

SUICIDE TERRORISM

I ARGUED IN the previous chapter that the categories “war” and “terrorism” are constituted according to different logical criteria, the one taking its primary sense from the question of legality and the other from feelings of vulnerability and fear of social disorder, and that they are not therefore mutually exclusive. It is not correct to say, as Walzer does, that “the peculiar evil of terrorism [is] not only the killing of innocent people but also the intrusion of fear into everyday life, the violation of private purposes, the insecurity of public spaces, the endless coerciveness of precaution” because war, whether just or unjust, does that, too. I also suggested that the brutality of a state army and of a terrorist group have much in common, that although in a formal sense state armies are subject to humanitarian law, this does not constitute as much of an obstacle to deliberate cruelty as might appear at first sight. To the extent that it is an obstacle to such behavior *as a matter of law*, this applies to independent individuals who act violently against states or to members of states that are too weak to afford them protection. Strong states protect their own and convict others as violators of humanitarian law of force. In this chapter, I want to discuss suicide operations through some current

explanations that seek to distinguish them from acts of war. How different are they from each other?

One might think that one undeniable difference consists in destroying oneself in order to kill civilians one regards as one's enemies, and that this above all requires a special explanation. *Why did he do this terrible thing?* Terrible not simply because he killed innocents or was prepared to die (that's common enough in war) or simply because he killed himself (that's not uncommon in peace) but because he killed himself in order to kill innocents. Trying to pin down motives is difficult, however: When and how did the intention of undertaking a suicide mission come to be formed? Which desire predominated—killing oneself or killing others? What exactly did the suicide think the moment before he triggered the explosive: "I'm going to kill these bastards: they killed my brother," or "God will reward me for dying in His cause." or simply "I can't bear to live on under this cruel occupation"? Or was it perhaps something utterly different? Were unconscious desires hidden by his conscious language? Was he ecstatic? Or did he have second thoughts, doubts, regrets, as he proceeded toward his objective? If so, in what way and to what extent were they overcome? How does one set about answering such questions if the perpetrator is no longer alive? I do not say that such questions are always unanswerable but that the matter is far more complicated than is commonly supposed.

Is there a crucial difference between someone who kills in order to die and someone who dies in order to kill? Thus the sociologist Jean Baechler cites the case of the murderer Buffet who wrote to the French president before his execution demanding the "grace" of the guillotine: "To kill in order to commit suicide, that's my morality!" Baechler also cites examples of the reverse, the most famous being the kamikaze pilots in World War II who died in order to kill.¹ Such categorizations tend to draw on psychological models according to which suicide ("the solution to an existential problem")² can be regarded either as an instance of individual psychopathology or as a case of collective ideology. In both cases, there is a resort to

causal as opposed to purposive explanation. What examples like Baechler's show, however, is that the end of an action is not defined merely by its ending: the end of suicide is killing oneself; the end of suicide bombing is killing oneself and others at the same time. The open-endedness of motive inevitably leaves considerable scope for interpretation.

Suicide attacks are therefore, above all, histories. In recounting plausible histories, they also employ fiction. Take the Columbia University professor of social science Jon Elster. Deferring to the authority of "a widely respected expert on this topic, Ariel Merari," Elster writes: "The mental state that actually triggers the act of detonating the bomb may therefore be ephemeral and something of an artifact rather than a stable feature of the person. When asked [by the U.S. Congress, before which he testified] how well he thought he understood the state of mind of suicide attackers in the minutes before he [sic] died, Merari answered: 'Some of them were elated, apparently. Ecstatic in the last moments' (CBS News, 25 May 2003)."³ But how can one possibly know what went on in the mind of a surprise suicide attacker in the moment before she died? An interesting story about suicide depends, however, on assumptions about interesting internal states, and the mythology of suicide as pathology encourages fantasies of accessibility.

Explanations of suicide fighters tend to focus on the origin of motivation. It is not the effect of the bombing (which is plain for anyone to see) that preoccupies most Western commentators but the bomber's reason for doing what he or she does. That reason is often—not always—seen as being in some way pathological. Or as being alienated—that is, as not properly integrated into Western civilization.

But I think here of such unpredicted massacres as the one that occurred at Columbine High School when two heavily armed students killed and maimed a large number of their schoolmates and then shot themselves; the debate on what motivated them has been endless and (not surprisingly) remains indecisive.⁴ A suicide bombing can be said to be more calculated than the school shootings: the

combatant appears to be at once more in control of himself (he is disciplined in what he does) and less so (ruthless men have trained him). Yet these are conditions, not motives. The reason the combatant kills others by dying is often traced to the systematic deprivation and humiliation he has suffered—to his sense that, in confronting an overwhelming and ruthless adversary, common destruction is the only possible response (an expression of despair and rage?)—or to deep personal unhappiness. It is also ascribed to Islamic discourse because of his recorded proclamation before the operation, which typically uses a religious vocabulary—thus the highly ritualized proclamation is taken to correspond to his real motives. The motive and the action to which it leads are together regarded by most Western commentators as perverse because the agents have chosen death. But death here is an effect not a motive. “Intention,” as I use the term, occurs at a causal level; “motives” do not. Motives are therefore often indeterminate. Why and when do people search for them? How do they recount the motives of suicide bombers? What signs do they take as visible indicators of invisible truth? And of what truth?

In the following discussion of some typical explanations of the suicide bomber, I suggest that they tell us more about liberal assumptions of religious subjectivities and political violence than they do about what is ostensibly being explained.



The well-known theorist of religious studies Ivan Strenski makes the point that explaining suicide operations in terms of “personal psychological motivation” isn’t enough and urges that one needs a sociological and theological perspective. Drawing on the writings of the Durkheimian school, he proposes that the phenomenon is better understood through the religious concepts of sacrifice and gift than through theories seeking to explain suicide. Strenski reminds us that Halbwachs was perhaps the first theorist to distinguish analytically between suicide and sacrifice in his development and mod-

ification of Durkheim's thesis on suicide. For Halbwachs, the distinction turns on society's attitude, something most clearly evident in its ritual form. When self-immolation is expressed in a ritual form, it is to be read as sacrifice; without that form, it is suicide. "Sacrifice is a profoundly social action," Strenski echoes Halbwachs, "essentially involving a network of relationships, typically . . . actualized in terms of systems of social exchange. Sacrifice is not something to be understood solely in terms of the dynamics of an individual's psyche. What is more, sacrifice is not just a social deed. It also has potent religious resonance. . . . It is also a 'making holy,' as the Latin origins of the term indicate—*sacri-ficium*. Sacrifice for the Durkheimians is indeed a giving up, or a giving of, *that makes something holy*."⁵ The sacrifice of oneself in the case under discussion, says Strenski, is made as a gift to and for the nation that is thereby sanctified: all suicide bombers believe they are giving their lives for the Palestinian nation, to the *umma*. "Without minimizing the importance of the utilitarian jihadist conception of these bombings [as a militarily tactic], as well as their multivalence," writes Strenski, "some of the many strands of meaning can be picked up that hang from the claim that these so-called suicide or martyrdom bombings need also to be considered carefully as sacrificial gifts [to Palestine]."⁶ Strenski's analysis thus proceeds from the claim that since sacrifice is the essence of religious subjectivity, violence is integral to it.

Three comments are in order here, however. First, for Durkheim, virtually all acts are social, including suicide. Durkheim would almost certainly have included suicide bombing in his category of "altruistic suicide." Indeed, Durkheim was the first theorist to problematize the notion of "the individual" through an identification of the social determinants of that most personal of acts: suicide. In Strenski's account, we are still in the realm of looking for motives, of asking "what impels them to do it?" only now the motive is called "ritual," a theme that easily allows us to speak of the religious.

My second comment is that, in the Islamic tradition, sacrifice involving the slaughter of an animal (*dhabīha*) is made in response to a

divine command (e.g., on the annual pilgrimage), or as thanks to the deity (e.g., on returning safely from a journey or recovering from a serious illness), or as a sign of repentance (called *kaffāra*) for particular transgressions. None of these criteria apply to the suicide bomber.

Third: Strenski's use of the idea of "making something holy" through sacrifice is less clear than it appears. I have written elsewhere about the problematic character of the concept of "the sacred," but, in the Islamic tradition at least, sacrifice does not make the recipient (God), or for that matter the sacrificant (the person in whose name the sacrifice is made) or the victim, "holy." The rite itself—the words and movements necessary to it—might be glossed as "sacred," and it is true that the moral status of the sacrificant is altered by the act of sacrifice, but that does not make him or her sacred. Strenski seems to have taken the Christian concept of Christ's supreme gift of himself as the model for sacrifice in general. But the Arabic for "gift," *hadiyya*, is never used to describe sacrifice, and *qurbān*—an Arabic word for sacrifice that is treated as central in Strenski's analysis—is more commonly used by Arabic-speaking Christians for Communion than by Arabic-speaking Muslims for animal sacrifice. In fact, the Qur'an uses the word *qurban* three times: at 3:183 to refer to burnt offerings according to Mosaic rites (there are no burnt offerings in Islam), at 5:27 to refer to the biblical story of Cain and Abel, and at 46:28 to refer to pre-Islamic beliefs about ritual mediation (the Qur'an rejects such mediation).

I will say more on the difference of the classical Islamic concept of martyr (*shahīd*) from the concept of sacrifice (*dahīyya*), but here I stress that if we pay closer attention to the way the concept of *shahīd* is deployed in historical as well as contemporary usage, we will see that its connection with sacrifice is contingent and that it doesn't fit with Strenski's use of that term. If one is to talk about religious subjectivities, one must work through the concepts the people concerned actually use.

A difficulty I have with Strenski's approach is that it is a forensic reading of motive. Its explanatory concern, like that of others, is

with identifying culpability that can be established through the reconstruction of a particular type of motive: According to this account, Palestinian suicide bombers are not sick, they do not perform their terrible acts because they are driven by an insupportable environment. The suicide bombers are fully responsible—answerable—for their acts because they *choose* to justify their violence in terms of a discursive religious tradition, in which they choose to offer individual lives (their own and the lives of others) in exchange for a transcendent value. It is the free intention of the perpetrator that leads to the criminal act and not (as is often alleged) brutal subjection to Israeli occupation. That, at any rate, is how this kind of reading is made. By finding the culprit as well as the religious sources that feed his criminality, a danger to Israeli society is identified with precision; the state's extension of the space of violence in the cause of security is seen to be necessary. Thus although for the law it is the unlicensed act of killing civilians that defines the crime, for journalists and security experts it is his motive for doing this terrible thing that is of primary interest. And yet, because the actor dies in the event, his motives are not fully retrievable. Ironically, it is only at the trial of someone who has failed to complete the operation that the motive of suicide bombers can be adduced. So the social scientist, novelist, and filmmaker endow the dead terrorist with the motives of the living. Strenski's redescription of motive in terms of the concept of sacrifice offers a religious model by means of which suicide bombing can be identified as "religious terrorism." And that appellation defines the bomber as morally underdeveloped—and therefore premodern—when compared with peoples whose civilized status is partly indicated by their secular politics and their private religion and whose violence is therefore in principle disciplined, reasonable, and just.



But one can do the reading in other ways, define and separate types of violent acts and the subjectivities to which they are attached, differently. Much will then depend on the overriding hermeneutic

principle one adopts to reconcile apparent inconsistencies in the reading required by the explanation one favors. The result may not be incontestably better, but it can be more complicated than the one Strenski offers.

In a recent unpublished article,⁷ May Jayyusi insists that suicide fighters must be understood in relation to new forms of political subjectivity that have been formed in the context of resistance to the particular powers that circumscribe them. To describe these powers (the Israeli military, the Jewish settlements, the Palestine Authority, and Islamic Jihad and Hamas), she draws on Carl Schmitt's idea of "the state of exception" via Giorgio Agamben's *Homo sacer* and stresses the importance of a developing political-ideological field—including Israeli policies of occupation and settlement, the Palestinian resistance, and international developments (the Iranian revolution) and agreements (the Oslo Accords). This is a larger story than the one told by Strenski, and it doesn't begin by trying to explain a *religious* act.

Oslo, Jayyusi writes, was an attempt to institute a local authority over the Palestinian population, charged with containing and subjecting it to a variety of exceptional regulations. In effect, the result of Oslo was that an entire occupied population was held hostage to the policing performance of the Palestine Authority. As the overarching state power, Israel was at once beyond the Palestinian zones and yet sovereign over them. (The ambiguity of where its unstated borders lie—what is inside Israel and what is outside—have long been part of its strategic advantage.) This means, Jayyusi points out, that the Palestine Authority was caught in an irresolvable contradiction: on the one hand, seeking national sovereignty and, on the other, conceding it indefinitely to the occupying power by agreeing unconditionally to carry out its policing function. Nevertheless, Jayyusi claims that something new did emerge with Oslo for the general population, something she calls "an imaginary of freedom."

It seems that at first the Palestinian population as a whole received Oslo favorably despite the misgivings of many. Thus, according to the polls, support for the militant Islamist movements

dropped to about 13 percent when first the agreement was signed. But as it became clear that the secular political elites in the Authority were unable to develop an adequate politics in the contradictory conditions established by Oslo, popular support for the Islamists rose to about a third. But, of course, more was involved here than a response to public opinion polls. There was also the welfare function of the Islamists, in which care and assistance were provided to all on a neighborhood basis and regardless of party affiliation. Furthermore, the mosque became the site of an Islamic discourse in which subjectivity was increasingly individuated, moralized, and linked to the movement as its collective representative.

Incompetent and corrupt, the Palestine Authority came to be generally seen as lacking legitimate leadership and incapable of standing up to Israeli power that had seemed in Oslo to recognize the possibility of a Palestinian state and that now easily denied it. The expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza continued, control of the water supply was withheld from the Authority, the pattern of new roads responded to the needs of the settlers and not to those of Palestinians. More land was confiscated by the state, more houses destroyed, militants as well as their kin punished. Add to all that the daily humiliation of all Palestinians at the many army checkpoints. Insupportable rage, says Jayyusi, was the consequence—and she cites Hannah Arendt's statement at this point ("rage arises 'only when there is reason to suspect that conditions could be changed and are not'"), relating it to the national struggle after Oslo. I suggest, however, that the relevance of Arendt's statement is not its reference to uncontrollable anger (planned suicide bombing is not an instance of uncontrollable rage) but its concern with an act of death dealing that reacts to injustice by transgressing the law. The stress here should be not on violence as such but on spontaneous action when legal political means are blocked. Because, for Arendt, we may recall, the possibility of acting politically is part of what makes men individual and therefore human. It is also what offers them a secular form of immortality.⁸

The second uprising started in October 2000 after Ariel Sharon's provocative entry into the holy shrine of al-Aqsa to demonstrate Israeli sovereignty over it. This gave Hamas its opportunity to demonstrate its political initiative. On January 1, 2001, it launched the first suicide operation. Subsequently, suicide operations began to be undertaken by the other—secular—political factions and eventually by members of the population at large. It was Fathi Shikaki, founder of Islamic Jihad, who had launched, in the early eighties, what many Palestinians call the second round of armed resistance against Israel.

So there is an important Islamic dimension in the suicide operations, according to this story, but it is placed in a wider context than the one appealed to by Strenski and others. Islamic militancy is characterized by the fusion of two elements: the centrality of martyrdom (inspired by the Iranian example) and the individuating process (initiated and promoted by Hamas) centered on the mosque.⁹

Jayyusi's conclusion is a neat inversion of Agamben: "If 'homo sacer' is he who can be killed and not sacrificed," she writes, "then the martyr here inverts this relation to sovereignty, transforming himself into he who can be sacrificed but not killed. Many testaments of martyrs are signed with the words 'the living martyr,' *ash-shaheed al-hayy*. They can be sacrificed but cannot be killed, the koranic verse 'Do not count those who are martyred for the sake of God dead but alive with their lord' is the signature of every *bayan*."¹⁰ So Jayyusi, too, draws on the religious idea of sacrifice, as well as on Palestinian politics, in her explanation of the suicide fighters' motives. But she includes an expressive element: the martyr demonstrates something by his violent death. The explanation itself is an optimistic one in which the Palestinian snatches the responsibility for his own life and death from the Israeli occupiers. This is arresting, but Jayyusi's explanation in terms of *shahāda* needs to be complicated further.

Actually, Palestinians, when employing a religious vocabulary, call all their civilians who die in the conflict with Israel *shuhadā*

(plural of *shahīd*)—including innocents killed in Israeli operations against militants and stone-throwing boys shot by the Israeli army. Strenski's claim that *shahāda* (glossed as "martyrdom") is essentially connected to the ritual of sacrifice—that it is a form of sacrifice—cannot account for this wider category of *shuhadā*. What matters according to this latter usage is neither personal motive nor political expression but the fatal effect of a violent encounter with the occupying enemy. The violent death of *all* Palestinians in confrontation with Israelis, so one might suggest, is regarded as a sign that they have died as witnesses (*shuhadā*) to their faith—although there is no ritualized form to most of these deaths. As such, the *shahīd*'s death constitutes a triumph rather than a sacrifice.¹¹

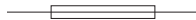
This usage fits with older conceptions of a death that needs special explaining. For over the centuries the Islamic tradition has described several ways of dying as *shahāda* that are not connected with war:

To the Prophet is ascribed the saying that not only those who are slain for the faith are to be regarded as martyrs. Seven other causes of death are enumerated which make the sufferers worthy of the honorable title of a *shahīd*, and these are mainly calamitous or pathological causes, which have nothing to do with voluntary self-sacrifice for a great cause. In later times other causes have been added to these seven. He who dies in defense of his possessions, or far from his home in a strange country; he who meets his death in falling from a high mountain; he who is torn to pieces by wild beasts, and many more, are to be counted in the category of *shuhadā*.¹²

Thus to be struck by a fatal calamity, whether natural or human, is to be constituted as a sign of human finitude in the world created by an eternal deity. I therefore suggest that the reason Palestinian civilians who are destroyed under the Occupation are regarded as *shuhadā* is twofold: first, they have been struck by a catastrophe, and, second, their mode of death gives them immortality. The idea of immortality here is not strictly speaking physical because every-

one recognizes that the individual's physical existence is ended by death. At any rate, to be struck dead by an external force has nothing to do with motives. But it does have to do with violence—violence not as it appears in the spectacular act of killing others by killing oneself (whether this can properly be accounted *istishād* is a matter of dispute among Muslim scholars) but as it relates to the idea of mortality. All untimely death that is not the result of legitimate punishment is a violation. The believer who dies in a so-called justified war (actively or passively) belongs to that category, but the category itself is not defined by participation in “justified war.”

So one problem I have with Jayyusi's account is that in its emphasis on sacrifice it concedes too much to current fashions in explaining suicide operations as a perverse form of national politics and permits unhelpful references to a unique “culture of death.” This doesn't mean that such a term is unusable but that it is used too crudely for the simple purpose of designating an illiberal perspective. Liberalism, too, I shall argue later, has its own culture of death.



But can one nevertheless regard suicide bombing as an expression of the political culture—the culture of death—that has emerged in modern times in the Middle East? Some commentators who have addressed this point do think so.

Bruno Étienne, a well-known French political scientist who specializes in North Africa, has tried to place suicide operators in the context of a long history of violence: precolonial repression (the Ottomans and then the modern Turks, as he points out, were scarcely gentle toward those of their coreligionists whom they dominated); colonial wars of conquest (in which ears and testicles were triumphantly collected by the French); colonial violence (of which Frantz Fanon wrote); wars of decolonization (in which both sides used torture, assassination, and systematic mutilation); the brutality of dictatorial regimes (whether nationalist or Islamist); the violence, finally, since the creation of the state of Israel, inflicted by the Is-

raeli army on the Palestinian people at whose expense the state was established.¹³ It is not clear whether Étienne is suggesting that the cumulative effect of historical violence in the Arab world *caused* the outburst of suicide bombing or whether he views such bombing simply as a continuation of the history of Middle Eastern violence. In either case, he takes it for granted that suicide bombing requires special theoretical attention.¹⁴ Psychoanalysis might combine the two in the idea of sacrifice, which it explains as an unconscious desire for parricide. For Freud, it will be recalled, totemic sacrifice is the unconscious repetition of a primeval crime;¹⁵ for others, like Money-Kyrle, the unconscious desire for parricide, acquired by each individual in his own development, is bound to the idea of gift.¹⁶ My argument throughout has been that to take suicide bombing as sacrifice is to load it with a significance that is derived from a Christian and post-Christian tradition. Although in my view this makes it inappropriate as an *explanation*, I shall later suggest that as an *idea* it is an important part of the political imaginary of modern nationalism.

In the case of Palestinian combatants, Étienne points out, the enemy's force is far more powerful, and add to that the contempt they sense in the verbal charity of their Arab brothers, as well as the Israeli contempt symbolized by the wall and the many checkpoints. "These things have manufactured contempt and hatred, transformed hatred for the self into hatred for the Other. Absolute."¹⁷ But where in all this is the mechanism of a hatred for the self to be located?

What is especially striking is how the widespread belief about tendencies inherent in monotheism allows Étienne to assimilate Islamic discourses on the subject to a Christian one—as Strenski does.¹⁸ Yet compared with medieval Christian literature, there are actually very few medieval Islamic texts that deal exclusively with what is called in European literature "martyrdom." In any case, the concepts are not the same even if the words used (*martyr* and *shahīd*) are etymologically connected. I have already referred to the range of meanings for *shahīd*, including unintentional death, that sets it apart from Christian understandings of "martyr." The Qur'an,

incidentally—and perhaps significantly—doesn't make explicit use of the word *shahīd* to signify someone who dies in God's cause. The verse most often cited in support of it (9:52) speaks of *husnayayn*, "the two best things," a phrase conventionally interpreted as "either victory or death in God's cause."¹⁹ The concept of *istishhād* as a technique of *jihād* in which the combatant (*muajāhid*) annihilates himself is an entirely modern idea.²⁰

Étienne's attraction to psychoanalysis is more interesting, however, even if his formulation of the Freudian idea of the death wish is not: "The death wish results from an overflowing of energies set free by the failure of the capacities to make representations: when there is no longer anything, no political model, no utopia, no hope, no solution—when the representations of the possible are frustrated, one explodes! This overflowing of excitation brings about a rupture: the actor, or the agent, as Pierre Bourdieu would say, is emptied of his own desires. He is then the object of a movement of disconnection for which the neurosis of war is the outlet."²¹ Étienne's suggestion that the suicide fighter wishes to die because she lacks political imagination is not only implausible (consider the evidence that Jayyusi's account provides), it also rests on the assumption—which I will examine at the conclusion of this chapter—that politics and violence are mutually exclusive.

According to Freud, the pressure to prolong life and the pressure toward death are both permanent, contradictory drives in all living organisms. One need not agree with every shift in Freud's argument (or subscribe to Freudianism) to see that this idea raises questions about every individual's approach—now deliberate, now unconscious; now willing, now reluctant—toward her end. There is in Freud's account no simple way in which a death decided by the individual for himself can be explained. One may say that the suicide fighter is *driven* to annihilate herself in the enemy or that she *chooses* to destroy her enemies that way. But how to account for the difference between laying hands on oneself and making war? For

Freud, both are aggressive instincts, and the death instinct (like the instinct to extend life) is a transcendent power beyond the conscious subject while being at the same time his own desire. The playing out of this instinct—of the ability and willingness to wage devastating wars—appears most impressively among the so-called civilized nations, in spite of Freud's claim that the disciplining mechanism of guilt serves more and more to internalize aggression as civilization progresses. But guilt, I argued in my first chapter, is no bar to the repetition of transgression. And, contrary to Étienne (and Freud), war is not a neurosis but a collectively organized, legitimized, and moralized game of destruction that is played much more savagely by the civilized than the uncivilized. Nor is it suicide in any but a metaphorical sense. In fact, there is consistent evidence to the effect that rates of suicide tend to decline significantly in wartime.²²

Étienne goes on: "But at what moment does an actor—whether manipulated or not—go on to the act of self-destruction? And in what 'objective' conditions does an entire society become 'mad' to the point of massacring its own children, as was the case in Algeria in the 1990s? . . . Self-hatred was going to be transformed into hate for the Other. All the more so in that Algeria, like most Arab countries, had lost its Other: the native Jew and the foreign (and foreign-tongued) European. Brother was thus alone face to face with his different brother, Kabyle, Berber, Arab, Islamist. This then produced a civil war that was to cause more than a hundred thousand deaths."²³ Here we seem to have an answer to the question I asked earlier about where the mechanism of self-hatred resides: according to Étienne, self-hatred is generated within and by the conduct of a vicious civil war, and the self is the nation in process of murdering itself. A complicated history of civil war is in danger of being reduced to a metaphor of suicide and equated with the real suicide of Palestinian militants—and then both are presented as expressions of an Islamic culture of death.²⁴

Robert Pape, a political scientist, collects figures. He insists that statistics show suicide bombers must be understood as employing a strategy of war.

I have spent a year compiling a database of every suicide bombing and attack around the globe from 1980 to 2001—188 in all. It includes any attack in which at least one terrorist killed himself or herself while attempting to kill others, although I excluded attacks authorized by a national government, such as those by North Korea against the South. The data show that there is little connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, or any religion for that matter. In fact, the leading instigator of suicide attacks is the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, a Marxist-Leninist group whose members are from Hindu families but who are adamantly opposed to religion (they have committed 75 of the 188 incidents). Rather, what nearly all suicide terrorist campaigns have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel liberal democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland. Religion is rarely the root cause, although it is often used as a tool by terrorist organizations in recruiting and in other efforts in service of the broader strategic objective.

Pape points out that these attacks are not random incidents but part of organized campaigns and that in terms of casualties they are the most efficient form of terrorism: Thus although only 3 percent of all terrorist incidents consisted of suicide attacks, they caused about half of all the fatalities, even excluding the large number who died on September 11.²⁵ To signal to the citizens of liberal democracies that they face an intolerable cost is to compel their armies to withdraw. Because they are widely mediatized, says Pape, terrorist incidents “make a statement.” One should add, however, that performatives are a feature not only of terrorist incidents but also of contemporary small wars (the 1991 and 2003 U.S. attacks against Iraq are famous examples of political theater)—and indeed of all popular politics that employ and respond to media images.

44. Walzer, "The Ethics of Battle."
45. Colby, "How to Fight Savage Tribes," p. 287; my emphasis.

2. SUICIDE TERRORISM

1. Jean Baechler, *Suicides* (New York: Basic, 1979), p. 36 and p. 409 ff.
2. Baechler dismisses a range of familiar definitions and comes up with the following: "Suicide denotes all behavior that seeks and finds the solution to an existential problem by making an attempt on the life of the subject" (*ibid.*, p. 11).
3. Jon Elster, "Motivations and Beliefs in Suicide Missions," in Diego Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 240. Elster goes on to propose that "such trance-like states most likely do not spring from a stable motivational system" (p. 240).
4. Explanations included "total misfits rejected by other pupils," "exposure to violent video games," "seeking attention," and so on, all of which turned out to be factually incorrect, or speculative, or tautological. The massacre was the central incident in Michael Moore's movie *Bowling for Columbine* and in another feature movie modeled on the event, Gus Van Sant's *Elephant*. Moore used the slaughter emblematically to make the uncontentious point that fear and violence are endemic to American culture.
5. Ivan Strenski, "Sacrifice, Gift and the Social Logic of Muslim Human Bombers," in *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15, no. 3 (2003): 8.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
7. May Jayyusi, "Subjectivity and Public Witness: An Analysis of Islamic Militance in Palestine," unpublished paper for the SSRC Beirut Conference on the Public Sphere in the Middle East, October 2004.
8. The full passage in Arendt reads as follows:

Rage is by no means an automatic reaction to misery and suffering as such. . . . Only where there is reason to suspect that conditions could be changed and are not does rage arise. Only when our sense of justice is offended do we react with rage, and this reaction by no means necessarily reflects personal injury. . . . To resort to violence when confronted with outrageous events or conditions is enormously tempting because of its

inherent immediacy and swiftness. . . . The point is that under certain circumstances—acting without argument or speech and *without counting the consequences*—is the only way to set the scales of justice right again. (Billy Budd, striking dead the man who bore false witness against him, is the classic example.) In this sense, rage and the violence that sometimes—not always—goes with it belong among the “natural” human emotions, and to cure man of them would mean nothing less than to dehumanize or emasculate him.

(Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* [London: Allen Lane, 1969], pp. 63–64, italics in original)

9. If by “individuation” Jayyusi means recognizing the individual as the subject of will and responsibility, then it is not clear why she thinks this is a new development. In Islamic doctrine, the concepts of will and responsibility have always been present.
10. The Qur’anic verse cited here (3:169) is conventionally interpreted as a reference to martyrdom but the word for “martyr,” *shahīd*, does not appear there. The verse actually refers to *alladhīna qutlū fī sabīl illāhi*—“those who have been killed in God’s cause.” The passive form allows Palestinians to cite it in the context of the deaths of noncombatant civilians at the hands of the Israeli army.
11. Because she befriended Palestinians in the Jenin refugee camp during the intifada, Tali Fahima, a young Israeli Jewish woman, was tried in Israel in 2005 for “giving aid to the enemy in times of war.” During this period, the portrait of Tali was stuck on the camp walls. Tali’s picture had the same honorific title as the portraits of Palestinian “martyrs.” See Stéphanie Le Bars, “Tali Fahima, une Israélienne trop curieuse,” in *Le Monde*, September 24, 2005.
12. Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, ed. and trans. S. M. Stern (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), 2:351–52. The passage I cite is preceded by this perplexity: “But it is remarkable that the meaning of the word *shahīd* received an extension which is scarcely to be reconciled with the warlike tendency of Islām.” This does not, however, lead Goldziher to ask whether the notion of Islam’s warlike tendency needs to be reexamined. Nor does he explain why thinking in terms of the ad hoc extension of an original meaning is preferable to regarding the meanings as elements of a single semantic field.

13. Bruno Étienne, *Les combattants suicidaires* (Paris: Éditions de l'aube, 2005), p. 34.
14. Étienne doesn't mention the Hindu Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, who are said to have invented suicide bombing and who have claimed responsibility for more than two hundred and sixty bombings over the last two decades—averaging almost one a month—killing and injuring thousands, mostly civilians. “Of course we use suicide bombers,” a Tiger official remarked to an American journalist, “because, as a revolutionary organization, we have limited resources” (Philip Gourevitch, “Letter From Sri Lanka: Tides of War,” *New Yorker*, August 1, 2005, p. 56). By now (2006), Iraqi suicide bombings must have surpassed the Tamil record.
15. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*.
16. R. Money-Kyrle, *The Meaning of Sacrifice* (London: Hogarth, 1929).
17. Étienne, *Les combattants suicidaires*, pp. 21–22.
18. Expressions such as “the Kingdom of God,” “the Redeemer will triumph over the Beast,” “those who have testified [*shuhadā*, from the root *shahāda*] will sit on the right hand of the father” are foreign to Islamic discourse—just as the Christian concept of “sacrifice” is. But they litter Étienne's text. The assumption that they are part of an authoritarian worldview shared by the monotheistic religions and can therefore help explain the *jihād*ist project—assuming there is such a thing as a single clear project—seems to me unpersuasive.
19. See, for example, *Qur'ān karīm bi tafsīr al-imām al-jalālayn jalāl ad-dīn muhammad al-mahallī wa jalāl ad-dīn as-suyūṭī* (Damascus: Maktabat al-Mallah. 1978), pp. 256–57.
20. In classical Arabic, incidentally, the word *istishhād* meant “requiring someone to give evidence as in a court of law”; the standard word for “death while fighting in God's cause” was—and still is—*shahāda*. In the Islamic tradition, as in medieval Christian texts, *shahāda* is formally distinguished from suicide, *qatl an-nafs*—the modern Arabic word being *intihār*.
21. Étienne, *Les combattants suicidaires*, p. 17.
22. See WHO Regional Office for Europe, “Changing Patterns in Suicide Behaviour,” *EURO Reports and Studies*, vol. 74 (Copenhagen, 1982), cited in Nadia Taysir Dabbagh, *Suicide in Palestine: Narratives of Despair* (London: Hurst, 2005), p. 10.

23. Étienne, *Les combattants suicidaires*, pp. 17–18.
24. Étienne is often perceptive but unconvincing in his attempt to treat the cruel civil war in Algeria and the suicide operations in Palestine as aspects of a single problem, to equate Christian apocalyptic discourse with the language of Islamic militants, and to treat *jihād* as virtually equivalent to *istishhād*. Freud's notion of thanatos against eros doesn't help in the problem Étienne has set himself: Freud proposed that since everything living dies for internal reasons (dissolves and becomes inorganic once again) "the aim of all life is death" and so death constitutes a return to the origin (Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Standard Edition) [New York: Norton, 1961], pp. 45–46). Whatever else may be made of this idea, it cannot explain why suicide operations take place in particular times and places. In fact, Étienne's focus on Islamic violence as a syndrome requiring special explanation diverts the reader from attending to the centrality of violence and killing in all politics—including the politics that liberals themselves value and defend.
25. Robert A. Pape, "Dying to Kill Us," *New York Times*, September 22, 2003. Pape has elaborated his position in the form of a book: *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005). This contains much interesting information, but the argument is essentially the same as the one advanced in the article.
26. Jayyusi, "Subjectivity and Public Witness."
27. Roxanne Euben, "Killing (for) Politics: Jihad, Martyrdom, Political Action," *Political Theory* 30, no. 1 (2002), 9.
28. The assumption that *jihādīs* have a single motivation—and are involved in a single project—is widely shared by many. Thus the French expert on political Islam Olivier Roy, commenting on the July 7 London terror attacks, assumes that all acts of terror carried out by Muslim militants, from New York to Bali, are attributable to an organization called al-Qaeda. Roy even includes the murder of Theo van Gogh by a Dutch-born Muslim in his list of al-Qaeda atrocities and argues that the terrorism perpetrated by al-Qaeda has nothing to do with such things as U.S. interventions, Iraq, or Israel but with a determination "to provoke a clash of cultures" on a global scale. In my opinion, Roy is too hasty in drawing such conclusions. Consider the following points in his argument: (1) the al-Qaeda attacks of Septem-

ber 11 preceded the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq (but was U.S. military, economic, and political intervention in the region absent before 2001?); (2) the U.S. military base in Saudi Arabia has been removed without this affecting al-Qaeda hostility to the Saudi regime (but has the military, economic, and security alliance between the United States and the Saudi rulers been dissolved together with the base?); (3) al-Qaeda published statements barely mention Israel (in fact, several do—but does their concern with Israeli suppression of Palestinians require that al-Qaeda mention it in every proclamation?); (4) the insurgents in Iraq have no political aim, not even the establishment of an Islamic state (but are attacks against a foreign occupier—and its perceived collaborators—not a political aim?); (5) the Spanish police have discovered attacks planned by al-Qaeda after the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq (perhaps—but is every plot uncovered by the police a plot by al-Qaeda?). Roy's assumptions do not prove that al-Qaeda is a central command center responsible for acts of terror carried out throughout the world rather than a source of inspiration for diffuse networks of militants who believe they have grievances against the United States and its allies. (See, incidentally, the excellent introduction by Bruce Lawrence to his collection of pronouncements by Osama bin Laden: *Messages to the World* [London: Verso, 2005].) That Muslim militants see the matter in terms of a global confrontation between a dominant United States and its allies, on the one hand, and Islam, on the other, is true (indeed, the United States is a global power, and it *does* deal with those it sees as friends and enemies across the world), but all atrocities committed by Muslims do not add up to a single deadly motive. In what sense, for example, did van Gogh's murderer, "avenging an insult to Islam," and the London bombers, attacking ordinary Britishers "for the war in Iraq," have the same motive? (See Roy's piece in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, English edition, August 2005.)

29. Euben, "Killing (for) Politics," p. 22.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

31. The best-known (and most persuasive) statement of this view is Robert Cover's *Narrative, Violence, and the Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).