-57)	16 20 (11-31)	14 15 (12-27)	13 27 (3-30)	6 14 (1-15)	3 8 (0-8)
Murderers (n=5)	4 8 (1-9)	36 38 (15-53)	5 10 (0-10)	7 8 (3-11)	3 5 (0-5)	5 4 (2-6)	15 17 (12-29)
Minor Criminals (n=5)	6 12 (0-12)	33 27 (23-50)	0 2 (0-2)	5 14 (0-14)	4 6 (0-6)	6 30 (0-30)	5 40 (0-40)
<b>totals</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>23</b>

**Table 8.**  
**Summary of Quantitative Measurements in Median Terms for Each Group of Participants**

Group	MRh		Ju		II		RI		
	before	after	before	after	before	after	before	after	then
Perpetrators (n=5)	.76	*.88	5.28	3.05*	.67	.73	.80	.67	*.50
Murderers (n=5)	.88	.80	4.77	3.39*	1.00	.82	1.00	1.00	.43
Minor Criminals (n=5)	.88	*.75	3.39	1.78*	.83	.74	1.00	1.00	.50

\* =  $p < .05$

lower by the chief perpetrators (Mdn = .76) than by the murderers and minor offenders (.88), rose for the former to .88. An inverse trend was apparent for the other two groups: Murderers—.88 before the interview and .80 after; minor offenders—.88 before and .75 after. The chief perpetrators, who justified violence to a high degree (Mdn = 5.28) before the second session, showed considerable downward shift afterward (3.25), unlike the non-terrorist offenders.

A similar trend, for instance, a decrease in justification of violence (Ju), was apparent for all three groups. The chief perpetrators showed the largest decrease where the victims were women and children (from 5.28 to 3.05). For them, there was a similar sort of shift in the other functional measurement measure (MRh). On the independent scale (II), the chief perpetrators (unlike those participants who had a previous criminal record) assigned more importance to the family after the conversation (from .67 to .73). These findings are consistent with trends found in the qualitative analysis, and they point to the uniqueness of the morality of the chief perpetrators.

## General Discussion

### *The Moral Uniqueness of the Chief Perpetrators*

The findings point to the *moral uniqueness of chief perpetrators*, compared to both groups of non-terrorist criminals. The *refugee experience* was the most important theme for them, based on verbal reasoning recorded in the first session. A deep sense of hostility toward Israelis and Jews in general, based on their self-conception as victims, appears to typify their moral infrastructure. A more humanistic view of victims of terrorism was facilitated in the second session, following a deliberating conversation, while an inverse trend was found in the judgments of the non-criminals. This picture is puzzling, recalling the latter's non-criminal background.

The moral infrastructure of the chief perpetrators seems to include two psychologically exclusive poles—*normative* and *deadly*—that live together in the chief perpetrators' moral framework, without any inner confrontation. It seems that between them there is some impregnable barrier. Such a barrier may be strengthened and maintained by rationalization and neutralization (e.g., Addad 1989; Sykes and Matza 1957). The return to Islam is a catalyst for moral perceptions, and it further strengthens the barrier between the two moral foundations, as reflected in the delegitimization and dehumanization of Jewish Israelis specifically and western society in general. These motifs were generated spontaneously in the first interview with chief perpetrators. Facilitation of some anti-terrorist moral short-circuit based on the process exemplified in the second session in the present study, may pave the way for further substantive and applied research.

*Suicide Terrorism as an Instance of Moral Deviance*

The conclusions about the moral polarity of chief perpetrators demand suitable conceptualization, such as that suggested by the *cognitive-developmental approach*. According to this view, an individual's morality develops in stages, with each new stage based on the previous one (e.g., Colby and Kohlberg 1987; Rest, Turiel, and Kohlberg 1994). It follows that the acts of chief perpetrators reflect a low level of morality (utilitarian-social). However, as previously exemplified, the words of the chief perpetrators are not characteristic of low level of morality. This contradiction can be seen as an indication of a limitation in the ability of the cognitive-developmental approach to connect moral judgment with moral behavior. Moreover, it is in tandem with Wolf's (2001:25-26) criticism on the very validity of the approach.

The cognitive developmental approach, lacking viable assumptions regarding the co-existence of cognitive and emotional elements in an individual's moral framework, therefore, is limited in its ability to provide a conceptual infrastructure for the findings of this study. These sorts of assumptions are included in concepts presented by Addad (1989). Pizarro (2000) also notes dialectics between intellect and emotion in the process of moral judgment. The assumptions of these two theorists can be combined with the basics of the functional theory of cognition (Anderson 1996) for dealing with this study's findings about chief perpetrators of suicide terrorism.

The *functional theory of cognition* (Anderson 1991, 1996) and its derivation called *moral modularity* (Wolf 2001, 2002) hold that individuals' moral schemata are complex—normative and deadly, as was found in the judgments of the chief perpetrators. In functional terms, the presumed barrier

between these mutually exclusive poles can be viewed as a necessary condition for the maintenance of such splits in moral schema. The hypothesis of *modular morality* (Wolf 2001, 2002), along with the functional theory of cognition, provides a theoretical basis for the findings of bipolar morality. According to this approach, the point of view from which judgments are made activates the concomitant pole. Consistent with the modular assumption, the manipulation in the second session has led the perpetrators to relate to some degree to the suffering of victims.

### ***Suicide Terrorism as an Instance of Deviance Regulation***

A substantial part of Atran's (2003) outstanding composition on the genesis of suicide terrorism relates to those who commit suicide attacks. One of his conclusions is that the common attempt to attribute irrationality or psychopathology to such perpetrators is a fundamental error: "No instances of religious or political suicide terrorism stem from lone actions of cowering or unstable bombers" (Atran 2003:1536). Moreover, "Poverty and a lack of education are not reliable factors," and overall "...suicide terrorists have no appreciable psychopathology and are at least as educated and economically well off as their surrounding populations" (Atran 2003:1535).

Based on these parts of Atran's (2003:1534) review, one may infer that attempts to account for suicide terrorism should focus on the actual perpetrators, that is, those (suicide bombers) who blow themselves up "...against noncombatant—typically civilian—populations to effect political change." Under the title "Rationale choice is the sponsor's prerogative, not the agents." Atran (2003:1537-1538) makes a distinction between "leaders who almost never consider killing

themselves (despite declarations of readiness to die)...” and suicide bombers who (according to Sheikh Yussuf Al-Quaradhawi) sacrifice themselves for the sake of their religion and nation. While the latter are motivated to give-up their lives for their values or ideals, the formers’ material benefits are more likely to outweigh losses (Atran 2003).

Nevertheless, Atran does not elaborate on the distinction between leaders (practically those who coordinate suicide attacks) and bombers as we do below, with a special reference to the psycho-criminological (especially in terms of moral dispositions) uniqueness of the former perpetrators. We briefly present a couple of supporting arguments, theoretical (the theory of *Deviance Regulation*) and empirical (indications of psycho-criminological uniqueness of the coordinators), for our suggestion to assign more importance to the chief perpetrators.

In their theory of *deviance regulation*, Blanton and Christie (2003) postulate that when faced with a choice between normative and counter-normative behavioral options, a person’s attention should be drawn to the latter alternative and consequently his or her “...decision will be made on the basis of the desirability of the counter-normative choice more than the desirability of the normative choice” (p.116). One substantive element of the suggested mechanism accounts for the association between action and identity: “An action will stick when it will cause either the actor or observers to draw inferences about the actor’s identity” (p.116). The following formulation is most applicable to the present context:

The highest levels of self-esteem should therefore be achieved by people who successfully avoid all of the negatives, as required by their reference groups. And who also succeed at some noteworthy subset of the optional ideals, as is desired by their reference groups.

By living up to the oughts, people avoid exclusion. By achieving some of the ideals, people gain praise and admiration. (P. 130)

The choice to be a terror coordinator, who sends volunteers to perform suicide bombing while avoiding any bodily damage to himself, should satisfy both conditions for gaining praise and admiration—avoiding the “negatives” in the eyes of one of his reference groups and succeeding to promote a noteworthy subset of another reference group. We base this guesswork on the present findings and on Wolf’s (2001) hypothesis of *moral/judgmental modularity*, for instance, individuals’ moral schemata change as a function of the social perspective taken at a given moment.

In terms of deviance regulation, suicide bombers seem to have two reference groups; one is their Arabic primordial belonging, while the other is the Western mega-culture. The Western values (including English as a reference language which is a vehicle for the related values) are incorporated and accommodated during their socialization as citizens of the global village (see Rinnawi 1999, 2000, on the friction between these two sets of values in the Israeli context), especially as represented by the mass media, particularly television (Rinnawi 2001, 2002).

Chief perpetrators successfully promote a subset of the optional ideals of their primordial reference group, for example, terrorizing the population of their rivals in order to achieve political-religious goals. At the same time they do not jeopardize a substantive Western value of inviolability of a person’s own life. According to this analysis, the messengers, for instance, the suicide bombers, satisfy only the anti-Western ideal endorsed by quite a few Islamic cults, sectarians, and schools. This sort of application of the theory of *Deviance*

*Regulation* seems to gain some empirical support from the results of the present study.

In metaphoric terms, deliberated to reflect our application of the *deviance regulation theory* (Blanton and Christie 2003), chief perpetrators seem to successfully fish in gloomy water; in this way, killing two birds with one shot. According to Atran's (2003) review (see also Levi 2001), such a person is not deviant in psycho-socioeconomic terms. In line with this conclusion, the present findings indicate that the chief perpetrators' self perception is noticeably different from that of murderers and petite criminals. It implies from the present findings that chief perpetrators should suffer from heavy moral dilemmas caused by the incongruity between the two following values (internal dictates): maximizing gains for the primordial reference group and avoiding the responsibility for the killing of innocent people.

It is thus assumed that these people develop an almost non-penetrable barrier between the active internal representations of the two incompatible values. This assumption shall be tested empirically. If supported, it should fill a vacuum in the application of Blanton and Christie's (2003) theory of *deviance regulation* as an account for chief perpetrators' choices. That is, it adds a moral perspective to this application specifically and to the theory in general. According to Blanton and Christie, *deviance regulation* is deliberated to contribute to the build-up of desirable identity. Presumably, moral identity should take a meaningful place in related psychological mechanisms (Addad 1989).

### ***Methodological Considerations***

The current study offers a new approach to psycho-criminological research. The unique morality of chief perpetrators was

revealed via a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. An assignment of meaningful importance to elements from both moral poles—normative and deadly—was found in the first session, based on the participants' *verbal reasoning* (qualitative method). The quantitative method—*functional measurement*, used in the second session, exemplified the penetrability of the barrier between the two, apparently incompatible, moral poles.

Recently, Anderson (1996:271-273) and Wolf (2001:25) have pointed to the advantage of such combined designs. The target participants of the present study were prisoners serving multiple life sentences for especially serious crimes. Cooperation of any kind with inmates of this type may appear to be impossible. A special approach is needed to converse with chief perpetrators and gather valid data.

After the first session, it seemed that the chief perpetrators had no picture of their victims before their eyes. The deliberated conversation in the second session attempted to evoke some empathy for the victims of terrorism. In this way, the hated-filled emotional base of the participants was moderated to some extent and the harm inflicted upon their victims became more concrete and vivid to them.

While verbal reasoning (the core measure of the cognitive developmental approach) enabled us to mark the moral framework of the participants, the resulting picture was not dynamic. The functional paradigm, on the other hand, demonstrated some shift in the chief perpetrators' morality. It seems therefore possible to influence them with heart to heart dialogue.

The open atmosphere of the interviews and the combination of research methods described above allowed the researchers to reach what might be described as the psychodynamics of the chief perpetrators' moral nucleus. At the outset,

the interviewer stressed that she did not intend to talk about crime, but rather about the person himself. The sense of empathy and ease in the first session led participants to wait impatiently for the second session. One participant even brought a picture of his children to the next meeting. It seems that the presence of a female interviewer allowed for greater openness. This presumption is supported by the following incident. In a preliminary meeting the interviewer was escorted by a male specialist in Arab studies; the prisoner refused to talk. He changed this attitude only when the female interviewer came alone to the next meeting.

The method employed gave the perpetrators legitimacy to say anything they wanted. The pleasant, flowing conversation led each of them to examine himself and his own life story. He felt like he had an opportunity to talk about himself and those close to him and to relieve the weight of dilemmas he had been facing. This offers a viable means of examining offenders who were thus far thought to be non-conducive to psychological study. In addition, the findings validate the functional paradigm and confirm the viability of combining it with the qualitative measurements offered by the cognitive developmental approach.

### *Applied Implications*

The findings of the current study indicate that a combination of the functional approach (including the notion of modular morality) and the cognitive developmental approach could provide a diagnostic means to distinguish between chief perpetrators of terrorism and ordinary criminals. Nevertheless, more research is needed to develop diagnostic tools, based on the method employed in this study. At first, these tools appear to be suitable only for examining terrorists who are already

serving prison sentences. However, many of the most dangerous terrorists have served more than one prison sentence, and the use of the suggested method may serve to identify those having particular moral profiles. Follow-up studies can be conducted to identify this sort of (bipolar) profile and later put it to use together with information obtained from security agencies. This can be accomplished without conducting special sessions with suspected or convicted terrorists.

The transcripts of the interviews as well as the report of the interviewer reveal that the chief perpetrators were overcome with emotion when speaking about their mothers. The fathers were portrayed as the dominant male role model of a patriarchal family. In many cases the father had been absent since the participant was a child. They kept claiming, however, that their families were not involved in their choice of terror as a way of life, but evidently, the families are a significant counterpart of their moral framework.

These findings suggest ways for the development of intervention methods that focus on perpetrators' personal moral dilemmas. Such intervention can speak to the perpetrator's sense of direct or indirect responsibility for his extended (tribal) family. At the moment, such responsibility is seen only in terms of honor and glory, and the chief perpetrator is perceived as the only one who will suffer greatly if apprehended or physically wounded.

In light of the moral characteristics of chief perpetrators revealed in the current study, knowing that the typical chief perpetrator lives with his family at the time he deals in terror may help to dissolve the barrier separating his violent side from his normative side. It can be assumed that many murders are prevented in traditional Muslim society because the potential killer knows that the norm of blood vengeance will cause the family he lives with to suffer the consequences

for generations to come. The goal then would be to find similar inhibitory mechanisms that could prevent or limit the awful act of recruiting somebody else to blow themselves up to kill innocent people.

### *Epilogue*

Overall, we suggest allocating meaningful importance to the study of chief perpetrators of suicide-terror. In terms of the *cognitive developmental* study of moral judgment (e.g., Rest, Turiel, and Kohlberg 1994) chief perpetrators should be living in a permanent state of heavy moral dilemmas. Solutions for these dilemmas to be applied as anti-terrorist means, can be based on the *Functional Theory of Cognition* (Anderson 1996; see exemplifications in Wolf 2001, 2002). The attempts to develop such counter-solutions might gain from mechanisms of regret-forgiveness (e.g., Gobodo-Madikizela 2003), especially where women or womanly approaches play a central role (see Bourne, Healy, and Beer 2003).

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