



## OUTTAKES AND OUTRAGE: THE MEANS AND ENDS OF SUICIDE TERROR

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**Samuel Thomas**

Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

—Gospel of Mark, 9:24

For perverse unreason has its own logical processes.

—Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*

In his introduction to *The Plague of Fantasies*, Slavoj Žižek attempts a brief précis of "the antagonisms which characterize our epoch." Writing just before the most far-reaching and spectacular phase of the Age of Terror, and thus with some prescience, he begins to delineate some of the specific processes that have been brought to their extreme—often to the point of their collapse and/or dialectical reversal—in our contemporary "audiovisual media." Among the numerous factors in play here, the tension between "world market globalization" and the assertion of various historical "particularisms" (ethnic, religious, national, linguistic) stands out as particularly significant in that it both binds together and immediately transcends the audiovisual focus of Žižek's project (1). Borrowing from Raymond Williams's well-worn formula of "epochal analysis," we can say that it extends into a bewildering variety of "dominant, residual and emergent" cultural forms (121). The processes through which the boundaries of the nation-state have become increasingly

porous and pliable—penetrated by networks of influence as diverse as the International Monetary Fund, tourism, flu viruses, drug trafficking, sports franchises, and Al Qaeda—are matched by a series of appeals to origins and claims to self-determination, by the pull toward localized or sovereign political units and by the solidification of various so-called fundamentalisms. In fact, such is the intimate relationship between the two sides of this antagonism, which erupted to such spectacular effect in the Event of 9/11; it is often difficult (or just plain wrong) to separate them out. This, as Žižek contends, has placed many of the "paradigmatic critical procedure[s]" forged in "the good old days of traditional *Ideologiekritik*" under considerable strain (*Plague* 1). And in the broadest possible terms, it is hard to argue. It requires no special kind of radicalism nor, for that matter, postmodern ennui to claim that the legitimacy of our modes of analysis have been called into question (and also, for better or worse, reanimated) by these violent upheavals in the contemporary life-world. I therefore begin in this rather expansive fashion with the opposite approach implied—a Žižekian switchover, if you will, a series of relays between the general and the particular, between the global and the local, between the macropolitics of the post-9/11 world and the micropolitics of the fictional text. More straightforwardly, I begin in this fashion because my topic demands it: the representation of suicide bombing and/or jihadist martyrdom; the theory and practice, as it were, of what Alex Houen has usefully termed "sacrificial militancy" ("Sacrificial Militancy" 113). Suicide bombing, in all its diverse and terrible forms, is a phenomenon that vividly dramatizes the most destructive possibilities of this interface between global and local forces, and for scholars of contemporary fiction, it is also the source of a significant outgrowth in discursive/creative practices. One of the underlying aims of my discussion here is to demonstrate that any critical treatment of this topic, whether directly or indirectly enmeshed in cultural politics after 9/11, must necessarily confront the simultaneous blurring and (re)inscription of boundaries that the suicide attack exemplifies in extremis.

This task is made all the more acute if we consider the proposition that the totality of global capitalism itself can be understood as developing from apparently closed, nationalistic forms of collective identity—an argument, for example, that underpins much of John Gray's *Al Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern*. The undisclosed symmetries between, say, laissez-faire corporate economics and the informal *hawala* banking systems that help to sustain the cross-continental operations of terrorist cells provide a stern rebuke to any crudely sketched and insidiously conservative clash of civilizations—with Samuel Huntington's thesis famously reenergized in the

aftermath of 9/11—and to the "stupefying" belief that "modernity," and thus capitalism, "is a single condition" (1). Indeed, various elements of Gray's thought, his portrait of the complex, transnational interrelations between militancy, democracy, and the market, are perhaps unwittingly dramatized in one of the central texts I will place under scrutiny here—John Updike's penultimate and much-criticized novel *Terrorist*. This bestselling work, alongside Hany Abu-Assad's controversial film *Paradise Now*, will form the basis of the later stages of my investigation. The contrasting contexts presented to us by these works (Updike's New Jersey and Abu-Assad's Nablus, from the Free World to Occupied Territory), their contrasting receptions, and the dialogue between literary and cinematic aesthetics that such a comparison initiates, all combine to provide a uniquely instructive framework for coming to terms with what exactly is at stake in the attempt to fictionalize both the lure and the perpetration of suicide terror. Returning, however, to the specific way in which Updike's novel might reflect parts of Gray's influential thesis, we can observe how for the character Jack Levy—a lapsed Jew, insomniac, and soon-to-be-retired high-school counselor—the "sense in the air, left over from '68, that the world could be reimagined by young people" has been replaced by something altogether more troubling and mercurial (Updike 25). Before the routine dreariness of his existence is overturned by an encounter with an Arab American student who has committed himself to jihadist radicalism, Levy is quite evidently out of step with the sociopolitical landscape after 9/11. A new kind of ambiguity is "in the air," not only exemplified by the collapse of the World Trade Center—that searing, metonymic image of the United States temporarily brought to its knees—but by the destabilization of certain ideological boundaries and antagonisms described by Gray and Žižek. This, I would argue, is precisely what is revealed during one of his tired moments of introspection in the opening sequences of Updike's novel:

Even our much vaunted freedom is nothing much to be proud of, with the Commies out of the running; it makes it easier for terrorists to move about, renting airplanes and vans and setting up Web sites. Religious fanatics and computer geeks: the combination seems strange to his old-fashioned sense of the faith-versus-reason divide. Those creeps who flew the planes into the World Trade Center had good technical educations. The ringleader had a German degree in city planning; he should have redesigned New Prospect. (27)

In other words, if one were inclined to look for sound bites, one would assert that "Al Qaeda is a global multinational" (Gunaratna 11)—part computer geek and part religious fanatic in Updike's phrasing—both inseparable from and made possible by the very structures it purports to resist on "fundamentalist" grounds. Identifying Al Qaeda as such partly accounts for the intricate looping, the weird combination of closeness and distance, identification and disavowal, that characterizes the mediation of (and response to) terrorist attacks. If, therefore, a diverse range of scholars—Gray and Žižek are of course rather strange bedfellows in many other respects<sup>1</sup>—provide us with a compelling and persuasive critique of the illusory gap that has been constructed between Islamist terror and technocratic (post)modernity, then the profound confusion generated by the violent closing of this gap is communicated very efficiently by Levy's musings here. Moreover, we might also detect some echoes of the wounded but nonetheless very telling rhetoric of the *9/11 Commission Report*—not only the much-heralded claim (via Paul Wolfowitz) about a "failure of the imagination" (Kean et al. 336), a failure to recognize that the hijackers were just as smart and technoliterate as the financiers and power brokers who populated the World Trade Center—but also those moments of acute, remorseful self-consciousness exemplified by the startling admission that "In a sense, they [Al Qaeda] were *more* globalized than we were" (340; emphasis added).

Indeed, if Al Qaeda can be said to resemble "the flattened networks of virtual business corporations" (Gray 76), then Updike's notion of an untenable or "old-fashioned" divide between "faith" and "reason," a divide that a network of networks such as Al Qaeda supersedes, has further implications. There is surely a powerful truth in the detail that the suicide truck bomb that Levy eventually thwarts, the vessel that will deliver *Hutama* or "the Crushing Fire" (6), relies on the very "chemical devilry" that—according to the novel's eponymous "terrorist"—makes "manifest materialism's spiritual poison" (75). This directly mirrors the way in which Islamist terror can, and perhaps must, be understood as the violent byproduct of the System it strikes against. The terrorist violence that announced itself to the world on 9/11 is predicated and dependent on an advanced engagement with science, economics, global geopolitics, and the mass media. The terms of a superficially archaic conception of holy war, for all the strained portentousness of the jihadist idiom, are therefore firmly located within the mechanisms of late capitalism. And if Updike's observation teaches us nothing else, then there is a lesson of sorts to be gleaned from the simple fact that suicide terror is always, ultimately, a matter of living (and dying) through chemistry. Now, whatever failings Updike's novel might have—and the more serious of these, as well as

possible ways of "redeeming" elements of the narrative, will be addressed in due course—my analysis of these texts proceeds from the debates that are beginning to take shape here.<sup>2</sup> To reiterate: bound together in a dialectical unity, the fraught interplay between the global and the local, between the abstract and the concrete, between "faith" and "reason," infinitely knotted yet often brutally clear, like the split second in which a liquid turns into a gas during a chemical explosion or a Boeing 767 hits a skyscraper, is what effectively structures our living experience in the contemporary sphere.

### Suicidal Tendencies

Both *Terrorist* and *Paradise Now* can be classed as attempts to inhabit and understand the desperate psychology of the suicide bomber. In short, they both attempt to explore the terrain of the apparently unthinkable—to empathize with the would-be martyr and murderer, to provide a comprehensive map of the conscious and unconscious processes that might lead a given individual onto an unstoppable, death-dealing path. Both narratives follow a terminal trajectory (the aforementioned truck bomb driven by a fanatical teenager that concludes *Terrorist*, a suicide attack on Tel Aviv by two young Palestinians in *Paradise Now*) and, in doing so, both texts situate themselves very deliberately at the most dangerous intersection between the personal and the political. Both novel and film, for all their points of divergence, are concerned with the deep structures and destructive excesses of masculinity, belief, technology, depravation, and disillusionment. Both works have found themselves in the headlines, and both—this is the real value of the comparison I am proposing here—enact versions of the dialectical interplay between (superficially) oppositional and/or antagonistic forces that I have already begun to establish. Put another way, this discussion will explore—with modest but very specific aims—how there are always outtakes behind the outrage; how the "exalted and dread-filled condition of the *istishhādī*" (Updike 250) has been aestheticized after 9/11 in works from two very different but interconnected zones of conflict. Updike's novel owes its very existence to the 9/11 attacks, while Abu-Assad's film demonstrates how cultural engagements with terrorism after 9/11 are drawn, perhaps inescapably, into what Art Spiegelman has poetically called "the shadow of no towers"—with conflict in Palestine demonstrating the inseparability of local and global concerns better than any other issue of our time.

Before delving further into the minutiae of this comparison, however, it is necessary to continue with a broader, contextual approach—to articulate as fully as possible the general picture of suicide

bombing that will give way to particular representations of lethal force. In the decade since 9/11, the figure of the suicide bomber has become one of the definitive and most resonant archetypes of what Alain-Philippe Durand and Hilary Mandel have called the fictions of the "contemporary extreme." These fictions present "a world both similar to and different from our own: a hyperreal, often apocalyptic world progressively invaded by popular culture, permeated with technology and dominated by destruction," fictions that "do not merely reflect on violence" (distinct from, say, opportunistic and/or journalistic genre fiction) but "seek it out, engage it, and, in a variety of imaginative ways, perform it" (1). While one would struggle to make a convincing case for Updike (or indeed Abu-Assad) as a purveyor of any kind of extreme aesthetic, and even if the breadth of this category means that it remains worryingly difficult to formally distinguish between discursive and actual violence,<sup>3</sup> Durand and Mandel's work is nevertheless a revealing attempt to map out a battle-scarred and ideologically-loaded sector of the collective imagination. At the very least, we are compelled to confront the uncanny sense in which the old simulacra that characterized certain versions of postmodernism now have a cruel and dangerous kind of weight—exemplified by Žižek's oft-cited, though no less compelling reading of 9/11 as a moment in which "the fantasmatic screen apparition" explodes "the symbolic co-ordinates which determine what we experience" as real (*Welcome* 16). The indiscriminate harm wreaked on bodies, buildings, and infrastructure by the terrorist spectacle is accompanied, he insists, by a kind of virtual violence—"the shattering of our liberal democratic consensus" and the perverse logic of a permanent "state of emergency" that is allowed to function and flourish in the name of safeguarding democratic norms (*Welcome* 154). It is therefore curiously appropriate in this respect that the Qur'anic Arabic word for martyr, شهيد or *shahid*, literally means "witness." Or in other words, the spectacular "martyrdom" of the suicide attack forces us to bear witness not only to jihad as testament, "uniquely transferable to any geographic or political context" (Burke 34), jihad as it is figured in the narrow frameworks inspired by ideologues such as Syed Qutb or in the militant branches of Salafi and Wahhabi Islam,<sup>4</sup> but also to the delicate interplay between explosive fictions and explosive materialities. Thus, in cases of suicide bombing, we bear witness to the most primal forms of blindness, intractability, fear, horror, rage, despair, and panic (on one level, *Terrorist* and *Paradise Now* are born out of this grim cocktail). But at the same time, we bear witness to the underlying systems of cost and complicity that maintain the representational textures of global reality (in the precise sense of Durand and Mandel's "contemporary extreme" or Žižek's "symbolic

co-ordinates," the fictions that sustain, paradoxically, the hard and unbearable kernel of the violent Real).

A memorable scene from *Paradise Now* demonstrates something of the spirit of this. In the film's final third, Khaled, one of the two young Palestinians to be recruited for a suicide attack on Tel Aviv, argues fiercely with Suha, a moderate human rights activist who has grown up away from the West Bank after her father (a resistance hero named Abu-Azzam) was killed by Mossad. In this heated, claustrophobic exchange, which unfolds in the confines of a moving car at night, Khaled is challenged as to the validity of his belief in paradise—*الجنة* or *Al-Jannah*—and he exposes the authentically tragic force of this bearing witness in his quickfire response. Even if mistaken, he claims, somehow both furious and melancholic (a double quality that attests to the excellent, complex performance of Ali Suliman), "I'd rather have paradise in my head than live in this hell." In the most desperate of circumstances, entombed in a terminal environment, Khaled will surrender his own life (and the lives, potentially, of many others) to a process of metaphorical substitution. With this startling disclosure, what begins as an apparently straightforward argument between pacifist and militant opens up a sort of crack in the film's narrative—simultaneously exposing and effacing the precarious fault line that separates fact and fiction, certainty and doubt, the Real and the Symbolic. This fault line, I suggest, is the proper domain of the suicide martyr—a line across which violent truths and glorious fantasies are traded like hostages—and it is on that fault line, in his curious state of deeply shaken unshakeability, that Khaled is prepared to gamble everything. Retaining a relatively open-ended approach for a little longer then, it is by dwelling on the vexed relationship between discourse and violence that defines the so-called "contemporary extreme" that we can begin to understand how suicide terror, as an imagined, mediated, and material threat, now functions as one of the preeminent manifestations of globalized militancy after 9/11. There is something very apt and revealing, for example, in the career of former CIA agent Robert Baer, a man who has done more than most to soberly elucidate this issue (albeit with certain loyalties implicitly maintained) in his pair of documentary films, *The Cult of the Suicide Bomber 1 and 2*, made in 2005 and 2008. Following this pattern of metaphorical substitutions and switchovers, Baer has simultaneously had his own life fictionalized and marketed—transformed into the quietly heroic Agent Bob Barnes for the George Clooney movie *Syriana* (2005). To talk of the interplay between text and terror in the case of suicide bombing is not, therefore, some ethically dubious postmodern game or theoretician's sleight of hand—the "relativism" (254) and "trademark cynicism" (255) that critics such

as Richard Wolin have angrily identified in philosophical responses to 9/11.<sup>5</sup> It is a question of mapping where the world begins and ends.

### The Strength of Weaklings

How then do we proceed from this series of unstable, collapsible distinctions between the fiction and the reality of suicide terror? Let us take stock of how suicide bombing actually functions. Suicide terror is a practice that can not only shatter the rhythms of everyday life but also the most sophisticated machineries of governance and military-industrial control. Indeed, it is precisely this practical malleability, and the way in which suicide terror can be endlessly adapted in terms of scale and context, that point to its symbolic and/or discursive ambiguities. The suicide attack, as Terry Eagleton writes, can be framed as both a symptom of "weakness" and as a theatre of "defiance" (90). It is a lethal sacrifice in which the categories of self-dispossession and self-assertion, of individual and collective power, are blurred together amid the awful intensity of the blast radius—just as the martyr's sacrificial body fuses the body of flesh and blood with the body politic. ("Our bodies," claims Sayeed, the other half of the twin suicide strike in *Paradise Now*, "are all we have left to fight with.") The decision to die as a suicide bomber is therefore not only "the solution to your existence, but also a commentary on it" (Eagleton 90). The implications of this cannot be stressed enough. Far from being reducible to reified abstractions of fanaticism or fundamentalism, or to some facile opposition such as "McWorld versus Jihad" (Žižek, *Welcome* 42), we must recognize that suicide terror, as a local and global phenomenon, as mass murder, as desperate resistance, and as sacred martyrdom, is part of an intricate circuitry. It is absolutely singular yet near enough infinitely repeatable when understood as a strategic weapon; it is diffusely communicable in the sense that the Jihadist call to arms can be spread through ever expanding information technologies and the terrible aftereffects of such actions broadcast across the globe (with 9/11 perhaps the supreme instance of this). But it is also *incommunicable* in the sense that the weird synthesis of negation and affirmation that defines suicide bombing brings us to the limits of what can be said, shown, and written; it is an assault, as I have already hinted, on "*meaning* as well as on *materiality*"; it is "*spectacle* as well as *slaughter*" (Eagleton 91).

It is these uniquely troubling qualities of suicide bombing that go some way to explaining why, as Mike Davis asserts, it is "not the more apocalyptic threats of nuclear or bioterrorism, that are producing the most significant mutations" in contemporary lifestyles and cultural politics. Rather, it is an "incessant blasting away" at "the



moral and physical shell" of metropolitan spaces from New York to Jakarta that is playing a decisive role here (7), as well as within the formal conflict zones that have come to define the age of the suicide bomber: Palestine, Chechnya, Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kashmir, the list goes on. Indeed, the suicide attack, whether perpetrated by a lone individual or by coordinated groups, has now established itself as an insurgent tactic capable of matching, or at least confounding, the most advanced technologies deployed by the US, European, and Israeli militaries. From the hijacking of airplanes on 9/11 (the ultra-violent extension of the grandstanding techniques pioneered by the likes of Leila Khaled and Carlos the Jackal) to the more modest use of plastic explosives strapped to the chest, suicide strikes are able to knock out "critical urban nodes" and "terrorize the population of entire cities" (5). Suicide bombers, in this sense, are the "quotidian workhorses" (7) of global terrorism and, however uncomfortable the debate might be, the strategic dimension of this practice cannot be ignored. As Baer explains while reflecting on the bombing of the US embassy in Beirut in 1983, the CIA has long recognized that suicide martyrdom represents the most fierce and terrible expression of "the strength of weaklings." It is "a *tactic*," he claims emphatically, and "not a *cause*" (*Cult 2*). Indeed, this point is made horribly clear by the rigorously planned attack that guides the narrative of *Paradise Now*. Jamal, the ambivalent "fixer" character who also operates as a respected community official—and possibly therefore affiliated with Fatah or Hamas—issues his instructions to the two would-be *shuhada* without breaking a sweat. The second bomber is to hold back until some minutes after the first has detonated his explosive vest, allowing more Israeli soldiers and the emergency services to arrive on the scene: "That gives us better results."

This instrumental matter of factness, however, does not do away with the deep ambiguities that I have started to sketch, and it is important to acknowledge the curious ways in which such attacks do not simply generate fear and disorder. Suicide terror is also implicated in powerful forms of remade social identity that cut across the divisions inscribed by class, ethnicity, or religion that are so acutely expressed in the stratification of urban environments. In the indiscriminate nature of the attack, suicide bombers leave a trail of destruction and grief in their wake but at the same time unwittingly plant the seeds for temporary communities and unlikely camaraderie, for intrasubjective happenings that take on both a ceremonial and an unplanned, spontaneous quality.<sup>6</sup> One only has to recall the scenes of collective defiance in the aftermath of the Madrid train bombings (thousands marching together, erroneously as it turned out, against the Basque separatist group ETA) or the countless instances of public-

sphere cooperation in New York after 9/11 to witness the efficacy of this point. Indeed, as Žižek argues in his earlier, article-length version of "Welcome to the Desert of the Real," one can go so far as to find a strange kind of irony in the fact that, when New Yorkers commented on how "one can no longer walk the city streets safely," those very same streets were already well known as sites of danger and crime: "if anything, the attacks gave rise to a new sense of solidarity," exemplified by images of young African Americans helping an elderly Jewish gentlemen across the street, a scene perhaps "unimaginable a couple of days previously," or restaurants opening their doors to emergency workers and so on (279). It would be naïve, of course, to invest too much in these newfound community ties. Prejudices are often depressingly quick to assert themselves, as Updike reveals in his novel's canniest insight into post-9/11 society. It is not only anti-Arab or Islamophobic sentiment that can flourish unchecked (and unreported) in these circumstances:

The dozing giant of American racism, lulled by decades of official liberal singsong, stirred anew as African-Americans and Hispanics, who (it was often complained) "can't even speak English properly," acquired the authority to frisk, to question, to delay, to grant or deny permission to fly . . . To the well-paid professionals who travelled the airways and frequented the newly fortified government buildings, it appears that a dusky underclass has been given a tyrannical power. (46)

The concentration of both global and local forces in the act and aftermath of suicide bombing, from the international crime networks used to smuggle explosives and forge passports to the micrological reconfiguration of community relations on a single street corner or an airport security queue, is made abundantly clear in such reflections. Even in *Paradise Now*, which generally refuses itself the elevated, bird's-eye perspective woven into parts of Updike's narrative, and which deliberately avoids representing the aftermath of the planned attack, the embeddedness of suicide bombing in a very living network of connections and obligations is quietly but directly stressed (Jamal's seemingly heartfelt reassurances that the families of the two bombers will be well cared for and so on).

### **Back to the Future**

If, however, the material impact of suicide bombing corresponds with powerful alterations in the fantasy life of local and global cul-

tures and in our narrative systems of representation, then it should be properly acknowledged that these aspects of the "contemporary extreme" are by no means without precedent. Similarly, while the figure of the Jihadist martyr undoubtedly occupies a central position in the contemporary imagination—the *shahid*, *feyadeen*, or *istishhādī*, the holy warrior, feared and revered, demonized and romanticized—suicide bombing per se is by no means an exclusively "religious" phenomenon. Indeed, this fact is crucial if we are to properly resist the incalculably damaging and intellectually bankrupt verdict that suicide terror is a feature inherently "inscribed in Islam 'as such'" and instead understand today's acts of terrorism as "the outcome of modern socio-political conditions" (Žižek, *Welcome* 41). In fact, the incomprehension that continues to greet the act of Islamist suicide bombing in so much critical analysis and reportage is virtually inexcusable in the sense that the tactic has been widely employed across the turbulent history of the twentieth century—from Tamil or Kurdish separatists operating under loose rubrics of revolutionary Marxism to Japanese kamikaze pilots.<sup>7</sup> It is also worth remembering in this respect that literary representation of suicide bombing begins with Conrad's indictment of anarchism (and indeed British governance) in *The Secret Agent*, his 1907 novel in which the hapless simpleton Stevie is blown to smithereens in a bungled attempt to bomb the Greenwich Observatory in London (a richly symbolic target that prefigures the media-savvy impulses behind the decision to attack the World Trade Center). Stevie, of course, is implicitly paired with a kind of dark double in the nihilistic and avowedly secular figure of the Professor, a feared terrorist who wears a detonator and flask of explosives on his person at all times.<sup>8</sup> Fusing himself quite literally with this lethal device—a kind of proto-cybernetic mechanism—he transforms himself into a living weapon: "What is effective," the Professor explains with chilling clarity, "is the belief those people have in my will to use the means. That's their impression. It is absolute. Therefore I am deadly" (92–93). Later, in the novel's concluding sequence, which has almost become a compulsory reference point for discussions of terrorism and cultural politics, we are left with these portentous words as the Professor disappears into the London crowds: "He passed on unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men" (269).

The contemporary resonance of these words is hard to ignore—we should not be overly fearful of anachronism here—and it is important to understand that both Updike's novel and Abu-Assad's film already belong to a cultural tradition of sorts.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, as Gray argues, while there are of course marked differences between fin de siècle and postmillennial political culture, organizations such

as Al Qaeda have far "more in common with these European revolutionaries" than "anything in medieval times" (21), rightly insisting (as I have already touched on) that we understand radical Islamism, or the elements of Islamic faith used to frame and justify terroristic actions, as wholly and "unequivocally *modern*" (20; emphasis added). In a strange type of ideological loop, the most distinctive feature of terrorism today, "projecting a privatised form of organised violence worldwide" (Gray 1) can be found nowhere in the premodern past, certainly not in any kind of medieval caliphate, and finds its roots in both the revolutionary impulses and economic deregulation that define the Western societies now celebrated as "liberal," "democratic," "tolerant," "secular," "permissive," and so on. It is in this precise sense, I think, that Derrida's reading of 9/11 as a kind of "auto-immunity disorder," a "double suicide" as he describes it (95), acquires the formal historical weight often missing from less sophisticated deconstructive approaches to this subject. Similarly, if we are tempted to understand globalization—or the international and *intertextual* relays in which I have tried to situate the act of suicide bombing—as a special property of the contemporary moment, then Conrad's nuanced and murky portrait of London reminds us otherwise: a great metropolis engorged by vast networks of colonial power, yet also a city incessantly breached by dangerous foreign imports and ideas (from Russian anarchism to the French pornography sold in Mr. Verloc's shop).

### "Are we doing the right thing?"

With this simple but infinitely resonant question in mind (asked by Sayeed to Khaled as they wait to cross a security fence into Israel, bomb vests concealed beneath their clothing), and with the theoretical and historical framework in place, I now turn to the ways in which both *Terrorist* and *Paradise Now* articulate the tensions and contradictions peculiar to the act of suicide martyrdom. Sayeed's nervous question casts a long shadow—longer even than the "shadow of no towers"—and it is within this shadow, I would suggest, that we must reflect on the creation of these two works that have chosen to "seek out" and in some senses "perform" (in Durand and Mandel's terms) the multilayered violence of suicide terror. More broadly, it is within this shadow that we must reflect on the grieving, violent societies in which these works were produced, especially so given the significant controversy they have generated and the questions they raise about the ethics (and indeed the limits) of representation in the post-9/11 world.

*Terrorist* tracks the radicalization of an Arab American teenager from New Jersey named Ahmad Ashmawy Molloy. Standing apart from "the cheerleader types and computer nerds, the Rastas and Goths, the wallflowers and do-nothings" (16) who make up the social ecology of Central High, Ahmad is a relentlessly pious and alienated loner—unswervingly dedicated to the "Straight Path" despite the temptations of the wayward Joryleen Grant<sup>10</sup> and a decadent, morally bankrupt "popular culture of eternal music and beer" (23). He is drawn, with grim inevitability, into a truck-bomb strike<sup>11</sup> on the Lincoln tunnel by a militant Yemeni Shaikh, "conceiving of himself as God's instrument, cool and hard and definite and thoughtless, as an instrument must be" (285). In a breathless Hollywood finish, however, Ahmad is eventually talked out of detonating his payload—twenty-five plastic drums of "ammonium-nitrate fertilizer and nitro-methane racing fuel" (283), "a work of modern art" (284)—which is capable of killing hundreds and causing massive infrastructural damage. He and many others are "saved" by counselor Levy, who uncovers the plot after becoming increasingly troubled by his A-grade student's decision to skip college and acquire a trucker's license, and who finds himself romantically involved with Ahmad's Irish American mother.<sup>12</sup> Ahmad's Egyptian father, we are told, abandoned him at an early age, an index to the novel's underlying and ever present libidinal economy: "'He did this Allah thing all by himself,' explains his mother. 'I guess a boy needs a father, and if he doesn't have one, he'll invent one. How's that for cut-rate Freud?'" (117).

In contrast, Abu-Assad's *Paradise Now* follows two young Palestinians, lifelong friends and natives of the West Bank town of Nablus, who are recruited to perpetrate a suicide attack in Tel Aviv. With the dead-eyed yet charming Jamal in the role of overseer, we discover that Sayeed and Khaled have been monitored for almost two years before being granted the "honor" of a suicide mission. This vetting process takes on an extra dimension after it is revealed that Sayeed's father has been executed for collaborating with the Israelis, and it is testament to the fact that both works locate themselves—despite the fact "Islam excludes God from the domain of paternal logic" and presents a considerable problem for Freud's theory of religion (Žižek, *In Defense* 114)—in a thoroughly Oedipal universe.<sup>13</sup> With every aspect of the attack in place, however, the old axiom about best laid plans quickly asserts itself and the narrative descends into a tense series of escapes, manhunts, and stand-offs as doubt takes hold of the two bombers. Both of these works therefore project a kind of investigative seriousness and, crucially, an overt commitment to a sense of psychological-sociological depth while at the same time drawing heavily on the conventions of the popular thriller—a point of

cross pollination, it would seem, between literary and filmic aesthetics. Both have attracted a heady mixture of praise, condemnation, and, in Updike's case, open derision. The Oscar nomination handed to *Paradise Now* (the film ultimately lost out to Gavin Hood's *Tsotsi*) sparked furious editorials, accusations of anti-Semitism, online campaigns, and picketing on the streets of Los Angeles. *Terrorist*, on the other hand, was publicly rubbished by a number of prominent novelists—including Mohsin Hamid, the author, most notably, of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), and Salman Rushdie, who memorably described it as "beyond awful" in *The Guardian*. "He should stay in his parochial neighbourhood," Rushdie continues, "and write about wife swapping." These protests, slurs, and feuds, the signs and symptoms of a post 9/11 culture war, pale in comparison though when one considers the fraught production history of *Paradise Now* at ground level. Indeed, if filmmaking and other visual technologies have now become an integral part of both violent resistance culture and reportage, from the dissemination of martyrdom videos as a recruitment tool to mobile phone footage of war crimes, then the actual making of Abu-Assad's film can be seen as bound up with the very struggle it delineates for the viewer. The production endured everything from Israeli rocket strikes (which prompted a sizeable portion of the European technical crew to abandon filming) to the kidnapping of the location manager by an armed faction.<sup>14</sup>

While these texts are profoundly removed from one another in many respects, they are also bound together in a number of arresting and unexpected ways. From a broad perspective, we might argue that novels and films, in a generic sense, are modes of representation that embody the antagonism between the local and the global (an antagonism that enframes the act of suicide terror) like nothing else—as mass market commodities, as agents of imperialism or resistance, as barometers of regional-national cultures, and as the regular source of international political controversy. (Who better than Rushdie, then, to provide the most brutal assessment of Updike's dalliance with terrorism?) More specifically, it has already been established that both *Terrorist* and *Paradise Now* attempt to provide a cohesive psychological portrait of the would-be suicide bomber and both are constructed according to a logic of empathetic identification. With this question of empathy in mind, the polarized (though similarly hot-blooded) responses to these texts are doubly revealing. Ahmad, for instance, the boy Levy calls "'a kind of minority's minority'" (84), has been roundly dismissed by many reviewers—with varying degrees of opprobrium—as an automaton or robot. For some, he is little more than a crude "Muslim metonymy" (Abell), a "static and one-dimensional" cliché from a "bad action adventure movie" (Kakutani), an avatar,

perhaps, of the clash of civilizations (although technically speaking Ahmad's background is, in a sense, a prototypically American story, an old-fashioned tale of the melting pot, and he has never left the United States). Indeed, Ahmad is a figure whose self-cultivated faith is so singular and mechanical that "he feels his pride of isolation . . . to be threatened by the masses of ordinary, hard-pressed men and plain, practical women who are enrolled in Islam as a lazy matter of ethnic identity" (177). In other words, for all the novel's explicit (and, it must be said, somewhat hackneyed) efforts to unravel the inner workings of a suicide bomber, *Terrorist* has been criticized for failing to provide a character who is sufficiently human and who shows little or no signs of the fact he was born and raised in New Jersey—for all the local features that Updike emphasizes—rather than some kind of imaginary Jihadi training camp. "*Devils*," reads the novel's opening line, "*These devils seek to take away my God*," thus sealing Ahmad's war against the poisonous material world that surrounds him from the very outset of the narrative (3). The empathy this text proffers, it is implicitly suggested by Updike's critics, becomes an empty gesture in the hands of a white Presbyterian bourgeois aesthete, no matter how finely observed the novel's details might be—beads of sweat, tension headaches, teenage hard-ons and swollen bladders, all rendered in the author's characteristically measured and glassy prose.

In addition to these criticisms, given the fact that the novel is studded with diligently researched references to Islamic doctrine and controversial *suras*, it is sorely tempting to invoke Žižek's shrewd analysis of the massive increase in sales of English translations of the Qur'an in the weeks after 9/11:

Sympathetic as this attitude may be (and what can be more ethically appealing than, in the midst of violent confrontation, trying to put oneself inside the opponent's mind, and thus to relativize one's own standpoint?), it remains a gesture of ideological mystification *par excellence*: probing into different cultural traditions is precisely *not* the way to grasp the political dynamics which led to the September 11 attacks. Is not the fact that Western leaders, from Bush to Netanyahu to Sharon, repeat like a mantra how Islam is a great religion . . . a clear sign that something about this praise is wrong? (*Welcome* 34)

What Žižek is describing here is a sort of radical depoliticization of the events and systems (both local and global) which converged to such devastating effect in the 9/11 attacks and, directly related to this, the critical limits of a supposedly tolerant idiom that fetishistically overvalues the importance of coming to terms with contrasting "cul-

tural traditions." Explanations that insist on "social circumstances," he contends, are "dismissed as covert justification[s] of terror" (33) and thus give way to aestheticized desire "to give Islam a chance, to get a feel for it, to experience it from the inside, and thus redeem it" (34). If Updike's novel can dodge the charge of outright Islamophobia (and indeed clichéd writing) brought against it by various critics, then its potential failings can be illuminated in a more sophisticated way within this framework. In decorating the narrative with reverential borrowings from the Qur'an and conspicuously knowing references to Arabic culture more generally, it could be argued that *Terrorist* projects "a patronizingly liberal respect for the Other's spiritual depth" (34)—channelling the kind of "understanding," kiss-and-kill rhetoric perhaps best embodied by a figure like Tony Blair, apparently a long-time student of Islam's holy book, and one of the key architects of the post-9/11 War on Terror (a figure whom Žižek rather mysteriously omits from his list). Fear and bewilderment, not to mention certain prejudices and value judgements, are sublimated into an outward gesture of compassion or inclusivity—a process that is played out in *Terrorist* at the level of textuality itself, traceable in its very composition, encoded in the novel's liberal-conservative DNA.

If Ahmad lacks humanity, then the opposite appears to be the case with Abu-Assad's work. His portrayal of suicide bombers has been condemned in the Israeli media on the charge of "humanizing terror," for "making the worst monsters look human." While this outrage is predictable, it is nonetheless worthy of further analysis. Decrying Abu-Assad's temerity in presenting us with so-called "sympathetic terrorists," an editorial in *The Jerusalem Post* offers the following critique:

The theaters in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem that showed the film, like almost every public place, routinely employ guards to prevent attacks of precisely the sort that the film portrayed—from the bombers' perspective—on the screen. Hence the concern is not over historical accuracy and perspective, but propagandizing for terrorism in the present and future. Two years ago, Israeli Ambassador Zvi Mazel purposely damaged an art installation in Sweden that depicted a Palestinian suicide bomber as Snow White floating on a sea of blood—an undiplomatic act that was met with near universal cheers in Israel. *Paradise Now* humanizes mass murderers even more forthrightly, and to a much wider audience. Those who would heap awards on such a film should, even if they are unconcerned by the sensibilities of Israelis, consider whether they would make the same choice if they—their nation or their families—were the victims. ("Humanizing")



In short, the film has been accused of actively condoning terrorist violence, with the final comments here designed as a reminder that suicide terrorism is simultaneously a local and a global problem, as well as perhaps appealing to some generalized sense of the wounded American psyche after 9/11. Reading between the lines, there is an emotionally manipulative hidden message being projected here: "Remember that these terrible crimes do not just happen in the Middle East . . . Have you already forgotten your own recent past?" The film has also earned the dubious honor of being listed on the hateful, notoriously Islamophobic *Jihad Watch* website. This alleged "glorification" of terrorism climaxes with the film's unbearable final sequence—a long close-up shot of Sayeed sitting on a bus crowded with uniformed Israelis. He is freshly committed to the Cause after a crisis of both conscience and will (committed to the immanent transcendence it promises, to the dialectical synthesis of the personal and the political, and indeed the secular and the religious, on which it is predicated), clean shaven and dressed in sharp black suit so as to resemble a settler. The camera moves ever closer before fixing itself on Sayeed's eyes for twenty long seconds; he stares intently forward, his expression strangely unreadable. The screen then abruptly dissolves into a white nothingness at the very moment he is due to detonate the bomb strapped to his chest. Moreover, Abu-Assad even dares to find elements of tragicomic, almost Beckettian slapstick in these darkest corners of contemporary experience—from the continual motif of malfunctioning automobiles, faintly pantomimic symbols of an ever-degrading social and economic infrastructure, to the protracted scene in which Khaled films his martyrdom video before embarking on the mission. Having been asked to repeat his impassioned message of holy resistance after the cameraman leaves the lens cap on during the first take (which essentially functions as an out-and-out gag), Khaled breaks from the script and includes a message for his mother about the cheap water filters available from a local store, all of which unfolds as Jamal impassively eats pita bread sandwiches. The farce, as it were, precedes the tragedy—a largely neglected element of *Paradise Now* that prefigures the audacious Jihadi satire of Chris Morris's *Four Lions* (2010), arguably the first "post-7/7" film made in the UK.<sup>15</sup>

In each of these cases then, the ethical legitimacy of an empathetic approach to terrorism, characterized in terms of lack and excess, has been called into question by voices from all sides of a literal and metaphorical conflict that now spans the globe. How then are we to proceed from this impasse? And what exactly, if we adopt the terms of this debate, would constitute an acceptable way of measuring and mediating the humanity of the suicide bomber? As a way of moving toward a provisional conclusion, I would first of all like to

suggest that this concern over the "humanization" of suicide bombers actually functions as a chimera. With regard to *Paradise Now*, which has generated surprisingly little English language scholarship,<sup>16</sup> Nouri Gana's outstanding reading of the film points the way:

it would be utterly misguided if film director Abu Assad *intended* to humanize suicide bombers. For what is less obviously ironic, but all the more insidious, is that—were it indeed compelled by the urge to prove the humanity of the suicide bombers—the film would more likely converge with, rather than depart from, the logic of the oppressors who infinitely urge their victims to prove their humanity. The victims acquiesce, but to no avail—terrorists must remain terrorists despite piling evidence to the contrary . . . What is at stake is not the horror of a film that, if this is indeed the case, humanizes suicide bombers; rather, it is the bankruptcy of the deeper rationale that sustains that horror, namely, *the differential allocation of humanity*. (24–25; emphasis added)

Put another way, the logic that seeks to affirm or deny the humanity of the suicide bomber presents us with a false and treacherous dichotomy. Contained within such impulses is an oppressive hierarchicalism that implicitly provides the phantasmic support for an attitude to life in which the collateral damage (and indeed systematic dispossession) effected by occupying forces and the deaths caused by suicide bombing can both be rationalized. To the ruthless organizers of suicide attacks, men and women can be treated, quite literally, as living weapons (and therefore already dead meat); to the occupier, laws can be suspended and communities harassed, starved, and humiliated in the face of an "inhuman" or "fanatical" enemy. Elements of this formula are usefully enacted in both texts, albeit to varying degrees. In Updike, what begins as a no doubt earnest attempt to reach across cultural boundaries ends up reinscribing many of the ideological patterns (or "mystifications" in Žižekian terms) that it at least seeks to interrogate if not debunk. It is, in this sense, an instructive (though no less troubling) failure, perhaps investing too much in the novel form's much-trumpeted yet extremely diffuse and unstable capacity for a kind of transportative empathy. With *Paradise Now*, the film demonstrates an extraordinary and provocative sensitivity to the ways in which the human collapses so very quickly into the inhuman, and vice versa, and how faith becomes doubt by subtly hinting at a kind of meta reading of its own sociorealist narrative.

As Gana points out, not only does the repeated image of a pot of Arabic coffee overflowing onto a gas stove "craftily preface

Khaled's combustible temper and ultimate [planned] explosion" but also "the difference in temperament" between the wavering, angst-ridden Sayeed and the outwardly bullish Khaled "is not as clear cut as it might seem since there emerges a subtle allusion that Khaled might not be other than a foil to Sayeed, or, simply, his alter-ego." This notion "can nuance further an already nuanced ending in which the initially hesitant Sayeed transforms into the formerly adamant Khaled" (28). It is doubting and fearful Sayeed, after all, who ends up on the bus. In fact, Gana's interpretation can be bolstered further by noting how they are rendered close to identical in their matching black suits and are suggestively shot in near tableau when urinating together against a tree or sharing a *nargila*. The implication that the two men represent a single but divided psyche therefore takes on an additional significance here. First, and most straightforwardly, the relay between certainty and doubt that their relationship embodies—in contrast to Ahmad's blank single-mindedness—helps to debunk the model of "blind faith" that is typically projected onto those who answer the call of Islamist militancy. Second, by fusing together in this way, the two bombers are reducible neither to some unshakable fundamentalism (a simply inaccurate abstraction that Updike's text undoubtedly flirts with) nor to an all-consuming, all-justifying Palestinian victimhood. Sayeed and Khaled have a choice—this fact is never shied away from—but at the same time they cannot, at least in one sense, choose the terrain of resistance and the terrain of their own lives and deaths, just as they cannot entirely separate from each other. As Gana argues, "by settling for the assigned suicide mission in Tel Aviv, Sayeed is not oblivious to the fact that he is thus acting in line with, not in excess of, the regulating power of the Israeli occupation" (26). "It's not we who decide," he insists to Suha. If their very humanity is a managed commodity, then "it is the occupation that decides the space of Man and the space of struggle."

The film's nuances are also enhanced by Abu-Assad's strategic (and very sophisticated) play of familiarity and estrangement, a self-conscious technique that is surely cultivated with the film's Western audience in mind—the claustrophobia and dusty decay of Nablus, for example, contrasted with the visible affluence and glamour of Tel Aviv (gleaming buildings, wide highways, and brightly colored billboards advertising mobile phones and so on). There are also specific evocations of canonical and popular images from Western art and fiction, a powerfully suggestive quality that is inscribed in the film's English title—not only alluding to the "Peace Now" Israeli pressure group, long-term advocates of a two state solution, but also to both *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Thus, instead of the religious philosophy that so preoccupies Updike in *Terrorist*, the

montage of Sayeed and Khaled's final meal together, for example, clearly echoes Da Vinci's famous mural of the Last Supper (there are exactly 13 men gathered around the long straight table). The sharp black suits and white shirts worn by the two bombers—ostensibly a disguise—perhaps even suggest a possible reference to Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992). The film therefore appropriates stylized images of consumable violence and culturally-sanctioned points of empathetic identification but differs from Updike's strategy by rigorously problematizing the desire (and therefore highlighting the complicity) of the viewer in the act of doing so. It is in this respect very much a "post 9/11" work—perhaps more so than the American novel with which I have placed it in dialogue—in the sense that formal questions about the mediation of violence and what Gana calls "the differential allocation of humanity" are built into its very structure. The film maintains a kind of unreal realism that dramatizes the relationship between intersecting death cultures (the symbolic overlap, as it were, between the Hollywood spectacular and the destruction of the World Trade Center). The videos of martyrdom speeches and executions that are available from a local store (fifteen shekels to buy, we are told, and three to rent) are a powerful illustration of this—born out of the decades of disenfranchisement that defines a specifically Palestinian set of experiences and identities, while at the same time plugged into a world system of edited terror that implicates us all.

These details, I would suggest, help us to open up a Jamesonian sense of "the missing psychology of the political unconscious," a model and metaphor for "how we might begin to articulate the local and the global," linking "our particular path through the world" to the "crucial features of our geopolitical planet" (McCabe xiv). What I mean by this is that by developing the analytical patterns I have begun to sketch out here, we can find authentic critical value in lingering over a muddled, problematic work such as Updike's *Terrorist*—adopting a geopolitical reading strategy that at the very least moves beyond the epiphenomenal feuding that has dominated its reception thus far. A kind of double vision is precisely what is required here, excavating the insights that the novel does offer (its useful allegories of American social experience and trauma after 9/11) while at the same time exposing how the text undermines itself—commits suicide as it were—by staging, for instance, an obsessive, fetishistic preoccupation with racial physiognomy that weirdly mirrors the kitsch aesthetics of mass market consumer choice: faces the color of "cocoa" (8) and "caramel" (9), "walnut-furniture stain" (15) and "gingerbread" (118), an incessant emphasis on the ethnic differences between Yemeni and Lebanese Arabs and so on. In the case of *Paradise Now*, however, we find a way of properly situating suicide terror within the coordi-

nates of our material and ideological universe—fiercely, intimately, violently localized yet dizzyingly, uncomfortably, uncannily bound up in globalized power relations, collapsing the safe distance between over there and over here.

To conclude then, for a discussion of means and ends must surely provide precisely that, an ending, no matter how makeshift it might be, I would highlight an exchange in Abu-Assad's film that I think demonstrates the simultaneous levels of meta/materialist reflection that the issue of suicide bombing—without ever apologizing for it—must always entail. When asked by Suha if he has ever been to the movies (the viewer, of course, is quite literally in this position and must therefore directly confront the film's ethico-political complexity and its multilayered construction), Sayeed gives the following response: "Yes. Once. Ten years ago when we burned down the Revoly Cinema." It is then revealed that this act was the violent culmination of a protest against Israel's policy of denying work permits to residents of the West Bank. "But why the cinema?" exclaims Suha. "Why us?" he replies.

## Notes

1. It is hard to imagine a more divergent treatment of, say, Marx and his legacies by two contemporary critics of culture and geopolitics after 9/11. There is a long distance between Gray's disquieting antihumanism and Žižek's pyrotechnic, rigorously committed defense of the "lost cause".
2. To clarify further, one of the challenges of approaching this topic in a properly critical fashion is the way in which suicide terrorism (and terrorism per se) is both incorporated into and, at the same time, stands apart from the systems it might (physically) disrupt and/or (ideologically) hold in contempt. Borrowing from the terms used by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire*, I proceed here from the standpoint that the networks of global capital that have now all but abolished an old-world statism form a totality with those oppositional forces that become spectacularly visible in the flashpoint of the terrorist attack. But this opposition is superficial in the sense that "the processes of globalization are no longer merely a fact but also a source of juridical definitions that tends to project a single supranational figure of political power . . . a new notion of right, or rather, a new inscription of authority and a new design of the production of norms and legal instruments of coercion that guarantee contracts and resolve conflicts" (9). However, as Gopal Balakrishnan explains in his review of their influential study, *Empire* is characterized by a coercive but also dynamic, volatile flow of "people, information and wealth" (143). Distinct from the familiar models of hegemonic totalization

found on the left and right—from, say, the counterintuitive utopian pessimism of the Frankfurt School to Francis Fukuyama's infamous End of History—the intricate "supranational order which they choose to call Empire" describes "a world overflowing with insurgent energies" (143).

3. While it is indisputable that terrorism can be conceived of as a narrative process, Alex Houen, for example, attempts to problematize the way in which violence and discourse are compounded in certain theoretical frameworks: "what about the violence *itself*? What of its own impact on the production of legislation or force of discourse? What of its influence in precipitating or terminating political negotiations? It is always textualized in advance, or can it manifest its own volatile performativity?" (*Terrorism* 10; emphasis added).
4. For a sober, detailed overview of both cosmic and "worldly" definitions of jihad in the context of global terrorism see Burke (22–40).
5. Wolin specifically attacks the work of Žižek, Baudrillard and Derrida (253–68).
6. As Judith Butler argues, grief is not always a "privatizing" or "solitary" phenomenon. Indeed, it is capable of furnishing "a sense of political community of a complex order and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility" (22).
7. Even conservative historians of terror have stressed this point. See, for example, Michael Burleigh (392–94). In terms of the origins of suicide bombing, while Robert Baer identifies thirteen-year-old Hossein Fahmideh as a specifically "Islamist" prototype, a martyr of the Iran-Iraq war who strapped explosives to his chest and threw himself under an Iraqi tank in 1980 (*Cult* 1), the debate rages as to where to begin—from medieval assassins to Russian nihilists.
8. I am fully aware of the argument that "sectarian and nationalist activists" must be distinguished from "the mythic figure of the philosophical nihilist" (Appelbaum and Paknadel 426). Nevertheless, Conrad's fiction clearly demonstrates that the social conditions and ideological motivations for suicide bombing as we understand it today (and, importantly, the technology to carry it out) have been in place from at least the turn of the century. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that it is Stevie who fits the "profile" of many contemporary suicide bombers, in the sense that it is often the young, uneducated, vulnerable, and/or mentally ill who are recruited, utterly ruthlessly, as cannon fodder by "cold-eyed operators capable of juggling one set of values they apply to their own lives with another that sends others to their deaths" (Burleigh 393).
9. It is interesting to note a stylistic-thematic parallel between Updike and Conrad in this respect. Both writers use obesity, or physical bulk, as a recurring trope in their discussions of terrorism. Jack Levy's wife Beth, for example, is described as "a whale of a woman giving off

too much heat through her blubber" (20), curiously reminiscent of Conrad's portraits of his grotesque and corpulent anarchists. Broadly speaking, it is as if outward rolls of fat reflect an inner failing on the part of the individual and society, a moral and spiritual decline. In contrast, however, if Conrad's "terrorists" are, quite literally weighed down by their shabby physiques, Updike's "terrorist," the athletic Ahmad, "has a sense of himself, his long limbs bare, as beautiful, beauty being an affront to the brutes of the world" (97).

10. Early in the novel, in the same moment that Ahmad feels a pang of sexual attraction for Joryleen, heavily implied by Updike's roving, incessantly biological aesthetic, he "pictures her smooth body . . . roasting in that vault of flames and being scorched into blisters" (9).
11. A tactic, it should not be forgotten, that was first pioneered on American soil by the anarchist Mario Buda, when a wagon full of blasting gelatin was detonated on Wall Street in 1920. See Davis (1–4).
12. It must said that one of the novel's most preposterous moments comes when Levy, running out of charm and ideas as Ahmad drives into the tunnel, announces: "Listen. There's something I need to say to you. I fucked your mother" (301)—an uncomfortable case of 24-meets-Woody Allen.
13. In fact, all three of the main characters in *Paradise Now* are marked by the death or traumatic wounding or their father: Suha, whose father Abu-Azzam is a hero of the Second Intifada and a continual absent presence in her life; Sayeed, who attempts to atone for the sins of his father and, at the same time, blames Israel for exploiting his weakness; and Khaled, whose father walks with a permanent limp after Israeli soldiers broke his legs.
14. See Nouri Gana for more information (29).
15. The tragicomic potential of martyrdom video "bloopers" is exploited to the nth degree in Morris's contentious film. In an interview with the online magazine *The Brag*, Riz Ahmed (the lead actor) tellingly explains how the humor of the film is not, in the strictest sense, a whimsical exaggeration:

The film isn't about, "Let's take a subject that in real life is deadly serious and invert it in some farcical way." It's very *realistic* . . . because what we usually get is the boiled-down headline that's very serious and drumroll and sensationalist, but there's a whole load of bloopers and out-takes either side of that headline that we don't see. And of course there are, because terrorist cells are groups of guys trying to organise something—and groups of guys trying to organise anything are going to screw it up.

This very nuanced conception of the film's comedic dimension is also, I would suggest, the key to the film's powerful political conscience.

16. Alongside Gana, see Raya Morag for an insightful discussion of the film's biopolitics in the broader context of Israeli-Palestinian cinema.

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