

Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here

UNTOLD STORIES FROM THE FIGHT AGAINST
MUSLIM FUNDAMENTALISM

KARIMA BENNOUNE



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Boualem Yekker was one of those who had decided to resist, those who had become aware that when the hordes confronting them had managed to spread their fear and impose silence they would have won.

—TAHAR DJAOUT (1954–1993),

The Last Summer of Reason

CHAPTER EIGHT

Why I Hate Al Qaeda: Surviving and Challenging Fundamentalist Terrorism

"W

hy don't I come with a suicide jacket?" the young voice on the phone said.

"Okay, I don't care, come with the suicide jacket," Pakistani peace activist Diep Saeeda retorted. "Bring more suicide bombers as well." Then she went on planning the rally against the blasphemy law.

Next she received an e-mail. "You are a threat to the Muslim *umma*." Diep tried to reply, but her message would not go through. The address was a decoy. To be told you are an enemy of the *umma*—the Muslim people—in a city like Lahore in 2010 is no mere insult.¹ It has been less than two months since a triple-suicide blast thought to be the work of the Pakistani Taliban killed twenty-five at a public procession in this city, "scattering bodies into the streets and sowing panic."²

Still, Diep's protest went ahead.

Nearly fifty people stand on the sidewalk near the chief minister's office, ironically under an official banner welcoming His Excellency the Iranian Ambassador. The protesters hold their own banners in Urdu and English that condemn the sentencing of Asia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian woman, to die for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad. "A secular state to protect minorities." "No More Blasphemy Laws!" They denounce law 295c, which was used to convict Asia Bibi. "295c is not Islam." A junior academic holds my favorite sign: "Root cause religious extremism." Sohail Warraich, a human rights defender

who helps organize my research in Lahore, says these are the slogans he has been chanting his entire life.

Tonight, passersby nearly fall off their motorbikes as they stop to look at those who stand against intolerance. They include young activists in jeans, a woman with her head covered, and grandes dames of the women's movement in shalwar kameezes. Here at this intersection, watching peaceful protesters challenge theocracy despite the threat of suicide attack, I first meet Diep Saeeda, the tired-looking convener who herself wears a shalwar kameez and flip-flops. On her knees on the pavement, she writes out signs. While we talk, a group of policemen arrive—responding, they say, to the warnings Diep received. "This is a security threat. Now you disperse."

The policemen want to "interview" the demonstrators. They want to know whether or not they are Muslim. "Their entire purpose was to scare the shit out of you so that you would go home," the young woman who held the sign about religious extremism tells me the next day. But she stood there nonetheless. In fact, the small phalanx of protesters found themselves with policemen in riot gear in front of them and a few angry-looking "bearded ones" (as the fundamentalists are sometimes called here) lurking behind. But they stood their ground, chanting and waving their signs.

There have been public gatherings condemning the violence in Lahore since my visit as well. At least six hundred "members of civil rights organizations, singers and students" attended a candlelight vigil at the Liberty Roundabout and a rally at the Press Club in May 2012 after militant attacks on mosques belonging to the minority Ahmadi set killed ninety-five.³ Everyone in the United States who watches television knows about Pakistani terrorists, but until the Taliban shooting of schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai in October 2012, most did not know about those who were standing up to the terrorists. Pakistani peace activists—that is not a stereotype, but it is a reality.

SHREDDING RAHMA

We are deeply concerned at . . . increasing militant attacks . . . and consider these . . . threats to the entire society. We show full

solidarity with families . . . of those . . . injured and killed in . . . barbaric terrorist attacks. . . .⁴

—Joint Action Committee for People's Rights, Pakistan

Many groups in Muslim majority societies regularly denounce terrorism, even when doing so is dangerous and receives minimal international publicity. In the West, it is sometimes assumed that Muslims generally condone terrorism. The Right often presumes this because it views Muslim culture as inherently violent. The Left at times imagines this because it interprets fundamentalist terrorism as simply a reflection of legitimate grievances.

In fact, many people of Muslim heritage—though not yet enough—are ardent opponents of fundamentalist violence, and for very good reason. Statistically, they are much more likely to be victims of terrorism than its perpetrators. Terrorism directed against Jews, Hindus, Christians, atheists, or anyone else is equally appalling, and Muslim fundamentalists have also killed many across these categories. But those most commonly on the receiving end in recent years have been people of Muslim heritage killed by Muslim fundamentalists. During Ramadan 2012 alone, Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for 131 attacks in Iraq, killing four hundred.⁵ A 2009 study of Arabic media sources by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point found that only 15 percent of Al Qaeda's casualties between 2004 and 2008 were Westerners.⁶ Between 2006 and 2008, fully 98 percent of Al Qaeda's victims were of Muslim heritage.⁷

I think of the celebrated Arab American filmmaker Moustapha Akkad, who made films about Libya's independence struggle and the life of the Prophet Muhammad (as well as the moneymaking *Halloween* movies). He perished at a wedding along with his daughter and fifty-five others, including relatives of the bride and groom, during a 2005 bombing by Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia.⁸

Pakistani religious scholar Mufti Sarfraz Naeemi, of the Barelvi school, chaired a meeting of Islamic religious scholars that denounced suicide terror in 2009.⁹ “Those who commit suicide attacks for attaining paradise will go to hell, as they kill many innocent people,” he

reportedly said.¹⁰ Later that year, on June 12, he was himself targeted by just such a paradise-seeking Taliban bomber and killed after Friday prayers.

My childhood neighbor in Algiers, Chadly Hamza, was one of those truly kind people you gravitate toward as a kid. A consultant for the UN Development Programme who also worked to create study-abroad programs for young Algerians, he was murdered by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, with thirty-three others, in a December 2007 suicide bombing of a UN building in Algiers.¹¹ The last time I heard from Hamza, as my dad called him, in 2005, he told me he had made a conscious choice to stay in Algeria to try to improve conditions, “rather than just being a consumer of development wherever I could have emigrated.”

All these people of Muslim heritage fell to the fundamentalists, an immeasurable loss to their families, their countries, and the world. That is why so many know that this jihad has got to stop.

However, the scale of such losses to terrorism in Muslim majority populations is not always well understood elsewhere. In the spring of 2010, I served on an Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) task force set up to consider what the organization could do to improve its work against terrorism. I spent frustrating hours trying to convince some other members that our task was vital to many people of Muslim heritage, not something they would oppose. Ultimately, we recommended that AIUSA hold an event about the human rights of victims of terrorism around the world, to commemorate the tenth anniversary of 9/11. The board of AIUSA rejected this, in large part because they believed such an event would contribute to discrimination against Muslims. They too seemed to assume that Muslims were mostly associated with perpetrators of terrorism, not with its targets, or at least this is what the public would think. It was easier to say nothing.

During the unhappy debate on the Amnesty task force, I thought a lot about my Algerian cousin Ahcene, a retired soldier from a peasant background who could not read. In 1994, he was killed by terrorists in front of his children on the eve of *Eid el-Kebir*, one of the biggest Muslim holidays of the year. After riddling him with bullets, the fundamentalists attacked what remained of his body. His seven-year-old

daughter, who threw herself on her father's remains to protect him, was covered in his blood. Though she survived, I always thought they must have killed part of her too.

You do not have to be an international lawyer to know what terrorism is and that it includes such acts. Most people can agree it is violence intentionally directed against civilians for a political or ideological purpose, or for the purpose of spreading terror. The outstanding definitional debate about who can commit it—states, non-state armed groups, “freedom fighters”—masks a political debate about when to employ the label: only against those with whom we disagree, or whenever it applies.

In any case, there is no denying that jihadist groups have purveyed widespread *terrorism* in recent decades, killing hundreds of thousands and provoking further bigotry against Muslims and counterterror abuses. It is an awful cycle I call “terror/torture.”¹² It did not commence on September 11, 2001, but long before. Some will rush to say this is all justified by a range of grievances—lack of democracy, violations of human rights, military occupation. Many of those injustices are very real. However, the fundamentalist bombers often purvey equally grave injustices—or seek to—and their victims are in no way responsible for the underlying problems.

The legendary sardonic Algerian columnist Saïd Mekbel addressed a February 1994 open letter to the terrorists of Algeria, a letter that distills the rage of many people in Muslim majority societies against those who butcher in the name of Allah. “Tell me, partisan of terrorism . . . you who regularly . . . explain that terrorist acts are done . . . to—I quote—‘bring down the military junta in power,’ tell me how assassinating a schoolteacher in front of . . . the children in his class, when he only had a little piece of chalk in his hands, tell me . . . how this ignoble execution contributes to ‘bringing down the military junta.’”¹³ Ten months later, the man who asked this question was himself fatally shot by a partisan of the Armed Islamic Group while eating in a restaurant near his office.¹⁴

There are, of course, Muslim fundamentalist groups that do not use violence, and some that do not even condone it. There are also many others who have nothing whatsoever to do with Islam—Jewish settlers in the West Bank, for example, or Christian fundamentalist opponents

of abortion in the United States—who have employed terrorism. But the Salafi jihadi groups have perfected the practice. As someone I interviewed said, “They excel in the art of terror.” They have shredded *rahma* (mercy), a foundational principle of Islamic teachings. For example, Algerian fundamentalists claimed that the more the victims suffered, the wider the doors of paradise would open for their jihadi killers.¹⁵ In other words, the terrorism was an end, not just the means.

The suffering was part of the point.

Acting in total violation of both international and Islamic humanitarian law, Muslim fundamentalist armed groups have made it seem as though suicide bombing is associated with Islam. They have blown up cafés in Morocco, churches in Cairo, the offices of the Red Crescent in Baghdad. They have used chemicals to attack girls’ schools in Afghanistan. The struggle to stop this antihuman violence is one of the world’s major human rights challenges.

The fact that the lamentable George W. Bush declared war on terrorism does not make it a good thing. The reality that governments have grossly abused human rights in the name of fighting terrorism does not make that fight any less important. It simply means we have to combat several forms of suffering simultaneously, rather than tolerating either one in the name of the other. These truths were confirmed to me along the way in Algiers, in Kabul, in Moscow, and in Lahore.

A LIFE OF A COWARD DOES NOT MAKE SENSE

I love Pakistan. I was there in 1996 on an Amnesty International mission. When I came down with chicken pox, the men who worked at the Pearl Continental Hotel in Peshawar took care of me as if I’d been a member of the family. I called room service daily, and the man who answered would say, “Is this Miss Karima? We’re praying for you, *al Hamdulilah*.” I used to hide on the balcony when the man who cleaned my room came up, because my pox-ridden face frightened even me. One day, the urbane concierge came to see me and said, “You do not have to hide. Everyone gets sick.” I associate Pakistan with this kind of humanist decency, as much as any ghastly headline. When the Pearl Continental was decimated by jihadist suicide bombers in June 2009,

killing seventeen, I immediately wondered what happened to the protective concierge and the prayerful cook.

When I returned in 2010, the country was riven by a bloody internal conflict against its own Taliban and myriad other extremist groups, some with close links to Al Qaeda. Across the country, more than eight thousand people had been killed in militant strikes in the previous three years.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the ordinary hustle and bustle in the city reminds me that one of the best forms of resistance to terrorism is to avoid doing the terrorists' work for them, to keep going about your business. My father was a firm believer in this approach. Except for occasional military checkpoints, most things seem normal in Lahore. As I travel between interviews, I see cars festooned in flowers for a wedding. Life goes on in the presence of death and death threats.

The day after witnessing the demonstration against the blasphemy laws, I visit its organizer, Diep Saeeda, in her humble seventh-floor office in what counts as a high-rise in Lahore. I find Diep at her computer in a small room with no name on the door. Down the hall from her office is a good view of the city, which looks, with its many trees, as though it would be quite beautiful if you could see through the smog.

Having labored for several decades for many seemingly lost causes—peace with India, abolition of nuclear weapons, and the defeat of fundamentalism—Diep looks exhausted. However, she shows no sign of giving up. Now forty-eight she is the founder and chair of the Institute for Peace and Secular Studies (IPSS). Much of her work has involved taking on the Pakistani security establishment. “When we organize for the nuclear rallies, people will curse, ‘Why do you want to destroy the one Muslim nuclear bomb?’” She has been arrested, is regularly harassed by people she believes to be government agents, and believes herself at ongoing risk.

But today she also takes on the Taliban “because they are anti-human. They have killed one hundred thousand people in Afghanistan and Pakistan.”¹⁷ Diep grapples with the contradictions in what the Pakistani Taliban do, contradictions in stark contrast to her pacifist universalism. “I hate the killing of anyone because I believe in nonviolence. But if the Taliban targeted the Army headquarters because it was supporting America, okay that is their ideology: they hate the Army.

But the next day, they will go to the women’s bazaar, explode there, and kill women doing the shopping. So, what kind of ideology is this?”

Diep stresses the lack of alternatives open to young people. “They are not enthusiastic about their future. They hate Taliban. They don’t want to get into their groups. But if they are from the lower middle class families, they cannot afford to go abroad.” She regrets that there are no youth resource centers in Lahore, “where young people who want to learn music, who want to paint can.” On the other hand, “there are madrasas and terrorist centers in every street.”

None of this is happening by accident in Pakistan. While it has both endogenous and exogenous causes at least as old as partition, Diep and many others draw a line back to the U.S. Cold War-era support for the dictatorship of Zia ul-Haq, who “Islamized” as a way of maintaining control. The rise of fundamentalism here is not just the natural by-product of Pakistan’s own internal development. In its battle against the Soviet Union, during the war in Afghanistan in particular, the United States instrumentalized political Islam here. As feminist activist Neelam Hussein sees it, the country was used as an “Islamic shield against the USSR.” Pakistan now, in part, reaps the terrible fruit of that unnatural crop.

So Diep and her institute have had to organize many demonstrations like the one I saw, regardless of the risk. In January 2010, she convened a rally against the Taliban. “It was immediately after the news from Swat that they were cutting off the heads of people.” The picturesque Swat Valley in the Khyber-Pakhtunkwa Province, known as the “Switzerland of South Asia,” saw an influx of Pakistani Taliban militants in 2007.¹⁸ Though its people had voted for secularists, in February 2009 the Pakistani government concluded a truce with the Taliban, conceding that Swat would be ruled by an Islamist version of Sharia.¹⁹ Thanks to the truce, the Taliban took over. This encroachment, and a series of abuses—flogging of women, killings of secularists, attacks on barbers who shaved beards—finally provoked the Pakistani Army to intervene during the second half of 2009, partially dislodging the jihadists. They subsequently returned and today continue killing. As egregious as the attack on Malala Yousafzai was, it was part of a pattern of Pakistani Taliban targeting of opponents.²⁰

Despite the Taliban atrocities that were ongoing at the time of Diep's march in 2010, she faced some public opprobrium in Lahore for opposing them. "When I was distributing flyers, they would curse me. They would say, 'You are not Muslim.'" That did not stop others from joining her. She gives me a copy of the Urdu flyer that she and her sister and her daughters handed out at intersections to get people to attend. It is entitled "Peace, War, Love, and Terrorism," with X's through "War" and "Terrorism." Diep translates: "From Swat to Gaza and from Mumbai to Afghanistan, everywhere peace is in trouble. People who are responsible for this--on one side the United States and its allies--military intervention--and on the other side is the terrorism of the fundamentalists. . . . Today . . . the large majority of the population is being held hostage." By speaking against these things, those who gathered also sought to display a different face of their country. "In this critical situation, it is important for peace-loving people to raise the slogan of . . . tolerance and coexistence. . . . Let us show the world that the majority of Pakistanis . . . desire to live a peaceful life."

Five thousand came to the rally. "Rickshaw drivers, common people would come, somebody from Swat who says he had a very hard time, because of the Taliban their lives had changed, so he came with friends to the rally." They received no coverage whatsoever in the Western press. But this does not stop Saeeda and the Institute for Peace and Secular Studies. On Facebook, I can see that they organized a well-attended vigil in Lahore the day after Malala Yousafzai is shot. Diep is quoted in the international press saying, "All Pakistanis should come together and raise their voices against such acts. If they do not do this, then they should mentally prepare themselves for their own children's fate to be like Malala's."²¹ In the face of such acts, the peace activist continues to speak out, entirely undaunted.

Back in 2010, I had put to Diep the question I always wanted to ask my father: "How do you keep going with the threats you face?" She says what I imagined he would have: "I believe that if I live a life of a coward, that is not going to make sense." Of course, no parent takes these risks alone. This is the hardest part for Diep. "I was upset when I was jailed and my daughter had exams, and she was sitting outside the jail all night long. That bothers me. I was a little careful when my children

were young. But my children are grown up now, so I don't care." Diep Saeeda has no security guards and lives in a small house.

"If they kill me, it is an honor to be killed, instead of sealing my lips and making any compromises."

DENIAL IS NOT A RIVER IN EGYPT

Diep Saeeda and Khaled Ahmed in Lahore, and their analogues elsewhere, are very clear about what fundamentalism is doing to their societies. But many others are not. I am fascinated by the denial that swirls around Muslim fundamentalism and its violence. It pervades the contagious 9/11 conspiracy theories and the *qui-tue-qui* thesis, which conjectures that the Algerian state rather than fundamentalist armed groups murdered in the 1990s. In Pakistan when I visit, this denial is endemic.

I am told many here believe Hindus or Jews are doing the killing, not the Muslim fundamentalist armed groups. In a country like Pakistan where the Jewish population is thought to have dwindled to almost nothing,²² where the Hindu population is 5 percent of the total 180 million and almost no Hindus whatsoever live in the areas hardest hit by terrorism, these are remarkable assertions.²³ Even though Muslim fundamentalist groups usually claim responsibility for their atrocities quite openly, others often rush in to absolve them. What does all this denial mean? How does one challenge it?

I ask the thirty-nine-year-old Pakistani documentary filmmaker and women's rights advocate Gulnar Tabassum about this in her small office at Shirkat Gah, the women's rights NGO in Lahore. She has very short, dark hair and wears a jean jacket. Gulnar grapples with an explanation for the denial, which she believes starts with identity. "The majority of Pakistanis, they are Muslims. When you talk about Islam, they say, 'We are with Islam.'" Given this starting point, they do not want to disparage their religion by standing against the fundamentalists, who claim to be advancing it. This sort of confusion underscores how useful it is for the fundamentalists to conflate their politics and popular religion. A mother who lost her son to Algeria's Armed Islamic Group once wrote to me, explaining how the fundamentalists take advantage of igno-

rance: "If you want to confuse an 'ordinary person,' you talk about God instead of about politics—and you have won."

Gulnar argues that this confusion is exacerbated in Pakistan by official stories and mainstream journalism aimed at obfuscating reality. "They are not getting the clear picture from the government or the propaganda agencies [of] media and newspapers." If people get confusing messages from those who are supposed to keep them informed, "they don't know who the Taliban are. Who is their enemy? And you know, it is easy for them to say, 'Oh, the Indians are doing this, Americans are doing this, and Israelis are doing this.'" The public assumes this must be true, because criticism of Muslim fundamentalist armed groups (aka "Muslims") could only be a sign that "people are against Islam."

Smoking continuously, Gulnar apportions blame for the current confusion. "Basically, this is the government's responsibility because they are not giving people a clear picture. They put them in denial." Average citizens "can't believe that any Muslim can make a suicide bomb in Pakistan and innocent people are killed."

Gulnar's most recent projects were a film called *Two Steps Forward*, about women in the peasant movement in Punjab after 2000, and another entitled *The Swollen River*, about the impact of the massive 2010 floods. During her travels, she asked ordinary people across Pakistan for their views about fundamentalist violence. "I have been in Swat and KPK for my flood film." (KPK is the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, near Afghanistan.) In these at-risk zones, she asks those she interviews, "Who are the Taliban?" Their first reaction? "What Taliban? It is all American propaganda." Gulnar does not give up, though. "I put a second question to them. 'But we have suicide attacks?'" The reply she most often gets is, "You know, Indians are doing this."

During her visits to Swat while making her film about the floods, Gulnar heard many awful accounts, but these horror stories were warped by conspiracy theories and popular myths. "They told you horrendous stories about the Taliban and what they are doing in Swat," she says. "They are raping women. But the propaganda is that Hindus are doing this. I said, 'Okay, in the middle of the Taliban regime in Swat, Hindus are coming, kidnapping women and raping them. Then they throw them back to their houses. Is this possible?'" According to

the Pakistan Hindu Council, there are only 474 Hindus in a population of 1.2 million in the Swat Valley. Despite such demographic impossibilities, Gulnar is assured by her interviewees that Hindus are to blame.

"One of my colleagues said, 'I met a woman who was raped. I personally talked to her. And she said the rapist was Hindu.' 'How did she know this?' I asked her. She said, 'He is not circumcised.' Then I researched and I discovered that the Mehsud tribe, they don't circumcise their people."²⁴ (She is referring to the tribe of Baitullah Mehsud, the late leader of the Pakistani Taliban.) According to Gulnar: "They think circumcision is not compulsory. But the propaganda is still that Hindus are doing that. People are so much in denial they just accept this." It is painful, she surmises, to contemplate that your coreligionists could be targeting your own people. "There are lots of disappointments. They can be disappointed by religion as well because jihad is very much glorified. To avoid these questions they prefer denial," Gulnar concludes. She is so concerned with this phenomenon that she wants to make a documentary film about it, featuring those injured in suicide bombings and women victims of rape in Swat who are convinced their assailants were Hindus. "Why can't they see? Or, if they are seeing, why can't they talk?"

I inquire how much of the denial has to do with a reading of the Pakistani Taliban as anti-imperialist, as fighting the United States, a justification I have heard time and again. She responds: "Al Qaeda claimed they have fight with America. Why they are doing this in Pakistan? Pakistani people, what they have done to them?" She simply does not accept that defeating imperialism is the real agenda. Instead, she insists, "This is a tactic to spread fear in people's minds." Her words echo those of Pakistani human rights lawyer Hina Jilani. In her Lahore office, up the stairs past the armed guards she must have, Jilani alleges of the fundamentalists: "They have an imperialism of their own which is very much about control and exploitation and abuse of their own people." Why would an "anti-imperialist" blow up the markets of Peshawar where local women shop? Or decimate mosque after mosque full of minority-sect Muslims?

Though they mainly kill Pakistanis, not Americans, apology for fundamentalist violence is facilitated by a festering anti-Americanism that

Gulnar Tabassum says it is “spread by the media, by the government. It is a popular thing.” It dovetails with a populist discourse. “They are based in surface slogans. ‘America is exploitative, so we are fighting them.’ ‘Taliban are good people because they are fighting the huge, big power.’”

Sohail Warraich, who has long been involved in documenting human rights abuses, is a former Amnesty International researcher on Pakistan. How can we challenge the denial and the persecution complex that seem to be two of the key pillars of the problem? I asked him. “Number one: Accept that killings have taken place. Accept that whoever is taking responsibility—until proven otherwise—it’s them, whatever they call themselves, rather than saying, ‘No, someone else has done it.’”

More people need to say such things openly, though it is difficult. “It requires a lot of effort to actually say to people, ‘Believe your eyes,’” Sohail concedes, “but we must. If you see that it was a suicide attack and the person belongs to this group, believe it. Look at what the group itself is saying.” This is the application of Occam’s razor to Pakistan—in fact, to all the regions I have visited. If there is violence being carried out systematically against civilians, in the absence of actual evidence to the contrary, the group that says it is doing it, whose ideology justifies it, is probably doing it. This is not to say that governments, including in Pakistan, do not commit their own atrocities. They, too, need to be held accountable. Sometimes multiple actors may collude. Nonetheless, the violence of Muslim fundamentalist armed groups, including that against Muslims, is all too real.

In 2012, I was hoping that after the Pakistani Taliban not only tried to kill Malala Yousafzai, “Daughter of the Nation,” but also said openly that they did, and would do it again, this might begin to undo some of the denial. A few days afterward, I spoke to Sohail Warraich by telephone. Fresh from attending Lahore protests against the shooting, he told me that clerics were now on the defensive, and that the dreadful incident was creating space to raise these issues in a new way, by showing “the real face of militancy.” It was, he said, “very encouraging to see momentum in media and political circles who are usually not clear cut about extremism.” There was an immense popular outpouring of love for Malala and hatred for the Taliban across the country that could

really change things. “This case has provided a catharsis of the masses for all the grievances that have been building up for years,” Muhammad Amir Rana, director of the Islamabad-based Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, told the *Guardian*.²⁵ However, Sohail rightly warned that denial would soon try to rear its ugly head again.

In short order, the Taliban—who were not used to getting such universally bad press at home—accused Malala of being an American spy. Members of the fundamentalist party Jamaat-e-Islami desperately accused her family of complicity with the U.S. military, tweeting a photo from their meeting with former U.S. envoy Richard Holbrooke in which they had asked the civilian diplomat for support of educational projects, but mislabeling it in Urdu as being a meeting with American military officers.²⁶ Ultimately, though Malala was supposedly colluding with the U.S. military, the Jamaat-e-Islami leader suggested, you guessed it, that it was in fact U.S. intelligence agents who had shot her in order to justify U.S. drone strikes. Some other right-wing commentators even excused Malala’s shooting because of those drone attacks. While the civilian casualties from such strikes are a very serious matter, local commentators pointed out that U.S. drones targeting militants had likely killed three to four thousand Pakistani civilians, while the Taliban had by late 2012 deliberately killed about sixty thousand.²⁷

Observing the attempts at obfuscation, horrified Pakistani editor Muhammad Arif blogged: “[W]hen Malala is fighting for her life these stone hearted people are trying to bring conspiracy theories to dilute effects of this highly sensitive issue. History would never forgive them....” Safiya Aftab likewise regretted, in a *News on Sunday* article entitled “Goebbels lives on in Pakistan,” that, “[e]leven years on, this nation still refuses to identify the enemy, let alone unite against it.”²⁸ On the phone from his home village, Sohail explained that to achieve those goals of identifying the enemy and uniting against it, there needs to be “clarity of thought and action and strategy on terrorism.”

I DON’T WANT TO HAVE DINNER WITH THE PROPHET

In 2003, Egypt’s then-president Hosni Mubarak warned his American allies that their war in Iraq would spawn a hundred new Bin Ladens.²⁹

About that, at least, he was exactly right. The illegal invasion transformed Iraq from a brutal but more secular dictatorship into a chaotic haven for fundamentalist terrorists.

When I meet Yanar Mohammed—an outspoken women's rights campaigner who founded the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI)—during her summer 2011 visit to Rutgers University, she is wearing sparkly red earrings. We drink tea from paper cups while talking about Iraq's tough years. For all her strong stands, she is very approachable.

She had opposed the 2003 U.S. war, and when I first heard her speak back in 2004, she was already calling for a complete U.S. withdrawal. Simultaneously, Yanar has never once shied away from condemning Muslim fundamentalism, even in the most difficult of environments. She deplores the fact that her country now is “under the most notorious Islamic authority.”³⁰ Her stance is not lost on Iraqi extremists themselves. After publicly protesting the Iraqi Governing Council’s resolution 137—which tried to introduce Sharia into family-law decisions, and to annul all family law incompatible with Sharia—she received an e-mail message with the subject heading,

“Killing Yanar.”

Opening this message in a Baghdad cybercafé, she wondered whether someone sitting anonymously in the same room had sent it. After that, Al Qaeda-linked groups threatened to blow up her offices and home. Yanar moved from one neighborhood to another to stay ahead of the bombers, but she found them all unsafe. She had to move around in a bulletproof vest that nearly doubled her girth.³¹

Still, like Diep Saeeda, Yanar Mohammed did not give up. As she had said in the past, “It is life or death for Iraqi women. If I don’t do it, if other women don’t do it, we are falling into this dark pit.”³² She kept fighting fundamentalism—both Sunni and Shi'a—because she could see the harm it was doing by fomenting sectarian hatred and spawning violence. “They began killing left and right. They would say we will kill everybody who is an apostate and works with the Americans, like Iraqi translators. And at that time there were no jobs!” The terrorists acted on these pledges for all to see. “They would kill a woman trans-

lator, write on her body, show her half naked and distribute her video clip. No one could cope with that.”

In recent years there has been a jarring dissonance between Iraqi views of terrorism in Iraq, like Yanar’s, which are mostly condemnatory, and the views of those outside—especially those of some other Arabs and some leftists elsewhere—which are sometimes surprisingly apologetic. In a 2005 article in the Arabic-language magazine *Elaph*, the journalist Nabil Charaf Eddine detailed the shock of Iraqis traveling in Egypt who watched Cairenes demonstrate in support of the Iraqi “insurgents.”³³ When the Iraqis complained, they were lectured about U.S. imperialism. For Yanar Mohammed, opposition to imperialism should in no way condone indiscriminate killings of civilians by fundamentalists.

The Algerian feminist historian Anissa Hélie wrote an article called “The U.S. Occupation and Rising Religious Extremism: The Double Threat to Women in Iraq,” which reflected this view in 2005, at the height of the post-Saddam killing frenzy. In it, she criticized both the U.S. military intervention and the response of the Iraqi extreme Right. She noted that in the West, “[T]here is a tendency within some leftist and feminist circles to label Muslim extremists—who kill, rape, kidnap women and girls and openly target civilians as ‘the resistance.’ This is highly problematic. . . . There are plenty of groups that reject the U.S. occupation yet do not engage in violence or human rights violations.”³⁴

Sadly, someone on the left in the West can always be counted on to attack women of Muslim heritage who raise such concerns. Corinna Mullin, a lecturer in Middle East politics at the London School of Economics, accused Hélie in an online response of Orientalism, and of “mimicking Bush.”³⁵ Meanwhile, Iraq’s fundamentalist armed groups, whom Hélie “dared” censure, were hunting gay men and blowing up the Iraqi Red Crescent, Iraqi Chaldean churches, and lines of young Iraqi men waiting to get desperately needed jobs as policemen. How could the U.S. occupation ever justify these crimes?

Yanar Mohammed tells me that because of her open criticism of fundamentalists, she has increasingly limited opportunities to speak to the media, and progressive groups in the West no longer invite her. There

seems to be an unwritten rule on the Western left that women of Muslim heritage are only allowed to criticize the violence of Western men. (Of course, on the Western right, the opposite is true—they can *only* criticize Muslim men.) Why do those we call Muslims have to accept one kind of violence or the other, when, like anyone else, they are demanding better choices?

Even after all they have been through, Iraqis have not given up on those better choices. When I meet Yanar in June 2011, she is fresh from her country's version of the Arab Spring. Smiling and optimistic, she tells me that Iraqis, like Algerians, sometimes cope with fundamentalist terrorism through comedy. Laughing ruefully, she told me a terrorism joke from 2006. "A jihadi gets into a taxi, very frustrated because he can't find Americans near whom to explode himself. He can't find a good group of Iraqis to explode himself near either. So, he decides to get in a taxi and explode himself. So the taxi driver tells him, 'Please, I don't want to have dinner with the Prophet. Please do it by yourself.'"

FEAR IN THE STOMACH IN THE LAND OF THE BRAVE

Although I was in no hurry to have dinner with the Prophet either, I decided I had to go back to Afghanistan. I am drawn to this country because what happened here is inextricably linked to what happened in Algeria. Many of the worst fundamentalist killers in my father's homeland had come here to fight the so-called jihad and then brought their training home. In fact, my guesthouse in Kabul on this trip turns out to be on the same block as a former hostel for Arab jihadis. Algerians call them "Afghans," but the appalled Afghans to whom I explain this politely say, "We call them Arabs."

I am also compelled by Afghanistan because I have never seen such resilience anywhere. Despite decades of agony, Afghans endure. It is no idle boast when a sign at Kabul Airport says, "Welcome to Afghanistan. Land of the Brave."

While gearing up to come back here, I learn much that is helpful when I write about terrorism. I had been trying to understand the French-language expression *peur au ventre*, which so many Algerians

used in telling me about the nineties. Literally, it means "fear in the stomach." Now I understood it exactly.

Almost no one has to live with fear in the stomach as much as a woman member of the Afghan Parliament like Fawzia Koofi. She is also the deputy speaker of its lower house and an aspiring candidate for the presidency in 2014. The Afghan Parliament building sits in a neighborhood called Karta-I Se, in western Kabul. Getting in for my appointment takes forty minutes from gate to meeting room, with multiple searches and a series of identity checks. I am asked repeatedly what I am doing here and whether Karima is my real name. Later, Fawzia Koofi apologizes profusely, but I repeat that I am glad to see the layers of protection. She and her colleagues need them.

The parliamentarian has the youthful gravitas of someone who has known danger. She is from the mountains of northeastern Afghanistan, near Badakhshan. Her skin is light against her dark hair and she wears a white jacket and a scarf with gold-colored trim. Beneath her long skirt, I glimpse open-toe pumps. Like any high-powered person elsewhere, Fawzia checks her phone constantly while answering my questions.

We talk at length about how ordinary Afghans have reacted to the emergence of suicide terrorism here, which, for all the outrages of the past, is a relatively new phenomenon. "It is strange that extremism can change the mind of people to kill themselves," she exclaims, genuinely bewildered that Afghans could do such things. There is no popular movement against terrorism by armed groups per se, she notes, but civil society groups that work for war victims generally have taken up the issue. "Everybody is against suicide attacks. The mullahs in the mosque talk against them." Unfortunately, the weight of public opinion has not yet been able to stop them.

I ask why, despite the obvious dangers, she is going to run for president in 2014. "Well," she replies, "I don't know if I'm going to survive until then." It turns out she had been invited to the dinner the previous week where another member of Parliament, Mohammed Hashim Watanwal, was killed, along with a top presidential aide. The diners were beset by two Taliban gunmen wearing suicide vests. Fortunately, she had chosen not to go. In addition to facing such broader risks, she has also survived a direct assassination attempt.³⁶

As for her presidential campaign, “I’m not running just for the sake of running. If I read my people’s minds, they want change, whether it comes from a woman or a man. I had mullahs who were supporting me.” She tells me one of the mullahs in her camp was asked by the BBC, “Why would you support this lady?” He replied, “In Islam, it doesn’t say man or woman, it says anybody who serves you better. If they are honest, you vote for them.”

In light of such endorsements, Fawzia asserts, “If I am elected, it is a success. If I am not elected, my messages are out there.” Her messages to Afghans are about justice and social security. She also has a message for the world: “I want to demonstrate a different face of Afghanistan. It is not only Taliban and terrorism that this country produces.”

Koofi has paid a personal price for trying to represent an alternative Afghanistan. She spends little time with her daughters, telling me flat out, “I don’t have time for them. When I change clothes, that’s the only time they come to my bedroom and they ask questions. I tell them, ‘Can you let me change?’” Her daughters do not give up. “They say, ‘Mom, after you change, you go to the guestroom and you’re busy with the guests and when you come back you sleep and we don’t have time to talk to you.’” Fawzia confesses, “It’s true.” The guests are not social visitors but often women coming to seek her help in dealing with such problems as domestic violence and divorce.

When I learn she is a widowed mother, I have to ask again how she lives with the hazards she faces. “It’s not something exceptional for me. This is part of life for every Afghan, every day. If they’re at home, if they’re working. They are all not safe.”

I try to grasp what it must do to a society for everyone to have *peur au ventre*.

Fawzia Koofi does not take the dangers she faces lightly but has a specific purpose in speaking out, come what may. “If I keep quiet and if others keep quiet, that means we accept the situation.” She feels the same moral imperative to act as Diep Saeeda does in neighboring Pakistan. “My silence, another woman’s silence, is an illegitimate response to extremism and fundamentalism and Taliban.” In 2012, she becomes one of the leading voices pushing for pursuit of those—such as Tali-

ban Mullah Abdul Khaliq—who orchestrated the public “execution” of a woman named Najiba for alleged adultery. Fawzia Koofi presses local authorities and U.S. military commanders alike, still a voice of conscience no matter the danger.

In addition to her civic commitment, another purpose closer to home also motivates everything Fawzia does—the future of the daughters who come to talk to their overtaxed mother when she is changing. “I’m also doing it for my daughters because I don’t want them to have to struggle every day to go to school.” She knows all too well what that is like. “I had to convince my family to allow me to go. My mother was every day arguing with my brothers, ‘She has to go to school.’ My brothers were saying, ‘Well for a woman, she can read and write. That’s fine. Why should she go?’”

The fact that Fawzia got an education nonetheless, made it into politics and even into Parliament, is a sign of the progress that has been possible here in spite of everything. “Now for my daughters, it’s a matter of choice which school they go to. I don’t want to take away that opportunity from them.”

Preserving these freedoms for her daughters, for other daughters, drives her. That still does not make it easy for her children to accept her absence. “They are not happy with what I do sometimes, because I’m too busy. And in fact, I haven’t had lunch yet,” she concludes. Engrossed in all she has been saying, I realize it is 3 p.m. and I have kept her far too long. Fawzia Koofi has been too polite to say so.

I am reluctant to say good-bye to this impressive parliamentarian, who tells me she does not know how long she will live, who dreams of running for president because she wants better choices for Afghanistan’s daughters, who will not give in to terrorism—but the driver is waiting nervously outside and she is busy. On the way back to the guesthouse, I mull over what it means for the legislature of a country to be so under threat its members must wonder whether they will survive until the next campaign. They must be separated from their constituents by layers of protection. Fawzia Koofi knows there can be a price for security precautions, however necessary. “Sometimes a strong reaction toward extremism of any kind creates another type of extremism. We

need to keep the world open." It is ironic to her, given all she has risked; that, "in many airports in the world now if I show my passport, I'm Muslim and Afghan. I get an extra search."

WHY YOU RISK NOT LIVING

The chief prosecutor of Herat Province enters surrounded by four large men with four huge guns pointed downward. Maria Bashir looks small amid her guards, though she stands straight and sure among them. She wears a coat and a neat animal-print scarf and looks younger than her forty-one years. In her office, deep red carpets adorn the walls, and low tables bear plastic flowers and dishes of raisins and dried chickpeas. Maria Bashir sits at her formal glass-topped desk in the corner, on which stands an Afghan flag.

Her quiet way of speaking indicates she means business and has no need for bluster. She is the first and only woman chief prosecutor in Afghanistan. I am grateful that bodyguards fill the antechamber of her office, for the contemporaneous risk she faces is among the most significant of anyone I will interview.

"Before, I had three guards. After that the number increased to eight. Now that I have seen a lot of the difficulties, it is twenty-three. I cannot go anywhere freely which is a big change. Because of that, my life is a little interesting." It turns out "a little interesting" is a euphemism for being subjected to bomb attacks that could have killed her children. "Three years ago there was an explosion near my house, and fifteen minutes earlier my children were playing in that spot. Two of my guards were injured. One lost his leg." Maria Bashir tells me very calmly that she cannot send her children to school anymore—I learn later that their father stays at home with them. The police tell her regularly that she is being targeted by suicide attackers. To prove the point, her would-be assailants once sent an envelope to her house containing three bullets.³⁷

Bashir came to work in Herat, her husband's hometown, back in the nineties, starting as an investigator in the Prosecution Office working on crimes against women. When the Taliban took over and drove women out of work, Maria Bashir started a school for girls at home. As a

result, the Taliban imprisoned her husband. After their fall from power, she became an investigator again. Then, since 2007 Maria Bashir has been the chief prosecutor.

When she first started, she said, "All the people believed a woman could not do such a position. They believe that in Islam a woman cannot be a judge. So I said, 'I am not a judge. I am a prosecutor.'" Many said her office would close within a month. As they began to evaluate her work, however, Bashir feels that most people came to accept her. Today, she still focuses on violence against women, which she says is the most important area in her mandate.³⁸ The year before I meet her, the unit of ten lawyers Prosecutor Bashir had established to focus on gender-based violence worked on seventy-eight cases. In addition to women's cases, she investigates and prosecutes corruption—something that is dangerous everywhere, and nowhere more than here. "Fighting against corruption is a very difficult thing in Afghanistan. The people who receive bribes, they are a lot. The people who are fighting against this problem, they are less."

As a result of all of this work, the chief prosecutor is barraged with daily threats—on her phone, written threats, SMS threats—mostly from the Taliban, though she is also at risk from "smugglers, the people who receive bribes." Why does she continue? Maria Bashir says—with a smile of recognition I see before the interpreter finishes repeating my question in Dari—that this is what everybody asks. As the interpreter puts it, everyone asks, "Why you risk not living?" She answers without bravado. It is simply that a better future for the Maria Bashirs to come is, to her, worth the danger. With quietly ferocious role models like this, I am clear that the women of Afghanistan need solidarity and support, not patronizing or pity.

Given her official position, I did not want to put Bashir on the spot by inquiring what she thought of government negotiations with the Taliban, a question I put to many others. But that is exactly what she wants to address. "If we give them a place in the government, who will protect women's rights?"

Afghan women are disappointed, she continues, that the international community seems more interested in the success of the political talks with the Taliban than in supporting women. The interpreter is

explaining, but the point is too important to leave to him. She interjects in English, urging the international community to “not forget the promise about women’s rights because now they want the peace with Taliban.” She does not mince words. “The Afghanistan government, the international community and Americans forget women’s rights. And it’s very dangerous and all the Afghan women are worried about this.” It is awful to imagine what Bashir’s fate would be if the Talib were to regain any real power; for the last six years, she has been one of their chief targets in this area of western Afghanistan.

Back in the United States three weeks later, I see a headline on the Internet. An Afghan prosecutor has been assassinated. I Google desperately to find details.

Mercifully, I find she is not the victim, but, sadly, another Afghan prosecutor named Mohammed Azam in Helmand Province has been gunned down by two men on a motorcycle on his way to work, most likely at the behest of the Taliban. I hear Maria’s words in my head: “The situation of the women of Afghanistan will be better. We should pave the ground for this, even if we are killed.”

JOB IN AFGHANISTAN

When I worked with Horia Mosadiq on an Amnesty International fact-finding mission to Kandahar in 2005, I had not noticed that her nose was a little crooked. Today, she is lead researcher on Afghanistan for Amnesty, an organization she loves for its years of work on her country. We met again in Kabul in 2011, and in my guesthouse lounge eating Afghan almonds, she told me her personal story. At a mere thirty-seven years old, Horia embodies the agony of Afghanistan across the last few decades. She survived the trials of Job and never gave up.

Originally from Herat, Horia was the daughter of an independent politician. The family moved to Kabul when he found himself caught between the Communist government he did not want to join and its mujahideen opponents, who extorted protection money to spare his daughters. In the early nineties, Horia began documenting human rights abuses. “I started writing about what I was hearing, and what I knew myself. When I gave that to my literature teacher in

school, he said, ‘My recommendation would be to keep it to yourself. Anyone instead of me, if they look at your writings, you would be in big trouble.’” I ask if she kept what the teacher told her not to share. She did, until 1993, “when our home was hit by a rocket and we lost everything.”

I remember the noise of a rocket that fell not too far from where I stayed in Kabul in 1996—the worst sound I had ever heard, though it was nothing by Afghan standards. Someone far away in the United States or Germany had made the thing, had made money off of it. (Afghanistan does not manufacture rockets.) Some fundamentalist fighter on a hill above Kabul had fired it without worry about where it would land. Somewhere out there, hell had come to someone’s house. In February 1993, that hell came to Horia’s house.

By this time, she was studying at Kabul University and working for a news agency. The mujahideen war for the capital was in high gear. “That conflict was much worse than what we had in the ’80s. In mujahideen time, all the fighting was brought inside the cities. Thousands of women were raped and disappeared.” In this fraught environment, Horia’s mother struggled to protect her children after their father died of cancer. At the end of their street sat a mujahideen post famous for atrocities. “Every two or three nights we could hear the scream of a young woman taken out of her home for rape or for sexual slavery. And then the family were calling for help. And no one was there to help them.”

As Horia told me, the only thing that would stop the screaming was gunfire. “Then there was silence, darkness, fear, and nothing else.” The Cold War was over. Afghans were of little use to the Great Powers now. The fundamentalists whom the Americans and the Pakistanis and the Saudis had armed and trained to fight the Soviet Union were unleashed against their own people. “As soon as we were hearing those screams, my mother was putting me into the chicken house. I spent countless nights there.” With an international community that failed to step in, that was the only protection Afghans had—the chicken coops of Kabul.

On a Friday in February 1993, as her brothers were on the roof trying to fix the telephone line that had been knocked out by a previous rocket strike nearby, another rocket hit their house. Telling me what

happened next is excruciating for Horia, and I wonder if I should turn off the recorder. But she is determined to continue. It is her description of how she found her brothers in the street that is most terrible. "At the beginning, both of them were quite yellow and there wasn't any blood. I was just looking, and suddenly I saw like bones and meats and body parts. Slowly, the blood started coming from their bodies." At first Horia and her family tried to get the boys, both still alive, to the International Committee of the Red Cross Hospital. "My youngest brother who later died, he was having that much of severe injuries that at the time I had rushed to pick him up I thought, 'Oh my God, he will just turn to pieces if I just tried to pick him up.'"

Where was the "war on terror" to stop this hell? In Afghanistan, people lived through a continuous fundamentalist terrorist attack from 1992 to 1996, followed by a Taliban reign of terror made possible by the underlying chaos. The impact on people's lives was unbelievable. A Bosnian writer once suggested, "Fiction must be plausible, reality has no such constraints."³⁹ If you wrote Horia's story as a screenplay, you would be told it was implausible. Ahmad Reshad Mosadiq, her thirteen-year-old brother, a straight-A student who dreamed of being a doctor, had fallen to the rockets of the mujahideen. Now her fifteen-year-old brother remained gravely injured in a hospital lacking anesthetic and bandages. Horia's mother wanted to leave Afghanistan as soon as he could be moved, but Horia feared that if she herself went into exile without her fiancé, they might never find each other again. So they married in mujahideen Kabul. In time, Horia gave birth to their first daughter. A month later, her husband was injured in another rocket attack while riding his bicycle across town.

When her husband was finally able to travel, Horia Mosadiq and her family left this Dantesque Kabul for Pakistan and then Iran, but she continued working as a journalist, returning regularly to Afghanistan. This was no easy assignment. It meant submitting to a new way of dressing for the very first time. The burqa.

"I couldn't walk. I couldn't see my way through the screens. Because I wasn't used to the burqa, I and my husband, we sat in the front seat of a car to be transported to Kabul." They were stopped at a Taliban checkpoint where the guards "started shouting at my husband what an

immoral man he is, that he is allowing his wife to sit in the front seat of a car. 'You dishonored man. You don't know that we always say you should eat first, then feed your children, then feed your dog. If anything is left, then your wife should eat it. And you're bringing this bitch to sit in the front seat of the car.'"

As she recalls this Taliban hierarchy of beings, Horia's thoughts jump back to the present. "These are the people who the West want to negotiate with, who America has romanticized about sharing power with," she says sharply. Are there moderates among them, as the U.S. government has tried to suggest? "If they are moderate," she exclaims, "then why they are Taliban?"

After mujahideen rockets took her brother, after terror and exile and forced veiling in the fundamentalist hell the Cold War had made of Afghanistan, Horia has two more tales of the Taliban. "Once I was going to a shop to buy myself a piece of cloth because it was a marriage ceremony of my sister-in-law. I couldn't see the color of the cloth inside the shop and then I put my burqa off and started looking." It seems innocuous—buying fabric for a family wedding and using your eyes to check the shade. Not in Taliban Afghanistan. "Suddenly, something banged on my head and I could see just blood in my eyes. Then I was beaten so badly by an electrical cable by a Taliban, I got a broken nose and even now I think you can see here there is mark for that." Now I understand the slightly crooked nose that graces Horia's kind face. It is the trace of the Taliban.

Others bear marks of that time that are even more horrific. As Horia tells me, in 1999, in Kabul's Microrayani Square, she saw a thirteen-year-old boy holding a bunch of severed hands. "They were turned very dark blue." Those hands belonged to people who had been accused of theft and taken to Kabul Stadium for amputation. Horia remembers, "The boy shouted, 'Look, what the justice has done to the thieves. This is how the Sharia should be.'"

A few days after I hear this account, I visit Kabul's Ghazi Stadium. I stand quietly with Alem, the guide from my guesthouse, in the empty arena that is now used for sports again. In addition to amputation of hands and feet while the Qur'an was recited nearby, people were lashed here for adultery in Taliban times, and women were stoned to death.

Alem says the Talibs would go out into the city with loudspeakers and announce the punishments. People who had no TV, no radio, no entertainment, would come and watch. There are many different Muslim laws applied in many different ways, but from now on, whenever people talk about “application of the Sharia,” it is hard for me not to think about this place.

The call to prayer echoes nearby. *Allahu Akbar*. Taliban supporters would shout this out after each execution. As I pause in the stadium, I cannot help wondering what a Great God might make of what is done in places like this.

THE RULE OF THE SAME PERPETRATORS WHO KILLED MY BROTHER

To say Horia Mosadiq was delighted when the Taliban were overthrown would be an understatement. She and her husband moved back to Kabul. But Horia’s enthusiasm, shared by so many Afghans, quickly took its first blow in June 2002, when a traditional council was resuscitated to determine Afghanistan’s transitional administration and president. The gathering was dominated by warlords who pressured other delegates. “As soon as we arrived before the emergency *loya jirga* in 2002, I noticed how Lakhdar Brahimi [special representative of the UN Secretary-General] and Zalmay Khalilzad [U.S. special presidential envoy to Afghanistan], they allowed the butchers of Afghans to join the power,” Horia recounts. “Brahimi came with that famous statement that ‘we cannot sacrifice peace for justice.’”⁴⁰ This was a political disappointment for many, because “it was the huge demand from the Afghan public that they wanted justice.” It was also a very personal affront to those like Horia.

“We have to live under the rule of the same perpetrators who killed my brother, who are responsible for the destruction of this city. I couldn’t believe that.”

Horia Mosadiq does not know for sure which fundamentalists carried out the strikes that afflicted her family. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s onetime-American-backed Hezb-e Islami might have wounded her husband. The rocket that struck down her younger brother may have been

fired by Shura-e Nazar, a mujahideen coalition founded by Ahmad Shah Massoud that controlled Kabul’s Television Hill then. This explains her insistence on universal accountability. To get all who may have been responsible, you have to have a wide reach.

Like Algeria’s Cherifa Kheddar, Horia Mosadiq could not give up on the dream of accountability, no matter what it might cost her. Before the first presidential elections in Afghanistan in 2004, she wrote an article addressed to Hamid Karzai. “I told him, ‘You have the support of 25 million. You don’t need to seek support in the ring of war criminals. If you want to win the hearts of Afghans, bring justice that you promised.’” Some time afterward, “when I was leaving for my office, just by the doorstep of my residence, a man came and said, ‘Stop talking about all this nonsense. Like justice or war criminals. Because no one is going to listen to you.’” The warlords wanted to be left alone right where the United States had put them—safely in power. They would not tolerate Horia’s defiance. “‘We are not going to shoot you to make you a hero,’ the man continued, ‘you just need a car accident.’” She recounts this matter-of-factly. “It was a funny story, because I was on my way to a conference organized by NATO about women living in the new security environment. . . .”

In 2007, she founded a unique coalition called the War Victims Network to buck Parliament’s passage of amnesty laws by demanding justice. The network brought together four hundred survivors of war-related abuses from different time periods. Knowing their pain firsthand, Horia gave “a voice to the victims,” because “when there was a discussion about human rights violations it was always the perpetrators who were justifying what they have done. The victims’ voices were missing.” The War Victims Network held the first-ever public demonstrations against war crimes and for accountability in Afghanistan. Horia even convinced a survivor of gang rape to appear and publicly identify herself at one such protest in 2008, at a time when the leaders of the groups who committed many of these crimes were in increasingly powerful positions. Yet again people were telling Horia Mosadiq not to show herself, this time for her protection. “I wasn’t covering my face like many were telling me I should. I was believing the perpetrators should know I have no fear of them.”

That year, someone tried to break into her office and her home. Someone shot at her husband's car. Luckily, he escaped. Between March and June 2008, there were three attempts to kidnap her children. "Twice I was taken at the gunpoint but they didn't kill me, they just showed me the gun." Finally, she and her family had to leave Kabul yet again.

You can take Horia out of Afghanistan, but you cannot take Afghanistan out of Horia. "I didn't want to sit silent somewhere and weep." After fighting and surviving Muslim fundamentalist violence for nearly thirty years, she continues to come here often and to document what is happening to all the Horias she left behind.

SHOCKING THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD

"I decided I should work hard for accountability of the people who don't care what's going to happen to those who they attack." Horia Mosadiq melted down her own ordeal at the hands of Afghan fundamentalists into the fuel for her fight against all who had plagued her people. She casts the net of blame beyond Afghanistan's extremist thugs to include those who used them. "As much as I go deep into the issue of fundamentalism, I can also blame the West. In 1978, as soon as the communist coup d'état happened in Afghanistan, the Western countries started supporting these mujahideen groups." The West's allies then were "the extremists who made Islam a legitimate way of killing people."

In fact, Horia tells me, the United States aided the most fundamentalist of the mujahideen. "From among the fifteen mujahideen parties, they chose to support the most extremist person, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar—the biggest recipient of the U.S. aid." She finds the outcome predictable. "Now, I'm not really surprised what's happening in Pakistan and Afghanistan." While the rise of fundamentalism was not unexpected in light of these policies, it did represent a major reversal in the course of Afghan history. "We were not an extremist society before. In the 1970s, my mom was walking on the streets of Herat with her miniskirt and no one was even looking at her." That was during the heyday of the Herat Cinema, back in an Afghanistan where short sleeves were possible. "We have forgotten this history now. My children don't know any better life than, 'Cover yourself otherwise you will be attacked.'"

The world seems ready to accept that these will be the limits of Afghan lives. "Everything is a double standard. Justice, democracy, women's rights are just words and luxuries that they cannot afford for Afghanistan." She aspires to something better. "I want my daughter to be educated. I want her to be able to walk freely on the streets." Looking ahead, she doesn't see that future. Now she thinks the United States just wants to "get rid" of her country again. "They will abandon Afghanistan, and we will go to a situation that is much worse than the 1980s and you will remember my words."

I ask what she thinks of the peace movements in the West that focus on the withdrawal of international troops and mainly protest against civilian casualties by those troops—killings she herself campaigns against. "When they talk about civilian casualties, do they know that more than twenty thousand people were killed in one week during the rule of the Taliban? Do they know that in central Afghanistan, in Yakawlang, the worst massacre happened in 2001 when thousands of men, women, and children were beheaded by the Taliban?" The Yakawlang events of January 2001 unfolded like a version of the Srebrenica massacre, but in this case both the murdered and the murderers were Muslim.⁴¹ All adult males were rounded up. The younger men were methodically shot by firing squads; the elders were forced to load their bodies onto trucks. "In that time we didn't have any American presence," Horia reminds me. "Then why the Taliban were doing that to us?" They did not need an "anti-imperialist" excuse.

Should foreign troops stay longer? Horia wants the troops to leave in time, but "what many Afghans are fearing is the consequences of them leaving before we have a strong government and accountable national security forces capable of protecting the rights of Afghans." As much as the foreign troops have made dreadful mistakes and committed some grave crimes here, and foreign governments have a history of working with the fundamentalists, it is Afghanistan's past that makes her fear for its future. "Because we have the same experience when Russia left in 1989. Everything started collapsing. This time it will be even worse." The violence Horia fears in the wake of the departure of international military personnel—and of the political will of the international community likely to go with them—is that of both the so-called Northern

Alliance and the Taliban. She knows too well what it can mean to live under the thumb of such groups.

"We will have a bath of blood in this country."

Horia is taken aback that some progressives in the West still regard the Taliban as anti-imperialist. "I'm shocked some of them call Taliban the freedom fighters. I can't believe as a Muslim woman that we think that burqa is okay, the way if you want to impose Sharia it's okay." True to form, she then says something quite daring: "I can just tell them that if the Prophet Muhammad himself was alive now, he would have been shocked to see the way the fundamentalist groups are implementing Islam and Sharia on the people."

The Afghan human rights defender reminds me that the United States "owes our people not a big pardon but also a lot more. Because we Afghans were used as a human shield to defeat Russia." Americans, she thinks, must "pressure their government to pay its debt to the Afghan people, to help Afghans get rid of the fundamentalist groups." Some of what will happen now depends on Afghans themselves. But a great deal depends on choices made far away. Dr. Sima Samar, head of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, warns in a speech I hear six months later: "Everyone is talking about leaving Afghanistan with dignity. But they mean their own dignity, not that of the Afghans."

The young driver who takes me to the airport when I leave Afghanistan in July 2011 plays local heavy metal on the radio. We drive through Kabul afternoon traffic while the guitars roar from the dashboard, and I say good-bye—"Khod'hafiz"—to Afghanistan, to the schoolgirls walking determinedly with their bookbags, to the ubiquitous wedding halls; to the dust and hope and fear in the air, to all the progress they have made since I first came here in 1996. I think about what Horia Mosadiq told me about her dream for her country: "I really hope Afghanistan one day is a country where everyone can feel that they are a human being."

WHY I HATE AL QAEDA

Around the tenth anniversary of September 11, it all came back. The sense that the sky over Lower Manhattan is actively empty. The sorrow over such ghastly deaths. The equivocation by some who should know

better. The wound inflicted that day on the American psyche is real, especially in the New York area, where I teach for a decade after 9/11. The toughest people I know weep when the names are read at Ground Zero each year.

On the tenth anniversary, I thought a lot about the victims, like Father Mychal Judge, a gay Franciscan priest who was a Fire Department chaplain and died in the lobby of Tower One.⁴² Father Mike had ministered to AIDS patients and alcoholics and was a fan of Celtic rock band Black 47. Rushing to comfort victims of terror, he became one. Christian fundamentalist Jerry Falwell said of 9/11 a few days later that the feminists and the gays and all who tried to secularize America "helped this happen."⁴³ Though he subsequently apologized, Falwell clearly was unable to understand Father Mike's life or his death.

I also thought about Amenia Rasool, a Guyanan American Muslim woman who worked on the ninety-fifth floor of the World Trade Center. I first read about her in the *New York Times* remembrance section.⁴⁴ Though she had an arranged marriage, she and her husband reportedly shared domestic tasks. She worked as an accountant by day, but in the evening when her chores were done, she was said to enjoy watching taped soap operas and painting her fingernails. All of these things—women working outside the home, dramatic entertainment, and use of cosmetics—are often prohibited by Muslim fundamentalists, sometimes even on pain of death. Meanwhile, many American right-wing racists cannot conceive of a Muslim woman with such a life, nor do those who waved hateful signs in protest against the proposed Muslim community center in Lower Manhattan ("No Islamic Settlements in America") remember Amenia Rasool, even in death. She would have been "the other" to some of these Americans, but she was also "the other" for Muslim fundamentalists. Her life challenged simple narratives about what it means to be a Muslim woman in America.

On September 11, 2011, I wonder if it can really have been ten years since Amenia Rasool and Father Mike died, since nearly three thousand were killed along with them in less than two hours. To mark the occasion, I wrote a manifesto called "Why I Hate Al Qaeda." But I could not get it published. (Thankfully, it was eventually adopted by a feminist international law blog.)⁴⁵ One left-wing paper told me it was

irrelevant because of the Arab Spring. Perhaps it was too off-script for me, a person of Muslim heritage, to say I hate Al Qaeda rather than just to explain how what the United States has done historically is even worse. I do speak critically of U.S. foreign policy, but not when what I am speaking about is the murder of three thousand people on a single morning by Muslim fundamentalists. While the flag-waving on the right is distasteful, the inability of some on the left and in the human rights movement to talk about Al Qaeda, to pause for a compassionate, engaged response to terrorism before rushing to criticize the government's reaction, perplexes me equally.

I want to stand with those who refuse to equivocate. With Professor Muqtedar Khan, who wrote, “[W]hat happened on September 11 will forever be a horrible scar on the history of our religion.”⁴⁶ With Mehdi Hasan, who blogged, “[W]e have to declare . . . not in our name.”⁴⁷ With Aziz Junejo, who denounces terrorism on the doorstep of his mosque, reminding us that “Holy Quran, in Chapter 5, verse 32, forbids the killing of any innocent person, equating it to killing the whole of humanity.”⁴⁸ With Arab American journalist Ray Hanania, who calls on Muslim and Arab American organizations to denounce extremists and expel them from their organizations.⁴⁹ With the Canadian Muslim Sheema Khan, who opined, “[S]ilence is not an option in this struggle for the soul of Islam.”⁵⁰

I battled with “Why I Hate Al Qaeda” for a long time. Hatred is not a good thing. But I believe there are ideologies worth despising. As Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka said on the International Day of Peace in 2012 with regard to a fundamentalist group responsible for the deaths of some three thousand in his home country, “We have an organization which closes down schools, shoots faculty teachers . . . and turn most of the north into an educational wasteland. How can we reach the children there? We must first get rid of Boko Haram.”⁵¹ Movements like Boko Haram and Al Qaeda are so bent on the destruction of human beings that the only possible response is to abhor them—not the individuals in them but their collective political organization and what it does.

Here are just a few of the reasons . . .

WHY I HATE AL QAEDA

September 11, 2011

To start, there are 2,975 reasons from 90 countries. An unforgettable patchwork quilt of humanity that was disappeared on a Tuesday morning ten years ago. But that is only the beginning.

I hate Al Qaeda for all the human beings they have killed—the Africans, Americans, Arabs, Asians, Europeans, agnostics, atheists, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Muslims.

I hate Al Qaeda because they have murdered thousands of Muslims while claiming to represent them, a claim they make even while bombing mosques during Ramadan. Because they make the most sacred pronouncements, like *Allahu Akbar*—God is Great—into threats, into epithets.

I hate Al Qaeda because of the Caliphate of Doom they want to build.

I hate Al Qaeda because they hate women, gays, Jews, Christians, Muslims not like them, which is most Muslims. Because they only hate. And they make me hate too.

I hate Al Qaeda for the young Algerian fiancé who bled to death in his mother’s arms in Cherchell after a suicide bomber broke his fast this August; for Moustapha Akkad and his daughter Rima; for Danny Pearl, Amenia Rasool, and Father Mychal Judge, all of whom are no more because Al Qaeda is.

I hate Al Qaeda for the bombs of Baghdad, of Algiers, of Amman, of Dar es Salaam, of all the cities they have blighted like New York.

I hate Al Qaeda because they make it harder for people who look like my father to board an airplane. Because they confirmed every racist’s view of Muslims. And provoked responses that confirmed every anti-American cliché.

Ten years on, I am ready to stop hating Al Qaeda. I am ready to stop Al Qaeda.

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