

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

### **RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM: A PARENTING STYLE**

Religious organizations generally address our common need for spiritual sustenance, and for community. They uphold the concept of ‘family’ in an era when economic rationalism is tearing families apart. Historically, religions have spawned and championed countless humanitarian causes, such as the anti-slavery and (American) civil rights movements, Ghandist non-violence and the Islamic *zakat* (alms tax for the needy), to mention but a few. In modern times religious institutions have often been at the forefront of human rights and social justice movements. For instance, church authorities have stood up against repressive regimes in Latin America, and in Australia they are an essential part of the fight to protect the rights of asylum seekers.

This chapter, however, is not about religion per se. It is about the use of religious extremism, radicalism or fundamentalism as a rationalisation for repressive or punitive child-rearing styles. In contrast to mainstream religion, religious extremism has historically been associated with increased social and international violence. I simply wish to pose the question ‘Might this have anything to do with the way religious extremist communities relate to children?’

Scriptures cannot be blamed for their believers’ attitudes. We all interpret according to our personal predispositions, and therefore we each should be held responsible for our interpretations. Those who favour violence will find justifications for violence in any text. The rage of the battered and maltreated child lives on in an adult body, hiding itself behind scriptural justifications, insatiably seeking others to punish. Even if we give our hatred a religious rationale, what underlies it is always childhood pain. Thus we persecute the infidel, or in the name of God and ‘good discipline’, we punish the next generation.

Religious extremism can therefore not be particularly associated with a specific denomination or sect. It is people, not texts, who perpetrate violence. In fact, extremism is not intrinsically problematic, unless it involves punitive approaches to child rearing.

What follows is a look at what social researchers have identified as the child rearing practices of extremists from four of the world’s main religions.

#### **<A>Child rearing and Islamic extremism**

Fundamentalist religious societies in general are patriarchal, and Islamic fundamentalism is no exception. In July 2002, the United Nations Development Program and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development jointly issued the ‘Arab Human Development Report’ (AHDR 2003) in order to assess blocks to development in the Arab world, where Islamic extremism has been enjoying an extensive revival. The report was compiled by a team of specialists from across the Arab region headed by Nader Fergany, director of the Cairo-based Almishkat Center for Research and Training. This report concluded that Arab women’s economic and political participation is the lowest in the

world.<sup>i</sup> It also underscored cultural blocks to development such as “authoritarian and over-protective child rearing ... curricula in schools that encourage submission, obedience, subordination and compliance rather than free critical thinking”.<sup>ii</sup>

The suppression of children increases in direct proportion to the degree of patriarchy and misogyny. In fact, punitive attitudes towards children seem to be a salient feature of fundamentalist communities. In Egypt, where fundamentalism is prominent, a report by the Department of Public Health in Alexandria,<sup>iii</sup> stated that one in four Egyptian children had suffered injuries such as fractures, concussion or permanent disability as a result of parental ‘discipline’. Radical Islam has embraced and propagated the African custom of female genital mutilation. Around the world, 130 million women have suffered this fate, dooming them to a life of sex without pleasure, or worse: making sex with their future husbands an excruciating ordeal.<sup>iv</sup>

Throughout the Islamic world modernisation, liberalisation and moderate forces are at work. Fundamentalist politicians were soundly rejected by Malaysian voters in 2004. Reformists such as Iranian Jamaluddin Afghani and Egyptian Muhammad Abduh were agitating for a liberalisation of Islam as far back as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>v</sup> Perhaps the advent of Islamic feminism constitutes one of the strongest contemporary bulwarks against archaic traditions. A growing number of voices from within the Muslim world are speaking out against oppression of women and children.

One such voice is that of Moroccan scholar, Fatna A Sabbah,<sup>vi</sup> who says that fundamentalists expect women to be silent and immobile, to act meek and remain with eyes downcast, and to lead a life of near-total seclusion. Women in fundamentalist families, as depicted by Sabbah, are possessed as property, shunned as temptresses, and blamed as the inspirers of lust — an evil and destructive emotion. When a mother is crushed underfoot, and when she lives under threat of violence, how can she be the kind of mother she wants to be, the mother her children need her to be? Children are the ultimate victims when their mothers live in bondage.

Palestinian researchers Haj-Yahia and Tamish<sup>vii</sup> echo Sabbah’s assertion that women are given a low status because traditionally, they are seen as the source of evil and anarchy. They demonstrate how this attitude to women has had disastrous ramifications in traditional communities. Female victims of sexual abuse are often accused of bringing the abuse upon themselves. A family’s honour is based on the sexual purity of its girls and women. Since a girl’s ‘loss of honour’ reflects on her whole family, even if she has been raped, she risks severe punishment for being found out. This makes girls easy targets for sexual abuse. Meanwhile boys, from a very young age, are pressured to be overly aggressive and dominant. The genders thus become polarised to extremes of hyper-masculinity and ultra-submission.

Much of what researchers Haj-Yahia and Tamish have to say about Arab families would be enviable by western standards. For instance, traditional Arab families are known for their generosity and hospitality. Children certainly benefit from the kind of security that the Arab extended family, with its shared or communal parenting practices, can provide.

However, wherever traditional patriarchy has not been tempered by modernisation, gender roles and relations are still rigidly — even violently — delineated.

The imprint of Islamic fundamentalism on parenting and family dynamics has been closely studied in Saudi Arabia. Two extensive and independent surveys of Saudi Arabian families were conducted by Arab academics Soraya Altorki<sup>viii</sup> and Mona AlMunajjed.<sup>ix</sup> Both reported a kind of sexual apartheid, where women were segregated from men at home, in most public buildings and in public transport. Even at university, male teachers were viewed by female students through closed circuit TV. At the time of conducting her survey in the 1970s, Altorki was not even able to move around on her own, unchaperoned. As an anthropologist, she considered Saudi Arabia one of the most closed cultures in the world.

As in other fundamentalist havens, a Saudi family's honour is tied to its women's sexual conduct, and to the males' capacity to control their women. Strict codes of honour are the prime responsibility of women, and the slightest infractions — which include talking or flirting with unrelated males — bring shame upon their family. Women are severely punished by their own male relatives, and the penalty for adultery is death. Male infidelity, on the other hand, is tolerated, though it is preferred that philandering is done with non-Saudi women. If sex occurs outside the rigidly prescribed boundaries, the woman is invariably blamed for leading the man astray. In marriage, her duty is to be sexually available to her husband — whether or not she chose, through love, to be his betrothed.

The suspicion and disgust with which feminine sexuality is viewed by fundamentalists is unfathomable. Only recently, religious police in Saudi Arabia forced 15 girls back into a burning building. Their crime? Trying to escape with their lives, uncovered by traditional dress. For this infraction they were burnt to death.<sup>x</sup>

In Saudi homes, obedience to the father or husband is usually the overriding principle. Most children and women do not leave their homes without permission — a privilege that is infrequently granted by the male heads of the household. From both women and children, total obedience is expected, and children are obligated to their parents for life. They are told that they are doomed to hell, after judgement day, if they displease their parents. At the time of Altorki's survey in the 1970s, children were still expected to stand when adults entered the room, and to kiss their hands in the morning, and not to laugh 'excessively'. The Saudi father loomed as a distant and aloof disciplinarian. His children always stood in his presence, and they were never observed by the researcher to defy him. Such authoritarian and repressive child-rearing customs are reminiscent of the most traditional parts of rural Yugoslavia in the 1930s. Interestingly, AlMunajjed found that as modernisation chips away at patriarchal oppression, children are gradually treated with more kindness and patience.

Though there are signs of change toward liberalisation, until recently Saudi marriages were arranged, based on commercial or status-related considerations. A 'dowry' was paid

for the bride by the groom's father, and partners did not see each other until their wedding day. Obedience, instead of love, was the glue that kept the family together.

AlMunajjed insists that patriarchal tribalism has distorted the true message of Islam, which originally was infinitely more liberal toward women. Middle Eastern writer and journalist Ziauddin Sardar argues that nowadays, the puritan imposition of Shari'a Law — which entraps countries like Sudan and Saudi Arabia is not based on the teachings of the Koran.<sup>xi</sup> In Sardar's opinion it was constructed by jurists in the Abassid period, between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Shari'a Law erases many of the egalitarian teachings of the Koran, says AlMunajjed, which explicitly recommends the empowerment of women in the spheres of politics, religion, commerce, and education. According to Amina Wadud, Islamic Studies Professor, contrary to the practice found in many Islamic regimes, the Koran guarantees women rights to inheritance, independent property, divorce, and the right to testify in a court of law, and it forbids violence against women and girls.<sup>xiii</sup> Edicts such as these go unheeded in conservative Islamic regimes.

Elsewhere, in Afghanistan, a survey of women recently conducted by Physicians for Human Rights found that under the yoke of the extremist Taliban regime, 78 per cent suffered symptoms of a major depression. More than one in every three women admitted having suffered at least one incident of serious physical abuse, such as beating, rape or detention. Even in parts of Afghanistan not controlled by the Taliban, over half of all women suffered from symptoms of major depression.<sup>xiii</sup>

In recognition that violence in the family home is endemic in many Islamic nations, a manual for combating this problem was recently developed.<sup>xiv</sup> This manual was compiled by a largely Muslim group of women campaigning against the high incidence of violence in radical Muslim families. It highlights the existence of stoning for adulterous women, polygamy, child marriage, and grossly unequal grounds for divorce; across a range of countries where fundamentalist Islam is powerful. The manual also exposes the loathsome custom of 'honour killing',<sup>xv</sup> which, it states, is common in Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, the Gulf countries and in Palestinian territories. ('Honour killing' of women and girls is rare in the non-Islamic world, but exists to a lesser degree in Ecuador, Brazil and Uganda.) As an example of honour killing in Jordan a father stabbed his daughter in the groin because she had gone unaccompanied to talk to a boy. She was left to bleed to death.<sup>xvi</sup> This kind of incident is not unusual, according to this manual, and honour killings are actually on the increase in the Middle East.

A girl's own father, brother or uncle can kill her if she is perceived to have brought shame upon her family. The dishonourable acts which merit her murder range from chatting to a neighbour, holding hands with a man other than her husband, flirting, indulging in illicit or pre-marital affairs, committing adultery, and in some places being the victim of rape. In the community's eyes, the family's name and reputation will not be cleansed until the offending girl is brutally killed. The more brutal the killing, the more complete the restoration of the family's honour, and so victims tend to be strangled, knifed or hacked to death. Only those whose hearts are already brutalised through years of abuse could possibly accept this kind of atrocity in their community, let alone

perpetrate it. In some Islamic countries, women who report being raped face adultery charges and the possibility of jail or even death by stoning.<sup>xvii</sup>

Honour killings are most common in Pakistan, and the government's response to this custom has left a lot to be desired. Most cases go unpunished, and even those who are prosecuted receive lenient sentences. Several hundred honour killings are reported each year in Pakistan, and it is estimated that many more go unreported.<sup>xviii</sup> Honour killing is also found in Palestinian territories. In 1997, Khaled Al-Qudra, Attorney General of the Palestinian National Authority, said that he suspected 70 per cent of all murders in Gaza and the West Bank were honour killings.<sup>xix</sup> In Jordan, where a forensic medical examiner estimated that 25 per cent of all murders are honour killings, the Criminal Code is explicitly and selectively lenient towards the perpetrator.<sup>xx</sup> 'Honour' in this twisted form, seems to be valued above love and life.

A recent Pakistani conference on child abuse reported a huge incidence of infanticide, abandonment, and violent physical abuse throughout the nation. Islamic schools in Pakistan are found to practice severe forms of corporal punishment. According to *The State of Pakistan's Children — 1998*, Pakistan tolerates a very large number of child workers: 3.3 million aged between five and 14, or one in 12 of all in this age bracket. The female literacy rate is 24 per cent — half of the male rate. The state of Balochistan has the lowest level of female education in the world: two per cent. Though Pakistan is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it does not enact its obligations under this charter. Governmental foot-dragging ensures the dereliction of its duty to establish and protect children's rights. From 1990–1997, central government expenditure was 31 per cent for defence, two per cent for education, and one per cent for health.<sup>xxi</sup> A conservative estimate of Pakistan's Infant Mortality Rate (as at 1998) was 9.5 per cent — the highest in the world.<sup>xxii</sup> How might this level of attention to children's wellbeing impact on this nation's quality of democracy, its state of social harmony and cohesion, and its foreign policy? Could this explain the preponderance of militant groups who find haven in parts of this country?

If the lack of educational opportunities exposes children to violent influences, so does an education system that has been annexed by radical religion. The recently imprisoned Abu Bakar Bashir, accused of masterminding numerous terrorist strikes around the world including the Bali bombings of 2002, was also head of a boarding school in Java which is notorious for militant religious indoctrination.<sup>xxiii</sup> Too often when a government fails to provide well for education, the slack is taken up by well-funded religious-extremist groups eager to indoctrinate children's minds.

The long-standing troubles in the Middle East have had disastrous worldwide ramifications. Israelis have been relentlessly attacked, and the Palestinian people have suffered considerable injustice and human rights violations (the latter has been acknowledged by rabbinical sources).<sup>xxiv</sup> A significant element of the Palestinian 'Intifada' — literal translation is 'shrugging off' — was originally based on a movement committed to non-violent resistance led by Palestinian–American psychologist, Mubarak Awad.<sup>xxv</sup> So far, militarism has done nothing but scuttle Awad's work and undermine the

Palestinian cause. Violent extremists have reversed the gains made by the non-violent elements of the Palestinian struggle, and contributed to a bloody stalemate in the Middle East. Could it be that the choice of brutal means has more to do with people's own childhood trauma, than with the historical injustices they are trying to redress?

### **<A>Child rearing and Hindu extremism**

Much of India is progressive, modern and tolerant, as evidenced by the recent election results in which for the first time a non-Hindu was chosen as prime minister. But religious extremism thrives in a number of Indian provinces, where, in accordance with ancient tradition, each year hundreds of women are burned alive, where female infanticide continues, and where, to a much lesser degree, even child sacrifice is not unheard of — among some radical sects.<sup>xxvi</sup>

As elsewhere around the world, the suffering of children bears sour socio-political fruit. In 2002, more than 1000 people, mostly Muslims, died in inter-religious violence in the Indian state of Gujarat. Bellicose Hindu-extremist leaders earned the censure of Amnesty International, who even accused the ruling party, BJP, of sponsoring violent vigilante attacks against Muslims.<sup>xxvii</sup> Reportedly, some prominent Hindu leaders publicly warned Muslims that a certain “Hindu deity wears a garland of human heads”, that a third of Indian Muslims — amounting to 50 million people — should be executed, and that what happened in Gujarat would happen throughout India.<sup>xxviii</sup> The extremists who made those public statements would surely have earned the most stringent condemnation from Mahatma Gandhi, if he was still alive.

### **<A>Child rearing and Christian extremism**

In the Christian world, religious fundamentalism is characterised by the insistence upon a literal, non-interpretive reading of the Bible. Christian fundamentalism is often associated with the belief that human history will come to an end in the near future in an apocalyptic battle between forces of good and evil.<sup>xxix</sup>

Christian fundamentalism emerged in the USA around the time of Charles Darwin, as a reaction against the growing influence of scientific thought. The World Christian Fundamentals Association was formed in 1919.<sup>xxx</sup>

As the boundaries between mainstream faith and fundamentalism are open to debate, it is impossible to decide how many of the world's estimated two billion Christians<sup>xxxi</sup> can be categorised as fundamentalists. One source<sup>xxxii</sup> estimated in 1996 that there are 60 million in the USA, with a growing worldwide following. In the same year, another survey<sup>xxxiii</sup> stated that only nine percent of Americans considered themselves as fundamentalists, although — seemingly in contradiction — 54 per cent insisted upon a word-for-word literal interpretation of the Bible.

Are there distinguishing features in the way Christian fundamentalists relate to children? It does appear so, according to a number of studies showing that Biblical literalists

practice more authoritarian child-rearing methods than mainstream Christian families. A recent American survey compared hundreds of parents belonging to Christian denominations espousing literal, versus non-literal interpretations of the Bible.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The survey was intended to measure the social impact of Biblical passages that seemingly encourage parents to corporally punish their children.<sup>xxxv</sup> The most well-known of these being Proverbs 13:24, which says, “He who spares his rod hates his son”. The Book of Deuteronomy contains a recommendation that rebellious sons should be stoned to death.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

The researchers found that members of literalist denominations were significantly more inclined to hit their children. What’s more, literalist parents had more inappropriate expectations from their children, and showed less empathy toward their needs.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Several surveys conducted since<sup>xxxviii</sup> have consistently replicated these findings. In the USA, the corporal punishment of children is most favoured in the southern and mid-western states known colloquially as the ‘Bible Belt’. Two fundamentalist parenting manuals in the USA have offered this advice: “The spanking ... should be painful and it should last until the child’s will is broken” and “Even though Mom spansks him, he wins the battle by defying her once again. The solution to this situation is obvious: outlast him; win”.<sup>xxxix</sup>

The corporal punishment of children is anything but synonymous with Christianity, and some Christian groups are salient for their stance against it. In the USA for example, a General Conference of the United Methodist Church has passed a resolution calling for the complete abolition of corporal punishment.<sup>xl</sup> Citing the teachings of Jesus, the group ‘Christians for Non-Violent Parenting’ aims to persuade Americans to reject corporal punishment at home, school and at childcare facilities.<sup>xli</sup> Some of the most authoritative, empathic and scientifically sound parenting manuals have been written by Christian authors.<sup>xlii</sup>

Fundamentalist groups, on the other hand, are notorious for their accent on obedience. One Missouri reform school for troubled teenagers purporting to use Biblical methods has been the subject of many allegations of physical abuse.<sup>xliii</sup> In a Texan home for girls run by a Christian group, girls were subjected to whippings, paddlings, hours of kneeling on hard floors and solitary confinement.<sup>xliv</sup> A nun from a Canadian religious commune faced charges of assaulting children in her care, to some of whom she had administered over 30 blows at a time. In court, she was cool and unrepentant as she recounted how God had instructed her to paddle the children, and she maintained that her punitive practices were in accordance with scripture. The judge ruled that her discipline methods constituted abuse, and police were called in to remove children from the commune for their safety.<sup>xlv</sup> Also in Canada, a judge ordered the removal of seven children from parents belonging to a fundamentalist denomination, as their parents had been assaulting them with implements such as belts and clothes-hangers. In court, the parents and their pastor defended their brand of ‘discipline’ as prescribed by scripture.<sup>xlvi</sup> Their solution? Twenty-eight of the mothers belonging to this denomination fled across the border, where they found a legal haven for their spanking habits.<sup>xlvii</sup> In Georgia, USA, authorities acted to protect 60 children who had been severely beaten by parents and church leaders, under

supervision from their church elder. When the church leaders were charged with cruelty to children, the parents refused court rulings to tone down their abusive practices, protesting that they were raising kids according to the Bible.<sup>xlviii</sup> Some of the harshest detention centres in America for ‘reforming’ unruly or substance-addicted youths are run by church groups. They have attracted considerable media attention for their commitment to corporal punishment – often severe.<sup>xlix</sup>

Twenty-two American states still allow corporal punishment in schools, where teachers favour the use a long-handled wooden paddle to redden their pupils’ buttocks. The states that hold on to this approach to ‘discipline’ are strongholds of conservative Protestantism. How successful is this approach to ‘discipline’? The 10 states that paddle students most frequently (in order: Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Missouri) have higher murder rates, and higher incarceration rates.<sup>1</sup>

The conservative Christian approach to pedagogy, with its tolerance for corporal punishment, is by no means limited to the USA. When the caning of school children was recently abolished in the Australian state of New South Wales, religious schools were conspicuous for voicing strong objections.<sup>li</sup> In the state of Victoria corporal punishment is banned from public and Catholic schools, but remains legal for independent schools. In 2001, a Victorian Christian Community Schools group issued a statement saying “the hand or flat instrument on the buttocks is appropriate in some circumstances”.<sup>lii</sup> Meanwhile, an Australian man was awarded \$2.5 million in damages for the strapping he received as a boy in a religious school.<sup>liii</sup> In South Africa, where the corporal punishment of children is banned from schools, a Christian organization representing 196 schools lobbied to have this ban lifted, on grounds of ‘religious freedom’.<sup>liv</sup>

### **<A>Child rearing and Jewish religious extremism**

Despite Israel’s strong democracy and a majority population of liberal, mainstream orthodox and secular individuals, Jewish religious extremism is still a powerful force. According to the ex-chairman of the Israeli League of Human Rights, Israel Shahak, only 20 per cent of Israelis are considered religious, and perhaps only five or six per cent<sup>v</sup> belong to radical extremes of religion. (Jewish religious extremism must be distinguished from the highly developed tradition of reformist and liberal Judaism — they are poles apart on many key issues. It should also not be confused with moderate orthodox communities.) Since the racism and sexism of Jewish religious extremists are virtually unknown outside Israel, says Shahak,<sup>lvi</sup> the degree of their oppressiveness would surprise and shock most of the world’s Jewry. On the other hand, secular and moderate religious Jews dwelling in Israel, are painfully aware of this small but politically powerful extremist minority.

In his two books *Jewish History, Jewish Religion* (1994), and *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (1999), Shahak describes the family dynamics of the Jewish religious extremists as patriarchal domains, where the education of children is dominated by the grandfather and women ‘know their place’. According to Shahak, rigidity in sexual mores is manifest

through strict regulation of male and female roles, as well as draconian attitudes on sexual preference. This is what prompted liberal Rabbi Donna Berman to write in protest about the “many centuries of Jewish misogyny”, calling for Jews to “honestly confront the sexism inherent in our tradition”.<sup>lvii</sup>

Some Israeli religious extremists repeatedly refer to women engaged in politics as witches, bitches or demons.<sup>lviii</sup> The same extremists forbid women from driving taxis or buses, or from taking up any employment where they might lead or oversee men. Just as in Saudi Arabia, the most extreme sects advocate the separation of men and women in public places. In some neighbourhoods, women who go about ‘immodestly’ dressed have been insulted or beaten. Men are forbidden to listen to the voices of women singing, for this is a sin as grave as adultery.<sup>lix</sup> This stands in contrast to the relatively gender-egalitarian attitude of the Jewish mainstream.

It should be emphasised that religious attitudes such as these are not representative of mainstream Jewish faith. What’s more, Jewish religious practice is traditionally characterised by open debate rather than by dogma. Harsh and authoritarian upbringing is not a salient feature of mainstream Jewish culture. A survey conducted in the USA in 1965 found that Jewish ethnicity was proportionally under-represented in national statistics of child abuse, domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse.<sup>lx</sup>

Shahak introduces readers to communities in Israel whose children are trapped in religious schools where ‘secular’ subjects such as mathematics, science and literature are eclipsed, and where they are forced daily to cram religious scriptures for hours on end. The head of the more extreme *yeshiva* (scriptural schools) has absolute authority. In Shahak’s view, he even arranges marriages for the students — an act that violates international human rights conventions. Students are excluded from the outside world and are forbidden contact with ‘unbelievers’. Once they reach the age of 16, they are indoctrinated with scriptural texts for 12–14 hours a day. Each day contains tedious study of God’s punishments, which threaten to befall those who have the temerity to break religious rules. God is believed to punish all Jews for communal lapses in Talmudic adherence — even children! Incredibly, there have been rabbis who professed that the Holocaust was one such punishment.<sup>lxi</sup> What kind of attitude towards children, and towards justice generally, would have to precede the acceptance of the idea that children should be horribly and fatally punished for their parents’ lapses in piety? What happens to the hearts and minds of children who are shut off from the rich and diverse world that surrounds them, and shackled daily to the study of such a vengeful God?

When, in the year 2000, Israel became the tenth country to abolish all corporal punishment against children, strong opposition came from religious circles invoking Biblical and Talmudic sources.<sup>lxii</sup> In keeping with world trends, a survey conducted by a major Israeli newspaper found a broader acceptance of corporal punishment among religious communities.<sup>lxiii</sup> The acceptability of corporal punishment among conservative religious schools was cited in an Israeli court, in defence of a rabbi and teacher who was recently jailed for child abuse.<sup>lxiv</sup>

Besides Shahak, a number of analysts (Marc Ellis, (1999) Jewish theologian and professor of American and Jewish studies, Yehoshafat Harkabi, (1988) professor of International Relations and Middle East Studies and ex-intelligence advisor to the Israeli Prime Minister, and Uriel Tal, (1985) professor of Jewish History at Tel Aviv University) have commented that the influence of religious extremism on Israeli politics has been deleterious, having contributed to a hardening of Israeli domestic and foreign policy. Opinion surveys have shown that secular Israelis see Jewish religious extremists as a greater threat to Israel than that posed by Arabs.<sup>lxv</sup> Liberal Jewish religious groups, on the other hand, are vigorous activists for justice and peace in Israel and the Middle East.<sup>lxvi</sup>

Despite all the violence that plagues our world, humanity is witnessing a remarkable growth of democracy and respect for human rights, beyond what has ever been known. The following chapter looks at how the evolution in child rearing has fuelled this welcome trend.

**This article is an excerpt from ‘Parenting for a Peaceful World’ (2005) by Robin Grille, Sydney-based psychologist. The book (published by Longueville Media) is available at:**

**[www.naturalchild.org/ppw](http://www.naturalchild.org/ppw) for North American readers, and [www.our-emotional-health.com/book.html](http://www.our-emotional-health.com/book.html) for readers from elsewhere in the world.**

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<sup>ii</sup> Raphaeli N (2003) ‘The failure to establish a ‘knowledge society’ in Arab nations: Arab Human Development Report’ Economic studies: The Middle East Media Research Institute *Inquiry and Analysis Series — No 151* 6 November 2003 <http://www.memri.org> see ‘Economics’

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<sup>v</sup> Sardar Z (2002) ‘Islam — resistance and reform’ *New Internationalist* May 2002 pp 9–13

<sup>vi</sup> Sabbah FA (1984) ‘Woman in the Muslim unconscious’ Pergamon Press, New York

<sup>vii</sup> Haj-Yahia MM and Tamish S (2001) ‘The rates of child sexual abuse and its psychological consequences as revealed by a study among Palestinian university students’ *Child Abuse and Neglect* Vol 25 pp 1303–1327

<sup>viii</sup> Altorki S (1986) *Women in Saudi Arabia — Ideology and Behaviour Among the Elite* Columbia University Press, New York

<sup>ix</sup> AlMunajjed M (1997) *Women in Saudi Arabia Today* Macmillan Press, London

<sup>x</sup> ‘Saudi Arabia — improperly dressed’ (2002) *Time* (1 April 2002) p 12.

<sup>xi</sup> Sardar Z (2002) ‘Islam — resistance and reform’ *New Internationalist* May 2002 pp 9–13

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- <sup>xvi</sup> Afkhami M, Mahnaz G, Hofmann N and Haleh V (1998) *Safe and Secure: Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls in Muslim Societies* SIGI, Bethesda, USA p 47.
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