

Martyrography in the Sunni and Shiite Worlds: A Comparative Study

Amélie Chelly, PhD EHESS

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of the Muslim martyr is a reality that the West must be able to grasp. It is a modern weapon of war with which we can no longer afford to be unfamiliar, both for obvious security reasons at home and in order to understand the spread and development of conflict in the Near and Middle East, Central Asia, and Asia.

Keywords: jihad, martyr, Shia, Sunni

La martirografía en los mundos Sunita y Chiita: Un estudio comparativo

RESUMEN

El fenómeno del mártir musulmán es una realidad que Occidente debe ser capaz de comprender. Es un arma de guerra moderna con la que ya no podemos darnos el lujo de no estar familiarizados, tanto por razones obvias de seguridad en el hogar como para comprender la propagación y el desarrollo del conflicto en el Cercano y Medio Oriente, Asia Central y Asia.

Palabras clave: yihad, mártir, Chiita, Sunita

逊尼派与什叶派中的死亡文化 一项比较研究

摘要

穆斯林烈士现象是西方国家务必把握的一个现实。出于明显的国内安全原因，也为了对出现在近东、中东、中亚和亚洲

地区的冲突的蔓延和发展进行理解，我们不得不熟悉这一现代战争武器。

关键词：圣战，烈士，什叶派，逊尼派

The phenomenon of the Muslim martyr is a reality that the West must be able to grasp. It is a modern weapon of war with which we can no longer afford to be unfamiliar, both for obvious security reasons at home and in order to understand the spread and development of conflict in the Near and Middle East, Central Asia, and Asia.

The term “martyrography” was coined by the sociologist Farhad Khosrokhavar. It was first used in the Iranian context during the Iran–Iraq war (1980–1988) to describe the phenomenon that occurred when the hope of paradise was supplanted by despair as the aspirations of the 1979 Islamic revolution were crushed. This resulted in the creation of an “individual in death” by separating an individual from society, so they could give their life for a state version of Islam. This concept, extended to include the modern Muslim martyr, must be defined as a phenomenon that pushes an individual to die *for a political cause that is regarded as sacred*. As surprising as this may seem from the outside, those who die as martyrs for this cause are not necessarily (or say they are not) Muslims. During the Iran–Iraq war, some Iranians of Armenian origin (who were therefore Christians) also embraced the notion of the nation as sacred and prepared for martyrdom with the same enthusiasm as Muslims. In dying as martyrs, they were held in the same familial, social, and institutional respect as Muslim martyrs who fell for the same cause.¹ Likewise, Iran also—during a public ceremony in 2014—unveiled a monument to Jewish martyrs² killed during the war against Iraq. The existence of this memorial seems to have been a surprise only to Westerners, as Iranians knew that the ideological aspirations and (often disenchanting) ideals of the early years of the regime had never restricted martyrdom to Muslims, but accorded it to all those who defended the Islamic Republic.

1 Note also that the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei visited the families of Christian martyrs during their Christmas celebrations. On December 27, 2015, the regime’s press service, the Tasnim News Agency, reported that the Leader visited the families. It even published a photo with a Christmas tree in the background, showing Ali Khamenei sharing food with the family of a Christian martyr. The image is far from insignificant, given that a Muslim cleric would normally consider eating food prepared by non-Muslims to be forbidden. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2015/12/27/954331/ayatollah-khamenei-visits-home-of-christian-martyrs-in-christmas-time>.

2 The memorial was erected in a seven-acre Jewish cemetery located in the south-east of Tehran.

These sacred political causes are modern in the way that they focus on nationalism. Starting from the principle that nationalism creates nations rather than the reverse, modern martyrdom and its martyrographic deviation also incorporate the sacrificial demands of the Palestinians as well as the Iranians, and includes, even more recently, the case of ISIS.

Therefore, martyrography is neither a purely Sunni nor purely Shiite phenomenon. A martyrograph must be defined not as someone who is prepared to value their faith in God more highly than their life on earth, but instead as someone who values the combination of despair and nationalist aspirations more highly than their life on earth. Let us make no mistake, although groups like ISIS seem to envisage the restoration of a utopian *Umma*³ with the attributes of a caliphate (which traditionally appear to be foreign to the concept of the nation) the embryonic institutionalization of this group, which no longer has a territory, has certainly adopted the outline of a modern nation state. Even if the experts are right in saying that ISIS is a transnational movement (and it must be admitted that its recruitment technique is transnational in the way it breaks down a sense of belonging to the nation of origin in order to create the feeling of belonging to an “authentic *umma*”), the institutional construction of the said caliphate conforms to those of modern nations (national currency, issue of identity papers, and so on).

Unlike Palestinian nationalist martyrs and martyrs of the Iranian state, the martyr of the utopian caliphate considers adherence to Islam a cornerstone. Despite these differences, it is now crucial to understand the shared psycho-sociological and ideological mechanisms that motivate present-day martyrographs.

CONSTRUCTING THE FIGURE OF THE MARTYR

THE IRANIAN MODEL

The contemporary Iranian Shiite *shahid*⁴ has been a strong influence on all other types of martyr. First, this is due to the displacement of *jihad*⁵ as defender of the Islamic faith (remembering that martyrdom is indissociable from jihad), by jihad as defender of a nation that is regarded as sacred. Second, and most importantly, it

3 The concept of the *umma* has three aspects. First, it is an ideal, second, a metaphysical concept, and third, a norm with a concrete structure, independent of all boundaries imposed by national borders. It is a calling to unity founded on the ideal of the *ummat al-nabi* (the community of the prophet). Louis Gardet uses the word *umma* as a synonym of *jame'eh* (or *jama'a*) meaning “society” or “community”: “The etymological root of ‘umma’ is reminiscent of the word *umm*, meaning ‘mother’, and hence the idea of a common origin; the root of *jama'a* highlights the idea of meeting and assembly” (“La cité musulmane” in *Dictionnaire de l’Islam, religion et civilisation* [Paris: Albin Michel, 1997], 204). The ideal city is traditionally a community that is bound together by a common faith, rather than blood ties.

4 *Shahid*, meaning “witness” in Arabic, is used to describe someone who is a martyr.

5 In Islam, *jihad* is indeed an obligation. It is the underlying concept behind the proselytizing side of Islam, meaning to apply force (whether physical or spiritual) on another will. Jihad can be defen-

is due to the doctrinal construction and current history of the new identity of the shahid. Iranian prerevolutionary literature (notably that of the leading ideologue, Ali Shariati) has contributed greatly to the humanization of the leading “twelver” Shiite martyr, Imam Hussein. In support of revolutionary aspirations against the regime of the Shah, ideologues worked on secularizing the figure of the martyr. Man must act as if he were Imam Hussein, sacrificing himself to escape oppression, even if it means (due to the influence of strongly leftist concepts) desanctifying the Imam, whose extraordinarily significant actions in facing certain death and fighting injustice were inspired by God.

Beyond this prerevolutionary ideological literature—which has made martyrdom a collective and human action rather than a specifically sacred one—the contemporary Shiite martyr is also a historical construct, particularly evident in the martyrdom during the Iran–Iraq war of the young Hossein Fahmideh. It was in this incident that the political promotion of the sacrificial individual found its expression. When the suicide bomber sacrificed himself in order to repel the Iraqi tanks that were advancing toward Kout Sheikh, the Iraqi army found themselves facing a new phenomenon: the sacrifice of a life as a weapon of war.

The weapon itself was not new, but its exploitation by the state during the Iran–Iraq war was to become an unprecedented policy: martyrdom became an institution. It became a means of social advancement that contributed to a redefinition of the social hierarchy, a means of massification, and a phenomenon supported by a state-run economy (through the *bonyads*).⁶

THE REVIVAL OF THE SHIITE MARTYR IN OPPOSITION TO TAKFIRISM

Martyrdom remains linked to the sacred, but it is the nation and its mouthpiece—the state—that is held to be sacred, rather than God. Moreover, it has a very different character from traditional martyrdom, a character that makes it a true weapon of war. In its modern guise from the beginning of the Islamic Republic, martyrdom is no longer a phenomenon that is extraordinary and therefore isolated. It has been humanized (everyone *can* be a martyr) and massified (everyone *must* be a martyr) through the propaganda machine. The modern figure of the Iranian martyr did not, however, die with the end of the Iran–Iraq war. Those in power were able to re-invoke its spirit when events required. For example, the symbol of Hossein

sive or offensive. It can be a personal struggle; that of the will against one's desires (i.e. those that conflict with what Islam advocates). This is what Ibn Rushd (Averroes) called the jihad of the heart. In this sense, jihad really means *ijtihad*, that is, a striving for internal purity. However, in the same way that the Koran includes both passages encouraging peace and mercy while also promoting war and violence, the term jihad also explicitly denotes war (there are 41 occurrences of the term in the Koran, of which 19 mean a “battle for the cause of God,” one of which is explicitly nonviolent, while the others relate to combat in the military dimension). Nonetheless, jihadism in its contemporary ideological form is external and linked to the fight against Western domination.

6 The *Bonyad-e Shahid* (Martyrs' Foundations) were established in Iran from 1979 to assist the destitute, injured veterans, and the families of martyrs of the revolution and the war.

Fahmideh was reused in 2010 during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, in the context of a "populationist" policy. Sadeq Mahsouli, Minister of Welfare and Social Security, gave a speech on April 16, 2010, when he explicitly called on Iranian families to have more children who could become new Hossein Fahmidehs, ready to die for their country. He said: "Children must be educated so that when they reach the age of thirteen they will be capable of imitating Hossein Fahmideh."⁷

Later, with the development of ISIS, the targets of Sunni jihadism changed. Now, according to *takfiri* logic, the Shiite was enemy number one. Before, jihadist groups such as Al-Qaeda saw the Jew or the Crusader as the enemy. Now, in the first instance, it is the Shiite that is demonized and marked out as a usurper of Islam, and therefore even more deserving of condemnation than those who, as infidels (Jews or Christian Crusaders), merely represent established figures of historical and civilizational domination. Iran is therefore in the firing line, as it embodies the model for political Shi'ism and is the great protector of Shiite populations worldwide. It was in this context that the figure of the Shiite martyr in the service of Iran was reborn. The state revived the martyrdom-loving ideological motivations drawn up three centuries earlier to fight this new power that aimed to eradicate the Shiite. The Islamic Republic defined the profile of a new type of martyr, the *shahid modafe-ye haram*, that is, "the martyr who protects the mausoleum."

This is a reference to the mausoleum of Zainab, daughter of Ali, which is enclosed within the Shiite Al-Sayeda Zainab Mosque in Damascus in Syria. Beyond the political interests that revived the figure of the martyr, the stated reason (the protection of sacred sites) is real and resonates with some who were mobilized. In July 2014, ISIS's destruction of the tomb of Jonah (an important figure in the Abrahamic faiths) in Mosul deeply traumatized people in the Middle East. We should also remember that Zainab's mausoleum itself was subsequently the target for several attacks, as were a number of other religious sites in Damascus including the Shiite Bab al-Saghir cemetery, the March 11, 2017, attack that was claimed by a former branch of Al-Qaeda, the Fateh al-Sham front. This attack killed 74, and was targeted at Shiite pilgrims, most of whom were Iraqi. Iran committed itself to opposing takfirism and becoming a model protector by calling for the defense of all sites sacred to all religions. The technique is therefore the same: political necessity is cloaked in religious rhetoric, invoking the sacred cause of the defense of the faith in order to defend, in the first instance, the nation and the Shiite communities' sacred sites, as well as those of other communities. Iran then swelled its forces against takfirism by recruiting Afghans who dreamed of Iranian nationality. In return for their sacrifice for "the defense of the mausoleum," combatants were promised that their families would be granted nationality. According to Human Rights Watch, martyrdom was revived in this way in 2013, principally to mobilize

7 Our translation. See the report of his speech on the BBC Persian Service website, 27 farvardin 1389/April 16, 2010 (in Persian):http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2010/04/100416_106_mahsouli_fahmide_.shtml.

the Shiite Hazara population. Officially, Iran does not send Iranian combatants to Syria, only military advisers.⁸ Iran promised to regularize the papers of undocumented Afghans who had fled persecution and therefore painted this pragmatic maneuver an ideological religious hue.

Furthermore, as a final example of the survival of the figure of the martyr in the current Iranian discourse, the state has retained and used martyrdom to honor national heroes, although it is definitely no longer the popular idealist aspiration it was during the early years of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Very recently, on August 9, 2017, the case of the combatant and military adviser Mohsen Hojaji, who was beheaded by ISIS fighters in Syria close to the Iraqi border, was used to revive the figure of the martyr. General Qassem Soleimani declared “I pray that God will grant us a destiny as glorious as that of the martyr Mohsen Hojaji,”⁹ and on August 21 in Tehran, the supreme leader himself praised the courage of the martyr Hojaji, in front of a gathering of managers and employees of a cultural institution. The young Iranian, whose death was filmed and broadcast, was described by the Iranian press using terms traditionally used to describe the martyr Hussein, the third Shia Imam: a horrible death suffered with imperturbable calm.

MARTYRDOM: A CULMINATION OR FAILURE OF NATIONALISM?

The new form of “sacred cause” takes the nation as its starting point, but it can very quickly be seen as no longer overlapping with the official international reality: martyrdom has become a transnational political statement. In the early days of the Islamic Republic of Iran, during the longest war of the twentieth century, martyrdom became the weapon of a revolutionary model that would spread through a Sunni versus Shiite view of the Middle East, particularly in the case of the Lebanese Hezbollah. Today, Iran is more engaged in realpolitik—a pragmatic power struggle—rather than an ideological analysis of its foreign relations, but it is precisely in this pragmatism that the Sunni/Shiite reading *may* in some cases find continuity. Iran targets Shiite populations that feel oppressed (not all Shiite populations) in order to extend its influence. A good example of Iranian pragmatism is its relations during the 1990s with Christian Orthodox Armenia, which have long been more cordial than those with Azerbaijan, where approximately 85% of the population are Shiite. In contrast, Shiite communities in countries such as Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and the Gulf States may be receptive to arguments presenting Iran as the nation that protects oppressed Shiites.

Nationalism is also central in the case of the Palestinian martyr, but unlike the Iranian martyr, this is in the future tense. In Iran, the martyr is clearly viewed

8 We know however, that the “Iranian Green Berets” were deployed in Syria. Ali Arasteh, deputy chief of liaison for the ground force troops, told the Iranian Tasnim News Agency on April 4, 2016, that commandos from the regular army were sent to fight ISIS in Syria.

9 Our translation.

as an example and source of inspiration, but the fundamental difference is that Iran has institutionalized its martyrs so as to protect the modern sacred view of the nation, whereas the Palestinian martyr is a symbol of despair in relation to the aim of one day building a nation. This stems from two obstacles that are put into perspective by Farhad Khosrokhavar in *Suicide Bombers: Allah's New Martyrs* (published in English in 2005):¹⁰ the fight against the Israeli army and the presence of a corrupt Palestinian authority, Fatah. The Palestinian martyr of the 1990s is the ultimate expression of despair, the hallmark of a nationalism condemned to fail to find its natural expression in a nation state. This form of martyrdom was therefore the new face of a failed nationalism, a nationalism that had not been able to incorporate failure into its ideology in order to rise above it. This is one of the major differences between the constructs of the martyr we have so far considered and the unprecedented phenomenon of ISIS. In addition to Islam as a key factor (one that is also central to Al-Qaeda, but expressed differently), the failure of a physical representation of the nation has been integrated into ISIS's ideology in such a way as to ensure its continuity.

MARTYROLOGY AS A WEAPON TODAY

THE POSTMODERN MARTYR

Although “the cult of the suicide bomber”¹¹ started as an Iranian phenomenon, and has certainly been a source of inspiration for all political movements that have in turn used martyrdom as a weapon, there are real differences that give ISIS's form of martyrdom a truly unprecedented character. First, it is founded on takfirism, which excludes all Muslims with a different view of Islam. But more importantly, as far as ISIS is concerned, it is a means of tapping into the modernity of Middle Eastern populations that pledge allegiance, as well as a way of recapturing the frustrated postmodernist aspirations of Western recruits.

How are we to understand this difference in how members of modern and postmodern societies aspire to martyrdom?

It was the birth of Khomeinist ideology that marked the entrance of Iran into modernity. Throughout the Iran–Iraq war, the population was *overwhelmingly* ready to enlist. During our interviews, we have been able to collect statements from former *tudehis*¹² and family members of political prisoners connected to the

10 Originally published in French as *Les Nouveaux Martyrs d'Allah* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002).

11 *The Cult of the Suicide Bomber* is the title of a documentary by Robert Baer tracing the birth and evolution of martyrdom (directed by David Batty and Kevin Toolis, 2005, Many Rivers Film, UK, 95 min).

12 The Iranian Communist Party *Tudeh* was created in 1941, and had very strong links with the Soviet Union. It emerged as a reaction against a law brought in by Reza Shah aimed at banning groups advocating a “collectivist” ideology, which effectively drove the communists underground. In 1978, members of the party played a leading role in the revolutionary process. After the fall of a regime

fadayin-e khalq.¹³ This communist group was vehemently opposed both to the regime of the Shah and subsequently to the Islamic Republic, which, seeing them as a substantial threat, proceeded to make arrests and order executions on a massive scale. These former communists explained that, due to their nationalism, some of them (especially the *fadayin-e khalq* for whom the world of armed struggle was much more familiar) asked to be freed in order to fight the Iraqi enemy, “to leave in order to lose their lives, at a time when ideals were to the fore. We refused to be martyrs of the Islamic Republic, but our attitude was to die in support of our people. Now, few are still prepared to die for an ideal. When I say few, I am talking about the Iranian people, not only us, the former *fadayin*.”¹⁴

These remarks are interesting insofar as they enable us to grasp two vital phenomena in understanding martyrdom: the first, a practical point, concerns why the Iranian population is no longer ready to die in the name of the sacred on an overwhelming scale. It is now only a minority that engages in this way, a minority that maintains a heroic image in the eyes of the population in the new context of conflict with takfiri political movements. For example, General Soleimani is popular and videos circulated on the Internet show him in Syria, surrounded by the sound of bombing, without a helmet, without protection, ready to risk his life, but without looking for death. Death is fundamental to the statement made by these videos, but is not the aim. Disillusionment with the post-revolutionary period, and especially with the aftermath of the Iran–Iraq war, has unraveled the ideological mentality making way for a nationalization crystallized by the demonization of Iran by the Saudis, neo-conservatives, and the rise of Sunni Islamic ideologies.

A second phenomenon is the view that Iran has entered the postmodern era. Having borne the brunt of holistic ideologies, and seen them fail, the population can no longer envisage dying in the name of an ideal, whatever it may be. The question of martyrdom is new and updated insofar as it seems to consist of both a battle against a postmodernist population that is disillusioned by mass movements (in Iran) and, in the case of new form of jihad like that of ISIS, modernist aspirations that are busy constructing a globalizing ideology that is driven by ideals and their finality in death. In this respect, the formation in 2015 of the Babylon Brigade in Iraq is an instructive example. This group of 800 Christian volunteer combat-

that silenced them, the party reappeared on the public scene, but once the Islamic Republic was established, a purge of members of the party began. Thousands of militants were arrested. Ayatollah Khalkhali (known as the “hanging judge”) sent a large number of them to the gallows. In 1982, the party leadership was imprisoned.

13 The *fadayin-e khalq* of the Iranian people was a clandestine Marxist–Leninist organization founded in the 1970s that resorted to guerrilla tactics.

14 Interview with a member of a family, 11 of whom were imprisoned during the Iran–Iraq war for their leftist beliefs, conducted during an inquiry into the link between disenchantment and entry into postmodernity.

ants embedded in the 100,000 strong Shiite Al-Hashd al-Shaabi militia (whose name means “mobilization of the people”) has clear links with the Islamic Republic. The term “martyr” can be clearly heard in the propaganda videos: “1,700 Martyrs we will avenge them one by one, and we will alleviate the pain and suffering of their mothers, wives and families, by the power of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵ The creation of this brigade proves that the Islamic Republic is reviving its model of martyrdom that is not founded on Islamic faith, and that this model is even more powerfully resonant when faced with a takfiri enemy that has been excommunicated, but also that the resurgence of this form of martyrdom is no longer aimed at ideological dissemination on a mass scale, but as an engagement that is perceived as defending the strategic influence that the state wishes to spread.

THE ISIS MARTYR: BETWEEN MODERNITY AND THE REJECTION OF POSTMODERNITY

The ways ISIS recruits jihadists are very illuminating and the arguments presented differ greatly depending on whether they are aimed at Western or Middle Eastern audiences. Arguments aimed at convincing Europeans play on the failures of postmodernity, such as a distaste for politics, corruption, a lack of ideals, the hardships of a consumer society, frustration linked to a lack of access to this consumer society, and a lack of meaning. Postmodernity is, of course, a reaction against the failure of the modernist project to attain absolute, universal truths, or a sense of history. It is in the context of this project that the great ideological systems, including holistic globalizing visions such as communism or Nazism, were born. In the West, these systems replaced traditional religions while taking on all their characteristics, such as the absolute truth of the ideology, the promise of happiness, a personality cult around the leader, and the meaning of life.¹⁶ Postmodernity is, roughly speaking, a resolve to reform the absolutes advocated by the modern ideological system, and is therefore the home of pluralism.

ISIS recruiters pull on these heartstrings and the group presents itself as filling the gap left by the renunciation of modernist ideologies. Recruitment speeches start with the failure element and then progressively deploy their ideology. On the other hand, when ISIS jihadists seek to swell their ranks from among Middle Eastern populations, they begin by presenting the ideological system before addressing the specific benefits that the ideology can bring on an individual level.

The view of martyrdom as promoted to Westerners builds on postmodern consumer society: it promises that abundance and pleasure that is forbidden in this world will be attained in paradise. For the martyr, that which is forbidden in life, is permitted in death. Moreover, the recruitment campaigns imply that alle-

15 Source: Propaganda video available on Youtube: <https://youtu.be/c8Mxhv4TTOA>.

16 The way ideologies function following a religious model has been termed “political religion” by Raymond Aron, or “secular religion” by Marcel Gauchet.

giance to ISIS and preparation for martyrdom cleanses the individual of their former dissolute lifestyle. The choice of martyrdom becomes a means of labeling acts of violence in the name of a supposed Good, and also a means of rehabilitation for someone who may have made bad choices during their life (such as delinquency, theft, violence, alcohol, or drugs)—a lifestyle that he will be able to legitimately resume in the afterlife. ISIS's version of martyrography is a continuation of postmodern aspirations. Honor is not a factor (whereas it was central to post-revolutionary Shiite martyrography), although it can still be invoked in ISIS recruitment speeches aimed at Middle Eastern populations, which seem to only just have entered the modern era.

Traditional Middle Eastern societies are based on a codified sense of honor (think of the motivations for honor crimes), itself founded on an overarching culture of honor that no longer exists in postmodern Western minds that are searching for meaning. Honor is a Middle Eastern cultural and social glue that is fused with the sacred and the taboo. It is this factor that has clearly been mobilized to trigger the ideological and martyrographic aspirations of Middle Eastern populations. During our interviews with Iraqi former would-be jihadists, we realized that there is an enormous gulf between their attitude and that of European jihadists. One of them said, "Martyrdom is a question of honor. The martyr is someone who cleanses the honor of a whole family, a whole tribe, even the whole of humanity. It has replaced art, it is the route from error to truth, from injustice to justice and a martyr saves humanity."¹⁷

Interviews with Westerners strongly highlighted the desire for personal salvation and individual satisfaction. In a letter sent to the press before he died as a martyr, a French jihadist explained that "before, I went to night clubs, I drank alcohol, I was a *dounia* guy [interested in material goods]. Jihad has become an obligation. [...] Death is a reward for me."¹⁸ This testimony is not unique. Interviews with European jihadists almost always reveal an individual's quest for personal salvation. Almost all bear witness to dreams of bliss defined by an abundance of pleasure. In other words, happiness through consumption.

To conclude, although the Iranian model of martyrography of the 1980s has certainly inspired various Islamist political movements, whether Shiite or Sunni, it must not be confused with the aspiration to martyrdom promoted by contemporary jihadist movements such as ISIS. First, although massification seen in the new takfiri ideologies is indeed similar to Iranian policies from the early years of the Islamic Republic, it is no longer the case in Iran today. The martyr is clearly

17 Interview with a 26-year-old disenchanted Iraqi jihadist conducted in April 2015. However, he had not ruled out the idea of universal justice, which he was seeking outside the sphere of jihadism.

18 Statement sent to a journalist "for publication before I die" by Salahudine, a 27-year-old French citizen who left to become a jihadist in Syria. Source : <http://www.france24.com/fr/20140212-pourquoi-je-veux-mourir-syrie-confession-djihadiste-francais-temoignage-martyr>.

still a central figure that can be revived according to needs and strategic interests, but it is no longer an idea that calls out to all members of society. Second, the Iranian model of martyrdom that views the nation as sacred does not have Islam as a cornerstone, unlike takfirism which by its very nature does not permit martyrdom to be extended to other religious viewpoints. Finally, the attraction that European jihadists have for the new form of martyrdom is clearly a postmodern phenomenon that finds a resonance in individualist and materialist influences. The cult of the martyr as an expression of collective salvation is a modern concept that is able, on occasion, to be revived in the context of an activism that aims to sanctuarize and exert political influence.