Gender, Globalization, and Violence

Postcolonial Conflict Zones

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> Do not deplore, do not laugh, do not hate, but understand.
> —Baruch Spinoza (In Hage 2003: 89)

> My body is a barrel of gunpowder that burns the enemy.
> —Andaleeb Takatka (In Hasso 2005: 29)

INTRODUCTION

Although suicide attacks have been a part of human conflicts since antiquity, it is only recently that women have received the attention of international news in their roles as suicide bombers.[1] The practice is certainly not superior in number or different in strategy from male suicide bombing, yet the phenomenon of female suicide bombing has raised a far greater alarmism, bewilderment, and consternation than its male counterpart has. Whereas male suicide bombing is often framed as gender neutral and related to extreme techniques of warfare, female suicide bombings get framed in gendered terms and provoke a need for a deeper understanding of how women not only engage in militant action, but decide to die for it. Furthermore, it is explained through personal rather than political motivations, often reconfirming patriarchal and orientalizing patterns. This has to do with not only the assumption of women as creators and protectors of life, and therefore as nurturers rather than murderers and killers, but also with the uneasy overturning of the private and public sphere, with women suddenly coming upstage and disrupting many of the expectations and stereotypes about their roles in the family and society at large and as symbolic models for the nation.

The first female suicide bombers appeared in the 1980s with the recruitment of female suicide bombers for Hezbollah and the Tamil Tigers. However, it was only with the second Intifada after 2002,[2] which came after the Oslo Accords and the deterioration of the peace process, that the exponential increase of women participating in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict became more visible and begun to capture international attention. Wafa Idris was the first Palestinian woman to blow herself up on 27 January 2002, followed by many other female suicide bombers within the Palestinian–Israeli conflict.

Although female suicide bombers belong also to a wide range of secular organizations, it is often framed as an "Islam issue emerging after 9/11," generating a new range of interpretations and misrepresentations in the spaces where issues of East and West, gender and politics, religion versus secularism, get magnified. Most of the Western analyses have focused on whether female suicide bombers were trying to prove their equality to men or achieve individual redemption. In the first case, the analyses show that women did not achieve betterment or structural changes of their position within Palestinian society. In the second case, personal and psychological motivations are ascribed to the suicide action, often concluding that these women were either "improper," "shamed," "undesirable," or not "redeemable" within the traditional patriarchal order. Suicide bombing is then reductively interpreted as an operation of martyrdom that would be performed by women in order to be rescued from their fallen status as divorced, barren, adulterers, daughters or sisters of traitors, and so forth (see Brunner 2005; Naaman 2007; Rajan 2011).

The analyses have been mostly split between a Western front in which a feminist liberal approach, which does not recognize or read the agency of these women, dominates (e.g., Applebaum 2002; Berko 2007; Bloom 2005; Davis 2003; Skaine 2006; Speckhard 2009; Victor 2003), and approaches based on a broader historical contextualization, as well as Arabic media sources and testimonials, in which the same national and religious motivations driving male Palestinian suicide bombers emerge (e.g., Hage 2003; Rose 2004; Hasso 2005; Pape 2005; Asad 2007; Brunner 2007; Naaman 2007; Rajan 2011). In both cases a different intervention needs to be made in order to reframe the notions of agency and political participation in terms that do not become co-opted into either a narrative of emancipation or of religious political militancy. The explanations are often much more complex, intertwined, and difficult to grasp than their male counterparts. Yet the spectacularization of the phenomenon, along with the rise to cult and celebrity status of the victims/heroines/perpetrators, raises important questions of framing and deciphering that can never be univocal or exhaustive. This illustrates how continuing to exclusively use a gender-based approach to explain the phenomenon of Palestinian suicide bombers limits our understanding of the wider implications at stake, both historically and politically. An exclusively political analysis fails to grasp the longer continuum of women's participation in militant movements.

It is not the scope of this chapter to provide an exhaustive or extensive overview of the different forms of participation of women in revolutionary, terroristic, or independence movements (more can be found in the introduction to this volume) but to analyze the discourses and framing done by international media, artists, and scholars, especially in the Palestinian case, in order to make sense of the phenomenon and to offer a counter voice that, when possible, more adequately recognizes the contextualized agency of militant women. This chapter aims, therefore, to connect the spectacular

attention media has given to, and the recent scholarly interest in, this recent phenomenon with a feminist and historically informed analysis of women's participation in these movements as connected to a longer history of women's participation in anticolonial or liberation movements. The scope is to offer a possible alternative reading of female suicide bombing that escapes the narrow gendered or religious interpretations done by the media or by scholarly fields entrenched in their own disciplinarity, making an intervention from a feminist and postcolonial perspective.

PALESTINIAN SUICIDE BOMBERS

Wafa Idris was a twenty-eight-year-old Palestinian who claimed to belong to the al-Aqsa Martyr Brigades. She blew herself up in a Jerusalem shopping mall on 27 January 2002, killing an eighty-one-year-old Israeli man and injuring more than one hundred. She became a role model for the participation of other women to come. Idris carried the bomb in a backpack, rather than strapped to her body. Prior to this attack, women had only helped plant bombs; the use of a backpack and the lack of the usual note or video led to confusion regarding her suicide motives. Wafa Idris's suicide took the world by surprise, including Palestinian leadership, who initially tried to deny any association with the attack. After positive reaction in the Arab world and with people seemingly ready to accept the role of a woman as martyr (*shahida*), the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for the attack. Idris's attack, with the seal of approval of the militant leadership, then served as a model for other women to follow. Her story points to the genesis of Palestinian female suicide bombers, showing how male leaders overcame their resistance to female participation after realizing not only the success of women in bringing these missions to completion (managing to bypass checkpoints more successfully than men), but also the international attention they managed to attract for the situation in these conflict zones.

Wafa Idris was the first female suicide bomber in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and has been followed by many others (including several failed attempts). Several female suicide attempts can be listed in a quick succession, showing overlapping strategies and choices of actors, to show how the phenomenon took an alarming turn around the period of 2002 and onward:

- 27 January 2002: Wafa Idris, twenty-eight, first female suicide bomber in Palestinian territories. University student, graduated. She detonated herself downtown Jerusalem. Affiliated with the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.
- 27 February 2002: Dareen Abu Aysheh, twenty-one, student at al-Najah University in Nablus. Supermarket in Jerusalem. From the Deheisheh refugee camp. Her male cousin had blown himself up in Tel Aviv. Affiliated with al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.

- 29 March 2002: Ayat al-Akhras, eighteen. Supermarket in Jerusalem. From the Deheisheh refugee camp. Engaged. Recently lost a close relative. Affiliated with al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.
- 12 April 2002: Andaleeb Takatka, twenty, from Bethlehem. Attack in mall in central Jerusalem. Affiliated with al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.
- 19 May 2003: Hiba Daraghmah, nineteen. Blew herself up outside a shopping mall in Afula. Both Islamic Jihad and al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed that Hiba was a member of their organization.
- 4 October 2003: Hanadi Tayseer Jaradat, twenty-nine. Was a real estate attorney. Her younger brother had been killed by security forces. She detonated herself at a restaurant in Haifa.
- 14 January 2004: Reem Salih al-Rayasha, twenty-one. Came from a wealthy family with two children. She was the first female suicide bomber associated with Hamas. Strapped her suicide device to her leg, saying at the checkpoint that she had metal from surgery.
- 22 September 2004: Zayneb Abu Salem, eighteen. Blew herself up at the police checkpoint in Jerusalem. From the Askar refugee camp in Nablus and affiliated with the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.

The emergence of female suicide bombers is a social phenomenon that has shocked both the West and the Arab world, signaling an escalation in the conflict. The reactions in the media and the news to Idris's and the other female suicide bombers' actions are diverse, but they all focus on recurring stereotypes and the need to label these women as either martyrs, heroes, and angels of death or monsters, terrorists, and mad. The celebratory labels, along with *shahida* (female martyr), include *bride of Allah, daughter of Palestine*, or even *mother of the nation*. But the understanding of these phenomena cannot be reduced to gendered metaphors and ethnic labels. Instead, the disparate reactions all signal a new ideological crisis of the perceived role of women in armed struggles and in religion and traditional gender settings. The problem with most interpretations, from both Eastern and Western analysts and scholars, is that while debating these actions they often collapse gender, ethnicity, and religion into one. As Dorit Naaman writes:

> Regardless of the narratives the women tried to communicate in their actions and videos, the dominant narrative in the Arab public sphere (political, media and local) tied these women into heteronormative narratives as mothers and brides, narratives that affirmed the gender status quo. Whether discussing mythic brides or monsters, the discourse in both the Arab and the West generally avoids uncomfortable questions of subjectivity, agency, and aggression, all qualities that are not befitting women according to patriarchal norms. (2007: 946)

We can assert, however, that the use of female suicide bombers is a relatively recent happening that is not per se linked to Islamic contexts, although

these are the ones that receive major international attention. The use of female suicide bombers is to be found also in secular organizations such as the Tamil Tigers in Sri-Lanka, which is a Marxist-Leninist group whose members from Hindu families strongly oppose religion. In the case of Palestine, some female suicide bombers left video, audio, or written statements before they killed themselves. Many, such as Wafa Idris, left nothing. For most of them the motives can be only speculated and this has enabled interesting gaps in the representations, not only between male and female suicide bombers, but also in which a revival of orientalistic representation and occidentalist positioning has surfaced. As already mentioned, Palestinian women are also neither the first nor the only female suicide bombers, even though they have attracted the majority of the international media attention. Therefore, a brief excursus in the history of female suicide bombers will be offered here to place the Palestinian case in the wider context of women's participation in armed struggles—a context that transcends the narrow boundaries of religion and the "War on Terror."

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS

Idris was not the first Palestinian woman to be recruited to fight for national liberation. Women have taken part in the Palestinian struggle since its onset, with some, including Leila Khaled and Dalal el Moughrabi, having partaken in highly publicized hijacking operations in the 1970s. Idris was not the first female suicide bomber, either; Hezbollah and the Tamil Tigers have utilized female suicide bombers since the 1980s. The first female suicide bomber was a seventeen-year-old girl named Sanaá Mehaydali, sent by the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP/PPS), a secular pro-Syrian Lebanese organization, to blow herself up near an Israeli convoy in Lebanon in 1985.

Female suicide bombers are/were involved in several other armed organizations in the Middle East, such as in Lebanon, Syria, and Kurdistan, and in the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party). They have also been used in the conflict in Sri Lanka, in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, which has been considered dismantled since 2010)—where they are called black tigresses and enumerate the highest number of female suicide bombers. Among those is Thenmuli Rajaratnam, known as Dhanu, the first and most famous Tamil Tiger female suicide bomber. She killed Rajiv Gandhi, the Indian prime minister, in 1991. Her attack has been defined as 'one of the most horrible of all assassinations in the modern world' (Rajan 2011: 7). Rosemarie Skaine in her book on *Female Suicide Bombers*, tried to dig out the personal and psychological motivations for the suicide attack, confirming the prejudiced gendered reading of this figure:

> Four of her brothers were killed in conflict; her home was looted and she was gang-raped. Dhanu belonged to the LTTE from the mid-1980s

and trained to be a black tigress in the late 1980s. She was the first to use a suicide belt. On May 21, 1991, she killed India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and herself by detonating an explosive vest after bowing down at Gandhi's feet during an election rally. (2006: 51)[3]

Suicide bombers have also been involved in the Chechen–Russian conflict, with a special female unit called the Black Widows. Black Fatima was a famous Chechen rebel whose specific function was to recruit women *shahidas*, martyrs for Chechnya who become Black Widows. As Skaine writes about Black Fatima:

> She will appear at the homes of would be attackers and has discussions behind closed doors. After the prospective suicide bomber disappears with the Black Fatima, the parents are often not informed why. They learn later either from members of the terrorist group or by recognizing their daughters on television footage. (2006: 47)

Within the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, women suicide bombers can be a part of many different groups, such as al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (of which Wafa Idris was part), Fatah, to which Wafa Idris was connected, Palestinian Nationalists, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and Hamas. This phenomenon is challenging even more conservative groups, such as al-Qaeda, to reconsider the utility of the Muslim woman on the front lines of Jihad. On 17 March 2008, a female suicide bomber blew herself up in Karbala, Iraq, killing more than forty people and injuring more than sixty. Al-Qaeda (which is blamed by the US military for most of the large-scale bombings in Iraq) has increasingly recruited women wearing suicide vests to carry out strikes since tighter security and protective concrete walls have made car bombings more difficult. In February 2008, two female bombers killed ninety-nine people in two crowded Baghdad pet markets. Several attacks have followed, generating much upheaval and claims that al-Qaeda recruited mentally unstable or mentally retarded women for the actions. However, as Pape (2005) argues, no proof of these assumptions can be confirmed.

A case that has created much upheaval was that of the first Western female suicide bomber, the Belgian Muriel Degauque, who exploded herself on 9 November 2005 in Baquba, Iraq, raising much debate about the issue of Western female converts. Muriel Degauque was raised as a Catholic, married the radical Islamist Issam Goris, the son of a Belgian woman and Moroccan father, and converted to Islam and committed to Jihad. She was recruited in Europe to fight with Zarqawi. The couple entered Iraq via Syria in October 2005. He was shot before he could detonate his charges, while she detonated her vest amid an American military patrol, wounding one American soldier. Only some papers and her passport have been recovered (Smith 2005).

In her article entitled 'Muriel's Wedding' (2011), Katherine Brown analyzes how the construction of Muriel Degauque and her death in the news media can tell us something about Western notions of sex, security, and religion, as well as the stability and hegemony of dominant social discourses. Even though Muriel Degauque's death in Iraq has been newsworthy precisely because she is female, European, and white Francophone, news media have constantly focused on her Muslim identity in highly gendered terms by emphasizing the reasons for her attack as based on, on the one hand, her marriage to a Muslim (stressing that he was the reason for her conversion, therefore undermining her choice in the process), and, on the other hand, the fact that her youth was troubled and exposed to risky behavior (which made her more prone to radicalism). Media further highlighted that her attack in Iraq threatens the security of European space, thus turning her into an "enemy within." As Brown writes, even though Degauque is part of a growing trend of European radical female terrorists, many reports clearly emphasize her exceptional status, saying that 'in particular [she is] not a "real" woman or not a "true" European' (2011: 716). Brown further comments:

> This racial Othering of a 'white' suicide bomber shows not only the ways in which inherited accounts of gender (femininity) and race are disrupted by her actions, but also how prevailing narratives stabilize dominant characterizations of 'women' and 'European.' (716)

This representation of Islam as foreign to Europe ignores the recent development of vernacular Islam and its presence in Europe for many centuries. This presence continues to be ignored or repressed as religion in the public sphere (through veiling and terrorism) challenges many of the narratives of modernity of the European states.

WHAT DO FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS WANT?

In her analysis of 'Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq' (2009), Anne Speckhard continues to put the accent on suicide terrorism as being driven by traumatic stress and need for revenge. Her reading is that sending groups take advantage of the vulnerable female caught in conflict zones, reframing an act of suicide into an act of national honor, Islamic sacrifice, and courage. Thus, Speckhard writes:

> when women are in proximity to groups that are able to indoctrinate them into a militant jihadi martyrdom ideology and play upon their vulnerabilities by agreeing to equip them for revenge and send them to what they come to believe as a direct route out of despair and into

paradise, it's no wonder that women are volunteering for such missions
in places like conflict-torn Diyala. (38)

It is obvious that women are understood only through their interpellation
into ideological action by subscribing to a reading of grief, despair, humil-
iation, violation, post-traumatic stress, anger, and loss as fertile grounds
for the indoctrination, coercion, exploitation, and tricks of women by
"male organized groups." They get reduced to a 'designated agency,'
an agency by invitation only, becoming 'weapons of a male arsenal,' as
McClintock (1997: 98) so lucidly writes. This reading, which interest-
ingly gives attention to the psychological effects of warfare on women,
also precludes an alternative reading of female terrorism, one that not
only damages the West (by successfully passing checkpoints and reaching
their targets, garnering more attention by a media subject to the horri-
fied fascination of women as violent actors), but that also refashions the
patriarchal relations in conflict zones.

Speckhard's conclusions are very much based on the equivalence of third
world women with oppression. Her article urges installing programs in the
region that would help women to cope with their traumas in order to make
them less prone to instrumentalization and deployment for these violent
actions. Speckhard (2009: 46) concludes that 'Iraq was once a thriving
country and can be again in the future. Women are necessary for build-
ing that future, and should not be left vulnerable to those who would use
them for purposes of destruction.' Such paternalistic and orientalizing
frames of analysis preclude a wider range of approaches that would require
more information from the suicide bombers themselves, often not avail-
able because of their deaths, but also a different way of conducting field-
work and interpreting secondhand information—including interviews with
relatives, friends, and colleagues—which are not guided by preconceived
notions about the motivations and the outcomes of the overview.[4]

Many Western scholars, motivated by liberal feminist ideals such as
in the already mentioned works of Victor (2003), Davis (2003), Skaine
(2006), or Bloom (2005), have reemphasized over and over again this gen-
dered reading of the phenomenon, trying to isolate the personal from the
political, showing the continuing bias of Western readings when it comes to
interpret third world forms of agency. They do not reflect, for example, on
how Saba Mahmood (2005) has reframed the notion of agency in religious
contexts, interpreted not just as resistance to submission, but as a form of
'piety,' a form of obedience to religious rules that may grant women observ-
ing those rules more autonomy and movement for self-improvement than a
Western reading would allow.

Furthermore, in these books, female suicide bombers are framed as a
completely new phenomenon and separated from similar forms of historical
or contemporary political violence in the West. The major characteristics

connected to the use of an orientalist paradigm with an occidentalist frame
are, as Brunner writes:

> a) a form of decontextualization grounded in an insistence that the
> individual must be the primary focus of research; b) a construction
> of women bombers as mistaken or deceived; c) a shift from neutral
> explanation to recommendations for counterterrorist measures that
> implicitly assume the perspective of the United States (never attacked
> by a female suicide bomber yet) and its allies in the so-called war on
> terror; d) a pronounced tendency to invoke the global dimensions of
> terrorism when it comes to combating it while eliding the global factors
> that contribute to structural violence that lays the ground for political
> resistance and terrorist agency. (2007: 958)

According to Jacqueline Rose (2004), who comments on Barbara Victor's
Army of Roses (2003):

> Victor's story . . . is a story of romance, passion and cynical intrigue. . . .
> Personalizing the female martyr can be a way of denying the abuses of
> the army . . . and of silencing the Palestinian political case. Here the
> distinction between suicide and martyrdom is crucial. According to
> Islam it is a sin to commit suicide. . . . Slowly and painstakingly, Victor
> has turned these women from martyrs to suicides. . . . Not one of these
> women is truly the political agent of her own life.

Mia Bloom suggests, instead, that suicide bombing is an issue foreign to
the Western world, a problem of a society that would be better off 'plac-
ing women in leadership roles and giving them the opportunity to have a
greater say in their future' (2005: 165). The specific political context of ter-
ritorial conflict and international power relations is largely left aside.

In these texts gender is often narrowly constructed, religion is discur-
sively framed as Islam, and the notion of race is used interchangeably
with assertions about religion. Within these texts women as perpetrators
of political violence are situated in an implicit discourse that pits West-
ern emancipation against the essentialized and orientalized Muslim/Arab
woman. As Brunner (2007) points out, these occidentalist practices are
unlikely to contribute to a better understanding of international and trans-
national terrorism. They distort rather than clarify the political violence
that emerges as a by-product of structural violence on a larger scale. Other
questions need to be asked that make space for controversy, that question
the narrow definitions of what the problem of suicide bombing is, and that
dare to put it into larger geopolitical contexts (of asymmetric international
power relations), questioning the focus of a presumed Western self and a
supposed orientalized other and trying to reflect on the relations between
the two, politically and epistemologically (Brunner 2007: 970).

Indeed, other scholars have tried to offer different readings of the phenomenon, which at times appears as a construction of Western media, as most of the attacks have not been suicide bombings. As Talal Asad has argued, although there is not one clear and single answer, the explanations in terms of religious (and especially Islamic) motives are still favored 'partly because they provide a model that combines psychological elements (familiar from criminal trials) and cultural signs (distinguishing them from us), a model that lends itself to the discourse of protection of civilization (committed to life) against barbarism (a love for death)' (2007: 56). The motives are more complicated than is popularly supposed and the assumptions that there are truths that can be accessed are mistaken, often because the actor dies in the event and therefore his/her motives are not fully retrievable:

> Ironically it is only at the trial of someone who has failed to complete the operation that the motives of the suicide bombers can be adduced. So the social scientist, novelist, and filmmaker endow the dead terrorist with the motives of the living. (Asad 2007: 45)

On a different note, Ghassan Hage (2003) explores why the phenomenon of suicide bombing has generated so much suspicions about people and scholars trying to understand the more complex nature of the events, instead of outing a clear-cut outrage. As Hage has clearly argued in the case of suicide bombers, there is a drive to see these actions as unmistakably condemnable on the moral ground that violence is wrong, especially violence that kills innocent people. This outrage that continues to see a contradiction between the notion of martyr or freedom fighter and terrorist insistently focuses on the need to explain the reasons for these actions, considered to be the last resort in conflict zones. Self-annihilation can hardly be appreciated as a way of accumulating personal status and eternal reward. Martyrdom is, therefore, not understood as a sacrifice for the nation, but reduced to the narrow constrictions of the Western definition of suicide, which is only individually based.[5]

Hage (2003) explains that in a society at war/under siege, social explanations can disrupt the way both the self and the society as a whole are invited to define and stabilize themselves against an other that has to remain different and unknowable. Humanizing the other brings affectively extra fear and threat. Hage develops, therefore, a definition that encompasses both these phobias: 'exighophobia' (from the Greek *exigho*, to explain) and 'homoiophobia' (from the Greek *homoio*, the same). 'In this homoio-exighophobic culture anyone wishing to *know* and to inquire about the social background of asylum seekers, is perceived as inherently suspect, a nuisance if not a traitor' (Hage 2003: 87). According to Hage, what is really feared is not the otherness of the other but the other's human sameness—not xenophobia, then, but homoiophobia. In this homoio-exighophobic culture of post-9/11, any sociopolitical explanation of the Arab terroristic acts is seen as sacrilegious and immoral. Hage goes on by saying that:

in answering the famous question 'Why do they hate us?' anyone who deviated from the presidential 'they hate us because they hate us,' they hate 'our values' and 'our way of life' (i.e., they are not humans in the same way we are), was considered not outraged enough and accused of blaming the victim. (88)

In short they are attributed a different value to life they can expend with, but the bottom line always remains that nothing can ever justify suicide bombing. Condemnation is meant to stop the spread of such practices, but, clearly, as Hage (2003: 88) concludes, 'the knowledge and the modification of the social conditions of their emergence is far more effective than the assumption that they are somehow the product of some transposable cultural or religious "state of mind" disconnected from any social situation, any social conditions, or any specific history.' Therefore, he closes with a quote from Spinoza. 'Now more than ever, we could all benefit from Spinoza's ethical injunction for the intellectual: "Do not deplore, do not laugh, do not hate, but understand"' (89).

Hage's critical analysis is a perfect introduction to a recent documentary film directed by American-Israeli filmmaker Hilla Medalia and titled *To Die in Jerusalem* (2007), which clearly documents attempts at understanding without reversing the stereotypical framing of East and West, reconciliation upon restitution, peace and death.

TO DIE IN JERUSALEM

Eighteen-year-old Ayat al-Akhras exploded herself on 29 March 2002, in the Kiryat Yovel supermarket in Jerusalem, West Bank, killing two and injuring more than twenty-eight. Al-Akhras was the third Palestinian suicide bomber, and the first teenager. She left a videotape in which she blamed the Palestinian authorities for failing to fulfill Palestine's duty and inciting them to take up their responsibility and come into action. Ayat's case is set aside and remarkable because in the attack she killed a girl of her age, the seventeen-year-old Israeli girl Rachel Levy. At the time of their deaths, Western media focused on what was perceived as an uncanny resemblance and parallel between the two girls: both have dark long hair and large dark eyes; they are approximately the same age and height. They lived just four miles apart from each other, one on the Israeli side in Jerusalem and the other in the Deheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem. The American periodical *Newsweek* published a front cover with the two girls side by side. The title read: 'A Human Bomb and Her Victim: How Two Teens Lived and Died.'[6] It galvanized international attention that two girls could end up together in death, one as perpetrator and the other as victim. The interlocking of their destinies into tragedy made the world stop and think about the nature of and the escalation reached by the conflict zone between Israel and Palestine.

Figure 4.1 Hilla Medalia, *To Die in Jerusalem* (Ayat and Rachel side by side). Courtesy of Hilla Medalia.

What gripped the media was the apparent innocence of the two girls, who should have been carefree teenagers, like all their peers around the world, coming instead to symbolize the intractable conflict in the Middle East. Their parallelism gave a human face to the conflict, making life grievable on the international platform for both sides, and also a narrative to construct about the motivations for a suicide action. What gets erased from much commentary is that for Ayat it was not just a question of an individual suicide, but the need to engage in action as reaction to the occupation, the frustration of a life led under curfew, checkpoints, routine military incursions, human rights violations, and the total unbalance between the powerful army of a sovereign state and the guerilla warfare of a nation denied political independence and military defense.

In 2003 Hilla Medalia started producing the HBO documentary *To Die in Jerusalem* (2007). Hilla Medalia is an American-Israeli filmmaker and producer who also served in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). HBO is a major American television network owned by Time Warner.

The documentary focuses on tracing the emotional journey of the two mothers, Ayat's and Rachel's mothers, and how they have grieved and mourned in order to process their daughters' deaths. The intention of the film was to bring the two mothers together in an encounter and dialogue, in which their irreconcilable political differences would be mitigated by their common destiny as mothers suffering the loss of their children. According to this understanding, motherhood and mourning would become the common denominator to stress the nonsensicalness of the violent conflict created by powerful political leaders that has wrecked the everyday lives of normal girls.
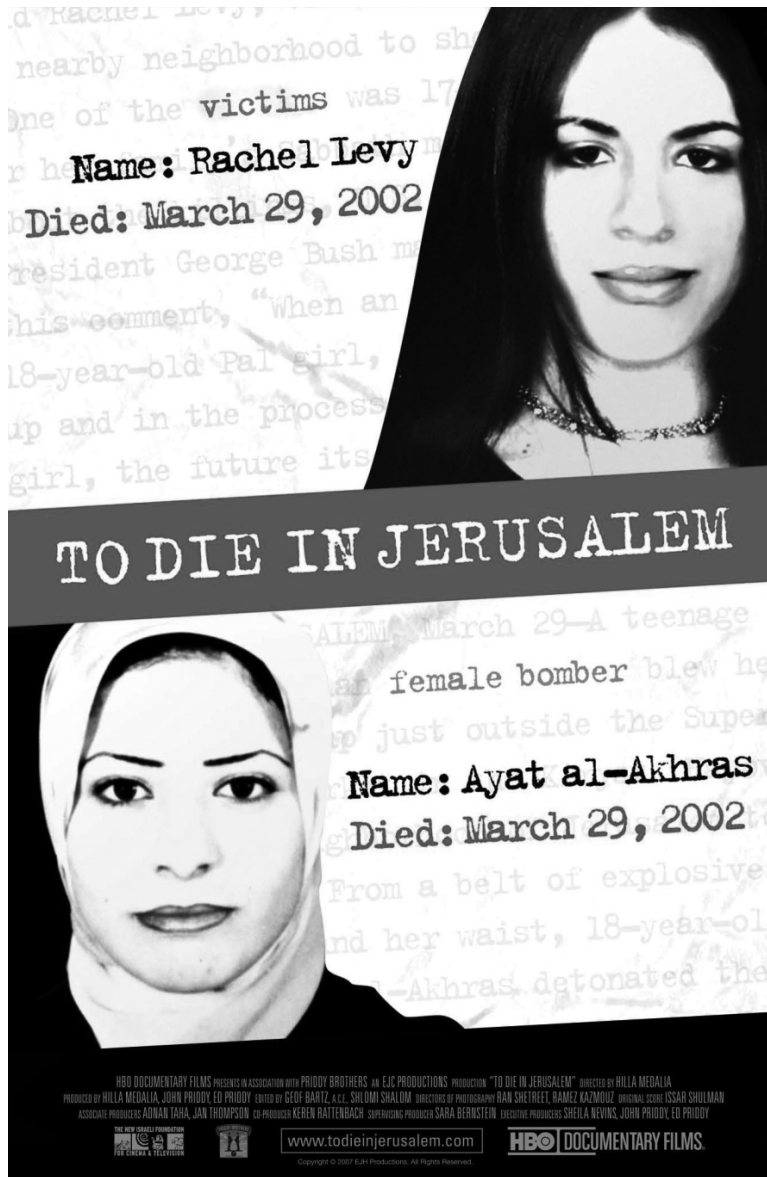
Figure 4.2 Hilla Medalia, *To Die in Jerusalem* (film poster). Courtesy of Hilla Medalia.

The documentary opens up with the image of Rachel's mother, Abigail, phoning a parents forum in order to get in touch with the parents of her daughter's killer. Rachel did not come from a particularly privileged family. Abigail had lived for a short period in the US, but after her separation from Amos Levy, Rachel's father, she had decided to return to Israel. This was a

difficult adjustment, but in the end Rachel confesses that she was happy to be there. Therefore, the film sets from the very beginning the perspective through which the events are to be narrated or interpreted. Although the filmmaker attempts to construct a mirror narrative between the two girls, their lives, and their personal and social backgrounds, the quest in the film is retained by Rachel's mother, who 'wants to know why,' why this action was necessary, why 'do they hate me so much to kill my daughter?,' as she literally says in the movie, echoing Hage's invocation of the US presidential rhetoric and bringing to the foreground her need to understand by talking to the killer's mother.

The film shifts back six months to present the two girls, shown dancing at a wedding, both in modern clothing, among friends. The extra dramatic effect is achieved by showing the two girls in color against the black-and-white of their entourage; their names are superimposed on the images. Then the terrible blast in the Kiryat supermarket in Jerusalem brings the viewer to the fatal moment of the suicide attack. The very short video testimonial left by Ayat follows, in which she instigates the Arab rulers to wake up, enough of sleeping and betrayal. Then a very effective voice-over by George W. Bush, a voice that is surprising in its eloquence. At first we only see the pictures of the two girls next to each other and hear the sound bite, 'when an eighteen-year-old Palestinian girl is induced to blow herself up and in the process kills a seventeen-year-old Israeli girl, the future itself is dying.' Hence we see the image of Bush himself finishing his sentence: 'the future of the Palestinian people and the future of the Israeli people' (*To Die in Jerusalem* 2007).

This powerful opening shows archival images of the TV newsreels with Abigail going into the hospital and realizing that she has definitely lost her daughter. The dramatic opening becomes subdued by the emotional realization that the two girls looked so much like each other, creating scene after scene the mirroring effect of two lives developing apart but being joined by the catastrophe of the suicide attack. The mirroring effect of the two lives is reproduced by showing, on the one hand, Rachel's father and siblings, her brothers, Guy and Kobi, and, on the other hand, Ayat's parents, Um Samir and Abu Samir, along with her many siblings, a family of eleven living in a refugee camp on the income of her father, who works for an Israeli construction company. People could have thought that he was a traitor, and some Western analysts have focused on the role of Ayat as wanting to compensate for the accusations about her father, even though everyone has understood that, given the conditions in the camp and the large family, he could not be picky about the job he managed to find and hold on to. It was very likely that after Ayat was identified as the suicide bomber, her father would lose his job. At this stage, when the parents are interviewed, they speak in Arabic with English subtitles. They come across as very eloquent and forceful, praising their daughter. Her father says that 'she excelled in her studies. She had excellent manners and was intelligent as well. Her personality was strong.' For her mother she was 'more beautiful than the

moon,' engaged to be married to Shadi, who could be characterized as someone who wanted to excel. Now she became famous in death (*To Die in Jerusalem* 2007).

When questioned about the integrity of his parental responsibility because of his approving of his daughter dying, Abu Samir goes on to say that the conditions that the Palestinians live under have forced them and their children to carry out 'these operations' as 'a duty to resist the occupation,' that 'resistance is not terrorism,' 'for every action there is a reaction.' He says that 'what is better than to be a martyr? You are going to die anyway . . . today, tomorrow, in one hundred years. To die in dignity and honor is better than anything' (*To Die in Jerusalem* 2007). On the other side, Rachel's brother Guy says that 'we are losing a lot of soldiers for no reason. We don't want to be there [the territories]; they don't want us there. But nobody's controlling the terror, and if nobody's controlling the terror, we don't have a choice; we have to be there' (*To Die in Jerusalem* 2007).

Ayat's and Rachel's looks are constantly highlighted in a parallel. During an interview, Ayat's father even points to a picture of Rachel on the front cover of *Newsweek*, mistaking her for his own daughter. The documentary uses the two lives as a platform to elaborate on the conflict and the two different communities, but the special focus is on how the two mothers have responded to the deaths of their daughters, and how they have interpreted these deaths. Whereas for the Akhras family the death of their daughter has increased their prestige and status within their community, Abigail's loss can hardly be turned into a positive effect.

The producers did attempt to give voice to the Palestinian/Muslim perspective through Levy's visits to the Israeli jail, where Arab female terrorists are held. Abigail does not even attempt to hide her prejudices and attacks a suicide bomber for being a mother and for not caring about her children. The visit to the prison ends up almost in a riot with the Palestinian women proclaiming that Israel does not exist, and that Russian Jews, Moroccan Jews, Iraqi Jews, European Jews, and American Jews should just go back to their countries and leave what was the territory of Palestine to them. Abigail is obviously not amused by such a confrontation and the meeting ends up in an impasse pretty quickly.

The director, Medalia, had not realized the difficulties Abigail would encounter trying to travel to the camp, confident that she would be able to arrange a meeting between the two mothers. Ideally Abigail wanted to invite Ayat's parents to her house, in a gesture of hospitality, without realizing that for Ayat's parents this is not such an easy thing to do. The whole idea of the encounter sounds naïve after the realization that Ayat's parents, Abu and Um Samir Akhras, could not just leave the Deheisheh refugee camp outside Bethlehem without authorization. Um Samir Akhras is not allowed to travel without her husband, and, being the father of a suicide bomber, he is not eligible for a visa to Jerusalem. Medalia had thought of bringing Abigail and the crew to them, by using Mitri Raheb, a pastor of

Figure 4.3 Rachel Levy. Courtesy of Hilla Medalia.

the Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church, to function as a mediator into the West Bank. The documentary shows the terrified and dismayed Abigail as she enters a completely new world. Eventually the Palestinian authorities detain the crew until darkness starts falling. A scared Abigail, who had been so confident about the purpose of her meeting and of overcoming cultural barriers, asks to be brought back to her home. The plan for a meeting failed.

The alternative solution is to organize a satellite meeting between the two mothers, a far less enticing occasion, but one that better conveys the reality of the conflict and the difficulties of the borderline between Israel and Palestine. After four years of negotiations, they manage to arrange a four-hour discussion (Ayat's mother is accompanied by her husband, who at times intervenes in the conversation to the great irritation of Abigail), which does not generate the desired result or filmic effect.

Though the film has about fifty minutes of interesting and powerful introduction and exposition of the conflict, *To Die in Jerusalem* is mainly

Figure 4.4   Ayat al-Akras. Courtesy of Hilla Medalia.

focused on getting to the last twenty-minute section, when the two moth-
ers meet via satellite. The meeting comes four years after the bombing,
due to bureaucratic and technical problems, and whatever answers Abigail
was still looking for are not going to be found. Rachel's mother plays the
personal card above the political reasons for the conflict, she says, 'I don't
want to talk politics. You continue to blame the occupation for all your
problems. You should learn to think differently.' However, the different
ways of framing the problem, and also Abigail's paternalistic attitude in her
attempt to practice peace in the face of hostility, emerge as a mismatch of
intentions and expectations, showing a naïve and dominant Israeli mother
versus an unremorseful Palestinian mother. The latter refuses to acknowl-
edge the death of her daughter as "useless," but sees it as something for
the "cause" and "honor," and proclaims the importance of her daughter's
sacrifice for a generation to come, making her a model to many other girls.
Um Samir asks: 'Should I resist occupation with a bouquet of roses? On a
tray of gold?' (*To Die in Jerusalem* 2007).

Abigail continues to want to reframe the discussion from the general
and political to the personal and individual, because there is nothing more
important to her than life. Abigail wants Um Samir to admit that what Ayat
did was wrong, and say this in public, in order to show a different way to
peace. The renunciation of violence and the gesture of reconciliation that
Abigail seeks never come, and she is never even close to them. They are
supplanted instead by a rhetoric of grievances as Abigail, on the one hand,
talks about the hate that goes back decades and should be abandoned in
order to build a better future and Um Samir, on the other hand, details
the hardships of Palestinian life that cannot be condoned. While Abigail

continues to plead for a condemnation of this kind of violence from Ayat's mother, asking her to go on TV to condemn this sort of action, Um Samir reacts fiercely, saying, 'When we have regained our rights, our land, authority, government, when we see our children released from prison, our houses are rebuilt then I will go on television. . . . on all satellites.' Un Samir says that this is to ask them for surrender, but the Palestinian people will never surrender. Abigail is demoralized by the tone of the dialogue and concludes by saying, 'I am very disappointed. I am sorry we have had to end up like this.' And Um Samir replies, 'Do not be disappointed. . . . I only told you the reality' (*To Die in Jerusalem* 2007).

The rhetoric of confession clashes with the rhetoric of oppression, and whereas the two girls looked alike in their youth, their mothers' worlds could not be more distant. The film makes us realize that some lives are more grievable than others. As Judith Butler (2009: 1) writes in *Frames of War*, 'the "being" of life is itself constituted through selective means: as a result, we cannot refer to this being outside of the operation of power, and we must make more precise the specific mechanisms of power through which life is produced.' Although mourning and violence might inspire solidarity and a quest for global justice against the instigation to perpetual war, it is the different positionalities toward the very idea of life, its precariousness, and its value not as just an individual property, but as a communal gift (as in the difference between the idea of suicide and sacrifice, individual death or national cause) that brings the idea of the dialogue between the two mothers to a complete impasse, frustration, and disillusion. *To Die in Jerusalem* ends with the pictures of the girls juxtaposed once again on-screen, a sobering reminder of the tragic consequences of the continuing struggle to find peace.

REPRESENTING THE PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

In addition to *To Die in Jerusalem*, there have been many artistic productions that have tried to visualize and interpret the question of suicide bombing, in Palestine but also elsewhere, in different ways. Natalie Assouline Terebilo shot *Shahida—Brides of Allah* (2008), a documentary about Palestinian female suicide bombers who landed in Israeli prisons, which won the Silver Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival and the FIPRESCI prize (the Award of the International Critics). The documentary tries to get close to the motivations and reasons of female suicide bombers by interviewing survivors, or women who failed their missions, in Israeli prisons. From these short interviews, we see many of the stereotypes on female suicide bombers being repeated and some undermined. The director confesses in an interview to Israeli television that she was surprised to find the women she found. She thought they would be brutal and aggressive, and instead she met gentle women, well educated and with children (Meslet 2008). This

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confutes the myths that women who commit suicide are ugly, cannot get a husband, illiterate, infertile, handicapped or mentally ill, or in search of vengeance for a killed family member or to clear up their honor after an illicit love relationship.

It is worthy of note that the interviewer insists on the term "suicide terrorists" and not "suicide bombers," and that she questions whether they are 'feminine.' The filmmaker says explicitly that she does not focus on the political but on the individual, that she also isolated each of them 'from everyone in general,' in order to have a more intimate and truthful insight into their motivations (*Shahida—Brides of Allah* 2008). Although through the strategy of documentary filmmaking and the interview style we are prone to believe this piece brings us closer than other writings and speculations to the motives and hearts of the female suicide bombers, it reiterates many stereotypes and clichés without offering any further clues. The filmmaker's focus remains on the individual as cut off from the political and on the psychological motives as cut off from the socioeconomic ones (which is also Abigail's approach with Ayat's mother). The filmmaker only briefly refers to these intricate combinations of factors and causes as hard to isolate and distill, making each individual case unique and specific in its own way. On that note, the documentary has an added importance as we are flooded by information and Western readings of the phenomena: trying to make sense of the situations by interviewing the survived attackers, mostly jailed family members and friends, yet always filtered through a specific form of interpretation that contributes to the kind of construction of knowledge often passed off as objective and scientific.

Other perspectives are taken in fictional films such as Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* (2002), which in a short scene shows a Palestinian woman trying to cross the Israeli checkpoint dressed in a skimpy pink dress, the scene somewhat referencing Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), which shows Algerian women restyling themselves as French modern women, bleaching their hair and wearing miniskirts, in order to pass the Casbah checkpoints by flirting with the French soldiers. Although in *Divine Intervention* the woman cannot obviously hide a suicide belt, she enervates the Israeli guard for the threat she poses by parading with the charge of her femininity in crossing the border. With a parody of the voyeuristic male gaze, she is literally kept in check by the Israeli soldier through the gun's sightline as he contemplates her female body while dreading her passage. The short scene is an ironic take on the stereotyped idea of fundamentalist terrorists, or female suicide bombers, as the woman is dressed in Western style and is flaunting her dangerous nondiversity.

In the short clip *"Chic Point," Fashion for Israeli Checkpoints* (2003), Sharif Waked shows a catwalk for attractive Palestinian men with their clothes torn, showing gaps and holes, presenting metrosexual bodies that challenge traditional patterns of masculinity and militarization. The description that goes with the video says: '*Chic Point* was shot in a fictional

location: the occupied catwalk. Employing all the elements of a fashion show, models reveal their abdomens in outfits designed especially to suit Israeli checkpoints. For Israelis in the present time, the individual Palestinian body is the most dangerous weapon there is, and it is therefore the subject of ongoing and humiliating surveillance.'[7] After the catwalk of fashionable men dressing in fishnet, transparent material, or stylish holes that reveal their nudity, the video shows black-and-white images of Palestinians having to strip at the Israeli checkpoints and suffer their lack of sovereignty and masculinity being undone by having to undress in front of the Israeli male gaze.

In the story of *Paradise Now* (2005), by Hany Abu-Assad, two close friends, Palestinians Said and Khaled, are living in Nablus with precarious or no employment and no possibilities of leaving the city as the Israeli authorities hardly grant permits to young men. Through the film we learn that the father of one was a collaborator with the Israeli forces and was eventually killed, and the other suffered from the occupiers' abuses and humiliation, including having to select which one of his own legs the occupier would shoot. The two friends, Said and Khaled, are recruited by an extremist group to perpetrate a terrorist attack in Tel Aviv, blowing themselves up. However, things go wrong and both friends must separate at the border. Khaled maintains his purpose of carrying the attack to the end, while Said has his doubts about it and disappears. They eventually resume the operation together but after a turn of events Khaled renounces the operation, trying to convince Said to do the same. Yet Said unexpectedly goes on alone with the mission. The last scene portrays Said on a bus with Israeli people and the screen goes white, a symbol of his having carried out the explosion. While putting into question the harshness and motivation of suicide missions, the film reflects on the political violence, humiliation, and economic disparity that lead these characters to doubts, distress, low self-esteem, and lack of prospective for the future; suicide becomes no less dramatic, but acquires a larger framework of analysis.

More dramatic and fitting of the Bollywood formula is *Dil Se* (1998), by Mani Ratnam, which casts no less than the megastar Shah Rukh Khan as Amar, a news reporter who has an interview to carry out in the northern frontier and meets the enigmatic woman Meghna, played by Manisha Koirala. Amar is already attached to Preeti Nair, played by the famous Preity Zinta. He dramatically falls in love with Meghna without knowing that she is a "supposedly" Kashmiri separatist suicide terrorist who will disappear without a trace. The film shows the clash between love and ideology, making the role of a female suicide bomber an excruciatingly painful path. More ironic is the art project by British artist Simon Tyszko called *Suicide Bomber Barbie* (2002), in which he creates a Barbie strapped with explosives. *Suicide Bomber Barbie* conflates Western commodification with Palestinian hopelessness and desperation. Religious and capitalist dogmas are here compounded, showing a Barbie with an idealized form of a blond top

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model, in a fashion that is strident and shocking, as a "fashionable" female suicide bomber. It is a work whose political stridency is accompanied by a sense of humor that takes the edge of both the drama around the Palestinian conflict and the futility of consumer culture.[8]

COUNTERING OCCIDENTALIST REPRESENTATIONS

Most of the analyses that are now brought forward by writers, artists, and filmmakers tend to focus on the motives and reasons that are behind the actions of suicide bombers. Most of the motivations are attributed to religious or psychological factors (often linked to various pathologies) and more rarely to civic and political motivations connected to historical and international dynamics. The analyses of the recent phenomenon of female suicide bombers not only suffer from mediatic exploitation and the rhetoric of the "War on Terror" that emphasizes the orientalist reading (othering of the terrorist) within an occidentalist frame (the West seen as enemy), but are also highly psychologized and psychologizing (trying to "read" the minds of female suicide bombers), detached from their geopolitical contexts (no comparative framework aside from the Muslim paradigm), and isolated from other historical precedents (no account of the role of women in the liberation movements from colonial time until today).

Some credits should be given to self-determination and agency of the female suicide bombers, taken within their sociopolitical context. As Frances Hasso (2005) clearly highlights, these women have been venerated as heroes by Palestinian girls and women across religious and ideological lines, which expresses the generalized escalation and militarization of the conflict, as well as the desire to be actively engaged:

> Indeed, the Palestinian women undertook their attacks in a context of eclipsed women's political power and visibility. While the period between 1978 and 1991 in the territory was dominated by wide-ranging grassroots, non-violent mobilization of girls and women by the largely secular women's committee (Hiltermann, 1991), after the 1993 signing of the Oslo accords, the focus and nature of most women's organization shifted from mobilization to state building. (34)

In her video testimony, twenty-year-old Palestinian suicide bomber Andaleeb Takatka says, 'My body is a barrel of gunpowder that burns the enemy' (cited in Hasso 2005: 29), clearly invoking the traditional narratives of female embodiment. However, she reverses the traditional understanding of woman as a subject who is vulnerable to danger into a warrior-like metaphor that transforms the body into a killing machine with specific purpose. Various metaphors used by Western media have referred to women whose wombs have been turned into bombs, but this testimonial left through the

video incites a different reading of the suicide narrative that is reducible to the role of neither the victim nor the executioner, but subscribes to an inter-relation of the self and the other being inextricably connected in death. As V.G. Julie Rajan writes:

> Women bombers directly and remarkably challenge those patriarchal ideologies in multiple ways. Instead of building and maintaining fami-lies and societies, they present the capacity to tear apart their enemies' families and to wreak havoc in their societies. Instead of remaining within the home space and remaining silent and hidden from soci-ety, women bombers implode themselves in the most public of ways, attracting unprecedented level of local, national and international attention. . . . Instead of being nurturing and an object of violence, women bombers reveal that, as women, they too can negotiate and affect the most excessive forms of violence, killing and injuring not only themselves but also others, and thereby objectifying others in the process. (2011: 25)

It is not surprising that women bombers create male anxieties about their potential to subvert the patriarchal order. They do so by questioning many of the male prerogatives, such as that of going into war on the front lines and literally making international headlines. This can explain why female suicide bombers have been often represented in ways that reduce their impact and reconfigure them into a traditional patriarchal scheme: as mothers, daughters, sisters, wives of Allah or the nation, reassuring all those who witness these extreme acts that they are just women after all.

Understanding the complex interaction among nationalism, religion, gen-der, and occupation is essential. As with other third world feminist issues, a comprehensive approach to the Palestinian female suicide bomber can-not be reduced to or even prioritize gender oppression over other (national and economic) circumstances, but rather needs to be accounted for in the particular predicament of the complex web of power and social relations in Palestinian society. But it is also necessary to provide a different reading of agency in the Palestinian context. Most feminist thinking continues to see agency as a model of subordination and subversion. Mahmood (2005) argues that this attachment of agency to progressive politics is problematic. There are different ways to change the world depending on social, politi-cal, and historical contexts. The meaning of agency should not be fixed beforehand or taken out of its social, religious, and political relations. If we really wish to understand the lives, experiences, and strategies of these suicide bombers, we should not understand these actions under the notions of false consciousness, misguided feminism, or failed equality. By including the arguments, experiences, and strategies of women who fight alternative struggles for equality, as well as those of women who do not necessarily desire freedom in the way prescribed by Western liberal feminism, different

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contextualized readings and interpretations of these phenomena are made possible, offering ways to rethink the relationship between religion and agency. Nevertheless, this remains an irksome issue, as a nonproblematic reading of these events could be used to endanger feminist struggles instead of offering alternative readings of empowerment.

By using their bodies as weapons, becoming *shahida* and therefore entering a mythological status that incites other women to follow, escaping the stricture of the gender regime in which they live, female suicide bombers subvert the symbolic order of the patriarchal system. Most feminist critics agree that nationalist movements, particularly in the postcolonial context, have for the most part betrayed women's struggle for gender equality and blocked their participation in the newly established nations. The phenomenon of the female suicide bombers, however, recasts the question of female participation in armed struggles and nationalistic projects of liberation in highly problematic ways. Female suicide bombers get much more attention and analysis than other female combatants in history, acquiring an either mythical or terrorist status, suspended in time.

The reason for this extra attention can be attributed not only to the violence through which they find death and the challenge to the maternal and peaceful role attributed to women, but also to the threat they pose to the patriarchal order, as it goes beyond the control of their male leaders and political authorities. As Leila Khaled, the best-known Palestinian woman fighter of the 1970s, has commented about the reception of the Palestinian female suicide bombers by religious leaders, 'When the religious leaders say that women who make those actions are finally equal to men, I have a problem. Everyone is equal in death—rich, poor, Arab, Jew, Christian, we are all equal. I would rather see women equal to men in life' (Khaled, cited in Victor 2003: 63–64).

NOTES

1. One of the authorities on the subject of suicide terrorism, Robert Pape, has created the first comprehensive database of every suicide terrorist attack in the world from 1980 until today. The database is linked to the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (see http://cpost.uchicago.edu/search.php, accessed on 24 September 2013). In his book *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (2005), Pape provides a comprehensive demographic profile of modern suicide terrorist attackers, offering a counter-voice to dominant interpretations. The book also examines the early practitioners of this guerrilla tactic, including the ancient Jewish Zealots, who in AD 66 wished to liberate themselves from Roman occupation; the Ismaili Assassins, a Shi'ite Muslim sect in northern Iran in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; Japanese kamikaze pilots during World War II, three thousand of whom crashed into US naval vessels; and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, a secular, Marxist-Leninist organization responsible for more suicide terrorist attacks than any other group in history.
2. The second Intifada is the second Palestinian uprising, referring to the period of intensified Palestinian–Israeli violence, beginning in late September 2000

and ending in 2005. The first Palestinian Intifada, a Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, lasted from December 1987 until the Madrid Conference in 1991, although some date its conclusion in 1993, with the signing of the Oslo accords.

3. The fictionalization of this event was created by Santosh Sivan with the film *The Terrorist* (1999). Differently than Dhanu in reality, the female suicide bomber called Malli in the film, does not go through with the mission. The film portrays the nineteen-year-old Malli, sent to assassinate a leader in South Asia, in her days before the attack. The film, which is replete with orientalizing and voyeuristic imageries, but with splendid camera work, successfully shows the psychological development of a woman turned into a killing machine who had to undergo a process of masculinization and disembodiment. However, her unexpected pregnancy, from a murdered partner, reawakens her bodily senses and passion for life. She eventually deserts the militaristic goals inculcated by her political leaders in the name of the Tamil cause, although no specific groups are mentioned in the film. The film won a number of awards at international film festivals.

4. The many publications that have appeared during the last decade on the topic tend to fall into unnuanced analyses. For example, all the books listed below, and published in the US, illuminate tropes of gendered othering: Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers* (2003); Joyce Davis, *Martyrs: Innocence, Vengeance and Despair the in the Middle East* (2003); Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (2005); Rosemarie Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers* (2006). In these texts, women and family are interviewed while the authors try to reinforce an orientalist reading that proposes the notion of a 'misguided feminism' (Bloom 2005) leading these women who were still in search of equality. Complex motivations are often reduced to catchy terms such as a 'fatal cocktail' for suicide bombing (Victor 2003). Bloom, for example, does not refrain from using strong sexualized metaphors: 'the advent of women suicide bombers has transformed the revolutionary womb into an exploding one' (2005: 143).

5. See on this the work of Emile Durkheim, and his study on *Suicide* (1970)

6. For more background information, see Hammer (2002).

7. See the description under a short fragment of the clip at http://www.vdb.org/titles/chic-point-fashion-israeli-checkpoints, accessed on 24 September 2013.

8. For an image of *Suicide Bomber Barbie*, see http://www.theculture.net/barbie/, accessed on 24 September 2013.

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