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# Suicide bombers in Western literature: demythologizing a mythic discourse

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# Suicide bombers in Western literature: demythologizing a mythic discourse

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In facing the challenge of suicide terrorism today on a global scale, it is tempting to attribute the phenomenon to cultural or religious behavior patterns observed solely in non-Western countries. Yet recent scholarly research on its possible cultural or religious origins has led less to convincing and satisfactory results than to an unresolved aporia between arbitrariness and contingency. By the same token, little notice is taken of the fact that, in Western history and literature, actions and figures can be found whose development and strategies conspicuously resemble those of today's suicide bombers. A series of such analogous examples in Western literature from antiquity to the present is explored in order to provide deeper insights into situational and systemic factors at work beyond cultural and religious determinants. To more effectively counter suicide terrorism, alternative policies are proposed with the vision of a peaceful coexistence of diverse cultures and religions.

**Keywords:** asymmetric warfare; freedom fighting; heroism; military practice; slave ethic; suicide bombing

## Introduction

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, a series of critical works in literary and cultural studies has developed a complex epistemology of the self and the other (see Bhabha, 1994; Eagleton, 2000; Greenblatt, 1991; Kristeva, 1991; Said, 1993, 1978/1995; Todorov, 1982). Since then, the heuristic opposition between Occident and Orient has increasingly been brought into question by considering two pragmatic problems. First, one tends to schematize or even dichotomize the perception of the variety of cultures by disregarding the fact that cultures within themselves can be hybrid and heterogeneous (see Said, 1993, p. xxv; Eagleton, 2000, p. 15). Second, according to the given cultural scheme, self-adaptation or self-exoticization can take place (see, e.g., Bhabha, 1994, chap. 4, pp. 85–92), with the result that it is not the culture that reflects the scheme but rather the scheme that constructs the culture. Selfness and otherness are thus primarily theoretical categories for handling differences rather than empirical categories for defining cultures.

In facing the challenge of suicide terrorism today on a global scale, it is tempting to attribute the phenomenon to cultural or religious behavior patterns observed solely in non-Western countries (see, e.g., Smith, 2003), in particular, when not exclusively, in countries of the Islamic world (see, e.g., Follath, Großbongardt, & Mascolo, 2004, p. 107). Yet recent scholarship on the possible cultural or religious origins of suicide terrorism has led less to convincing and satisfactory results than to an unresolved

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aporia between arbitrariness and contingency.[1] Smith's proposition that organized suicide bombing is an exclusively non-Western phenomenon (Smith, 2003) has no sufficient empirical foundation; neither does Conesa's claim that the phenomenon is by and large of Muslim origin (Conesa, 2004). By the same token, little notice is taken of the fact that, in Western history and literature, actions and figures can be found whose development and strategies conspicuously resemble those of today's suicide bombers. Here, the phenomenon of suicide terrorism betrays its potentially universal character.[2]

The genesis of suicide terrorism has been – not least in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 – the subject of intensive historical and cultural inquiry (see, e.g., Kermani, 2002; Laqueur, 2003, pp. 71–97; Atran, 2003). Reuter, Croitoru, and Smith have traced tangled lines of development from the medieval Isma'ili sect of Assassins via the Japanese kamikaze pilots in the Pacific War to the suicide pilots in the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington (Reuter, 2002, 2003; Croitoru, 2003; Smith, 2003). In such structural observations, the contextual difference between warfare and terrorism, strategic strikes on military targets and deliberate attacks on innocent civilians, is flagrantly overlooked.[3] On the other hand, under the impact of today's anti-Western Islamist terrorism, comparable examples from across Western history remain relatively unconsidered.

Thus, the current Western discourse (political, journalistic, etc.) on suicide terrorism can be characterized as a 'mythic discourse' in Edward W. Said's terms (Said, 1978/1995, p. 321). The phenomenon of suicide bombing is wrongly being orientalized or even Islamicized, and misleading conceptions of selfness and otherness are being constructed along the process. If we are to avoid the seductive degradation of knowledge that Said deplores with regard to Orientalism (Said, 1978/1995, p. 328), a more self-critical approach in mutual justice and cultural respect is needed for a better understanding of the allegedly 'exotic' phenomenon.

This article aims to challenge prevalent culturalizing views of suicide terrorism by exploring examples which reveal the current discursive 'othering' and the inherent universal dimension of the phenomenon. In concrete terms, its intent is to examine such agonistic behavior in which the destructive energy is bidirectional – directed against the self and against the other – and to set the focus on those phenomena which have found their expressions in Western literature in terms of Western cultural representations. The tension between fiction and fact is of secondary importance in the context of this study. What matters in the formation of cultural memory is less the empirical facts than their systematic selection, representation and interpretation.

On the basis of a constructionist approach, my argument proceeds in five steps. First, I suggest a metaphorical understanding of suicide bombing so that we can broaden our perspective on what elements this behavior consists of. This understanding brings us to the analogy with certain practices observed in Western history and literature, namely power-based ethics and hero-making narrative. Second, against the background of the theoretical requirement of the readiness to fight and to die in the military practice, the connection between literature and power-based ethics is addressed from the view of the wielders of power. Third, the same connection is considered from the view of the servants of power. Fourth, the narrative practice of hero-making is analyzed with respect to the effective use of the motif of suicide killing. Finally, the strategic, apocalyptic and revolutionary variants of suicide bombing and their ethical implications are discussed. In the concluding section, based on the findings of the study, alternative policies are proposed for more effectively countering

the challenge of suicide terrorism. Additional perspectives from literary and cultural studies to those recently offered by anthropology (Atran, 2003), history (Croitoru, 2003), Islamic studies (Reuter, 2002, 2003), philosophy (Smith, 2003), political science (Münkler, 2002 & 2006), psychology (Schmidbauer, 2001, 2003), religious studies (Kermani, 2002), and sociology (Laqueur, 2003) are also discussed.

## Suicide bombing: a metaphorical understanding

Terry Eagleton has described the 'Professor' of Joseph Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent* (1907) as 'the first suicide bomber in English literature' (Eagleton, 2003, p. 215; see also Eagleton, 2005, p. 121). In fact, the crazed anarchist and ego-maniac, who strolls through the streets of London with a detonator hidden in the inner pocket of his waistcoat, proves his superiority by relying not on life, but on 'death, which knows no restraint and cannot be attacked' (Conrad, 1907/2004, p. 51). However, if we understand the term 'suicide bomber' metaphorically – although not metaphysically – we encounter a more significant figure long before Conrad's character, namely the celebrated hero of John Milton's dramatic poem *Samson Agonistes* (1671). And if we open the criteria toward those who are ready to destroy themselves in destroying others, we can, as I will show below, find even more such figures.

In Western literature as a whole, including the Old Testament and Greek tragedies as its ancient fundaments and inspiring sources, the tracks of both self-destructive and terroristic actions and figures lead far back into the history of representation of asymmetric conflict patterns and their consequences. Schmidbauer and Reuter have pointed out two decisive moments in the genesis of modern suicide terrorism: the invention of explosives which made the destruction of masses possible and the development of mass media into a technical apparatus capable of worldwide propaganda (Schmidbauer, 2001, p. 106, 2003, p. 26; Reuter, 2003, pp. 23–24). However, long before explosives and mass media were invented, there have existed since time immemorial in the imagination of mankind mythological figures with supernatural power and deities or god-like creatures who manifest the ability to disseminate information and to manipulate the masses. Where certain 'situational variables' and 'systemic determinants' are at play (see Zimbardo, 2007, p. 445), the typical behavior pattern of a suicide bomber could well be imagined at any stage of history. Literature, being historicized and textualized culture, maintains its timeless relevance to the human condition.

Significant changes in Western view of the suicidal expression of violence seem to have occurred in the course of the twentieth century with the experiences of two world wars and various revolutionary and terrorist movements. By comparing two prominent theoretical writings on the issue of violence, one by Walter Benjamin and the other by Hannah Arendt, the former published before and the latter after World War II, we can observe a paradigmatic shift of ideological background from the notion of a redeeming and bloodless divine violence (Benjamin, 1977, p. 199) to that of an atrocious and merciless violence arising out of the impotence of power (Arendt, 1970, pp. 53–54). The notion of violence has been consistently secularized, and the use thereof has become more and more life-conscious.

The present state of affairs shows a Janus face. In the so-called post-heroic societies of the West, heroic fearlessness in the face of death and readiness to self-sacrifice no longer constitute general ethical imperatives for everyday life (see Münkler, 2002),[4] in contrast to the sector of military where heroism is still called for. The historical decrease of a selfless disposition to fight and its displacement into a less than fully

voluntarist sector in Western democracies (see Münkler, 2006)[5] provide a key to under-
standing the mechanism of recruitment and indoctrination that guarantees the func-
tioning of suicide operations of non-Western militant organizations such as Hamas,
Hizbullah, or Islamic Jihad. For literary and cultural studies in particular, this ambivalent
situation requires knowledge regarding the historical transformation of the idea of hero-
ism and thus poses the task of outlining a diachronic trajectory of various conceptions
of agonistic and suicidal behavior represented in texts of high socio-political relevance.

## Western literature and military practice

Exploring the vast terrain of Western literature, the first thing we notice is that agonis-
tic and at the same time suicidal motifs or figures are not frequently to be found.
However, this is true of all literature. It would be not only rash, but also wrong to
claim that some cultures are more likely to praise or are keener on representing such
motifs or figures than others. The occurrence of such representations depends rather
on socio-political factors and power relations which accompany or determine the
particular situation of writing.

In European literature, until the emergence of the so-called bourgeois tragedy in
the eighteenth century, only characters of noble rank were placed at the center of
'solemn' literary interest. This means that until then, except for rare outbreaks of a
bourgeois realism in the history of literature (see Auerbach, 1946/1964), the fate of
those individuals who were subject to the power of others remained entirely outside
the interest of 'solemn' literary writing – let alone for historiography. Since the age of
Enlightenment and the French Revolution, or more concretely since the diverse proc-
lamations of the rights of man and the condemnations of slavery, Europe looks at the
world's social and martial events through different eyes. What until then was taken for
granted suddenly appeared to be ethically questionable. Military missions for which
lives had to be sacrificed became – with the introduction of the guarantee of human
dignity and the development in retreat techniques and casualty transport (see Keegan,
1976, pp. 269–270) – not only problematic, but also superfluous.[6]

Sacrificial missions as such have existed as long as organized conflicts exist. In
terms of military history, each officer who put his soldiers in the front line of a merci-
less battle knew their deathly fate. So, for instance, did King David act, when he
commanded his servant Uriah to be placed 'up front, where the fighting is fierce', so
that he should 'be struck down dead' (2 Samuel 11:15). In his seventeenth-century
philosophical treatise *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes asserts that David's indirect
killing of Uriah 'was not an Injurie to *Uriah* […], because the right to doe what he
pleased, was given him by *Uriah* himself' (Hobbes, 1651/1997, p. 117).[7] The imagery
of a tactically sacrificeable infantry – from *jia-shun* (Chinese, 'armors and shields';
Kolb, 1991, p. 197, n. 14) in Ancient China to 'foode for powder' (original spelling,
Shakespeare, 1986, p. 534; *1 Henry IV*, Act 4, scene 2, l. 2326) in Renaissance Europe
– speaks a universal language.

A significant change in the understanding of one person's arbitrary power over
another makes its appearance in the direction of a more liberal and humane conception
of power, when John Locke in *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), deals with the
extent of legislative power of the commonwealth. He argues that

> no Body has an absolute Arbitrary Power over himself, or over any other, to destroy his
> own Life, or take away the Life or Property of another. A Man … cannot subject himself

to the Arbitrary Power of another … the *Legislative Power* … in the utmost Bounds of it, is *limited to the publick good* of the Society. It is a Power, that hath no other end but preservation, and therefore can never have a right to destroy, enslave, or designedly to impoverish the Subjects. (Locke, 1690/1967, p. 375, § 135, emphasis in original)

Interestingly, precisely this objective of 'preservation' opens a special door for what Locke actually intends to abolish in all forms of human life. With regard to the practice of martial discipline, he draws a critical distinction between 'absolute power' and 'arbitrary power':

the Preservation of the Army, and in it of the whole Commonwealth, requires an *absolute Obedience* to the Command of every Superiour Officer, and it is justly Death to disobey or dispute the most dangerous or unreasonable of them: but yet we see, that neither the Serjeant, that could command a Souldier to march up to the mouth of a Cannon, or stand in a Breach, where he is almost sure to perish, can command that Soldier to give him one penny of his Money; nor the *General*, that can condemn him to Death for deserting his Post, or for not obeying the most desperate Orders, can yet with all his absolute Power of Life and Death, dispose of one Farthing of that Soldiers Estate, or seize one jot of his Goods; whom yet he can command any thing, and hang for the least Disobedience. Because such a blind Obedience is necessary to that end for which the Commander has his Power, *viz*. the preservation of the rest; but the disposing of his Goods has nothing to do with it. (Locke, 1690/1967, pp. 379–380, § 139, emphasis in original)

This famous passage is usually quoted with reference to the importance of private property being protected under any circumstances. However, there is a secondary – though not less significant – point, namely the retention of the otherwise questionable 'vertical power' in military contexts, expressed in the emphasis on the soldiers' absolute duty to obedience of their superiors. Penny and farthing stand here in glaring contrast with liberty and life. On the one side, we are dealing with things which may never be arbitrarily taken away from anyone, neither in this nor in any other context; on the other side, we are dealing with rights which, according to Locke, are supposed to be deactivated exclusively in this context.

In extreme cases, a deliberate renunciation of life is here considered necessary to achieve the primary task of the military, namely the preservation of the whole as opposed to the preservation of the individual. Locke, in fact, does not seem to disapprove of the idea of the individual's sacrifice for the sake of survival of the rest. In an earlier place, where the 'state of liberty' is discussed together with the 'liberty to destroy', he significantly asserts:

though this be a *State of Liberty*, yet it is *not a State of Licence*, though Man in that State have an uncontroleable Liberty, to dispose of his Person or Possessions, yet he has not Liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any Creature in his Possession, *but where some nobler use, than its bare Preservation calls for it*. (Locke, 1690/1967, pp. 288–289, § 6, last emphasis added)

Accordingly, where the preservation of the whole is at stake – be it the preservation of the army as a microcosm or of the commonwealth as the macrocosm – it should be given priority over the preservation of the individual. For Locke, it constitutes a 'nobler' aim than a 'bare' preservation of one's life.

What takes place in the passage from Hobbes to Locke during the ripening process of the seventeenth-century state philosophy is therefore not a total abolishment, but rather a mere displacement of absolute power. Despite all his liberal merits, compared

with Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Locke creates a security gap that theoretically supports any kind of suicidal mission so long as its usefulness for achieving a noble end is guaranteed. This gap – aside from the monumental theory of the separation of powers that will influence a large number of Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau and furthermore inspire the United States Declaration of Independence (1776) as well as the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) – enables a dangerous concentration of absolute power on the exclusive practice of military.

Nevertheless, the impact of this alarming power shift does not materialize on a large scale in Western history and literature. At the latest, since the beginning of the decline of the Ottoman Empire following the Great Turkish War (1683–1699), Western nations have broadly maintained their hegemonic position in both military power and technology against other nations. This fact implies that, for certain domains, they generally had not only sufficient lower rank, but also non-domestic human material at their disposal.[8] If we remember that Napoleon used Mamluk forces in his campaigns in Egypt (1798–1801), Spain (1808–1809), Belgium (1815), and other places, and that T.E. Lawrence reflected on sacrificing the Arabs for the English during the Arab Revolt (1916–1918; Lawrence, 1922/1965, p. 395), we can imagine how less disturbing Westerners' ethical restraints must have been so far as the use of foreign soldiers was concerned. In imperial or colonial interests, they could easily be sent out to certain death.

## Western literature and slave ethic

The idea that a servant, if need be, ought gladly to give his life for his master, derives from an ancient slave ethic. Euripides, for instance, formulates it through the mouth of Agamemnon's old attendant in his tragedy *Iphigenia at Aulis* (*ca* 406 BC): 'Glorious it were in my lord's cause to die' (Euripides, 1988, p. 29, l. 312). In principle, little seems to change about this idea from the classical antiquity through the Middle Ages until into the age of Enlightenment. In Gotthold E. Lessing's first German bourgeois tragedy, *Miss Sara Sampson* (1755), Sir William's old servant Waitwell advocates the same atavistic ideal of servility by stating, 'If all masters were like Sir William, their servants would be *inhuman* not to give their lives for them' (Lessing, 1755/1977, p. 45, Act 3, scene 3, emphasis added). What makes this message remarkable in a work of Enlightenment literature is that the category of the 'inhuman' comes into play against the human instinct of self-preservation.

From here, it is an easy step to allow someone to be used as a human weapon. If serving the master means to murder for him, the suicidal determination of the servant can intensify itself to the agonistic and suicidal zeal of a contract killer. In Shakespeare's plays, profoundly submissive and resolute figures of that kind appear without exception in minor roles and in most cases anonymously, such as the nameless, simply enumerated murderers in *Macbeth* (1623). These men have nothing to lose; they represent the 'radical losers' (Enzensberger, 2006) in life and labor:

> 1. MURTHERER. I am one, my Liege,
>    Whom the vile Blowes and Buffets of the World
>    Hath so incens'd, that I am recklesse what
>    I doe, to spight the World.
> 2. MURTHERER. And I another,
>    So wearie with Disasters, tugg'd with Fortune,

> That I would set my Life on any Chance,
> To mend it, or to rid on't.
> […]
> 2. MURTHERER. We shall, my Lord,
> Performe what you command vs.
> 1. MURTHERER. Though our Liues – (Shakespeare, 1986, pp. 1113–1114; *Macbeth*,
> Act 3, scene 1, ll. 910–916, 928–929)

They are absolutely determined to liquidate Banquo and Fleance on behalf of Macbeth, cost what it may. In selfless devotion to the will of their commander, they are completely aware of the highest price they must pay. Behind the aposiopesis – the sudden breaking-off in speech displayed through the dash – we are allowed to read their suicidal willingness to follow any kind of orders.

In fact, not the tragic heroes capable of dramatically falling from their noble rank, but the most untragic and insignificant figures of minor parts are those who typically demonstrate a both agonistic and suicidal disposition.[9] Not the great and the high, but the mean and the low present themselves as potential suicide bombers, by manifesting unconditional obedience to their superiors. These action motifs, however, remain secondary and replaceable in view of the pivotal motifs of the drama – be they regicide, usurpation, revenge, or self-destruction. This explains one of the important reasons why the motif of suicide bombing – metaphorically speaking – scarcely plays a dominant role within the general motif framework of Western literary texts prior to the nineteenth century.[10] Of course there are significant exceptions, which I will discuss in detail below. In any case, the phenomenon of suicide bombing in terms of suicidal mission, to be carried out by a slavish character as the protagonist, could hardly be of interest for Aristotle-oriented rule poetics.

## Glorious heroes: from account to strategy

In its very beginning, literature was particularly committed to the 'making' of heroes. From the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh (*ca* 2500–1500 BC) and the Homeric epics (*ca* 750–700 BC) to medieval heroic poems such as *Beowulf* (between 8th and 11th centuries) and *The Song of Roland* (late 11th century), one of literature's main purposes was to convey specific systems of values over generation upon generation, by featuring mythological or national heroes embodying them. Prior to the rise in importance of bourgeois and later proletarian figures in literature in accordance with the socio-political and socio-economic changes in societies since the eighteenth century, there were primarily two levels on which positive social values could be promulgated through literature. One level was that of leading characters of noble rank who lived and died heroically and thus established ethical examples. The other was that of minor characters of lower ranks who were not supposed to show heroic bravery due to their origins, but could be examples of loyalty and servility.

We have seen typical cases of suicidal servility above. They demonstrate that, in extreme cases, servants are obliged to give their lives for their masters, and they should willingly do so. This does not necessarily mean that they reflect the social reality of the time. On the contrary, they represent part of the permanent attempt of aristocratically patronized literature to dictate what reality should look like. The same applies to those cases of heroic bravery which are narrated or performed for the purpose of education, entertainment, or idolatry. What matters is less what happened veridically than what should be recorded and passed on in the collective memory.

A hero who destroys himself in order to destroy the enemy has the advantage that an example of self-sacrifice can be established without any constraint or, if at all, with a divine implication. The first suicide attack – not in historical, but in narrative terms – was of this kind. The Israelite judge Samson, who was proclaimed 'to be conse-crated to God from the womb' and to 'begin the deliverance of Israel from the power of the Philistines' (Judges 13:5), now with his eyes gouged out and put into chains in Gaza, delivers a furious end in the Philistine temple:

> The temple was full of men and women: all the lords of the Philistines were there, and from the roof about three thousand men and women looked on as Samson provided amusement. Samson cried out to the LORD and said, 'O Lord GOD, remember me! Strengthen me, O God, this last time that for my two eyes I may avenge myself once and for all on the Philistines.' Samson grasped the two middle columns on which the temple rested and braced himself against them, one at his right hand, the other at his left. And Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines!' He pushed hard, and the temple fell upon the lords and all the people who were in it. Those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed during his lifetime. (Judges 16:27–30).

This mythographic account emphasizes the fact that the act of self-sacrifice was carried out absolutely freely. This is the way heroes are 'made'. No doubt is allowed about the genuinely intentional character of the event; any indication of its possible incidental character is suppressed.[11]

The series of similar hero-making legends continues on various levels down the ages into our time. There is the Swiss patriot Arnold Winkelried who, in the Battle of Sempach against the Habsburg army in 1386, threw himself onto the enemy spikes and thus opened a breach for attack (see Laqueur, 2003, p. 73). In fact, the historicity of this event is widely questioned. There is also the Piedmontese miner Pietro Micca who, during the Siege of Turin by French troops in 1706, ignited a mine at so short a distance that he killed himself with the invaders (see Assum, 1926, pp. 142–145). He, too, has been a typical case of posthumous legend-making.[12] Then there is the Prussian sapper Carl Klinke who, in the Battle of Dybbøl during the Second Schleswig War in 1864, blew himself up, blasting a hole into the Danish bulwark (see Arndt, 2008, p. 62). Theodor Fontane commemorated this event in his poem 'Dybbøl Day' (1864). Japan eulogized its 'three human bombs of Shanghai' at the onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 (see Croitoru, 2003, pp. 42–43), and South Korea celebrated its 'ten human bomb heroes' in the run-up to the Korean War in 1949 (see Croitoru, 2003, p. 71). So far as the narrative hero-making process is concerned, the account of 'The Battle for United 93' in the 9/11 Commission Report (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, pp. 10–14) can be seen along the same lines, not least because the courageous passengers are immortal-ized in cinematography.

When a heroic feat is believed to consist in a deliberate self-sacrifice and hence potential heroes from all levels of society crave such a noble death, there should be no need to coerce anyone into it: everyone of a brave nature, whatever their social rank, should eagerly imitate the heroic example. Friedrich Hölderlin, for instance, expressed his fervent longing for self-sacrifice in his poem 'Death for the Fatherland' (1797). Yet the presumption that heroes can be generated by dexterous storytelling remains in the realm of theory. In practice, even if 'in earlier ages, … the willingness to pay the ultimate price in war had been taken for granted' (Laqueur, 2003, p. 77), it was thought advisable to use further arguments and to employ additional means in order

to guarantee an unshakeable fighting spirit in the combatant forces. This is part of the reason why, from Marco Polo via Silvestre de Sacy up to our popular media, it has been and is still largely believed that the Assassins used cannabis to enhance their combative morale.[13] Niall Ferguson, on the other hand, mentions some indispensable tools of European trench warfare by name: 'Without alcohol, and perhaps also without tobacco, the First World War could not have been fought' (Ferguson, 1998, p. 351).

Further arguments for promoting a species of self-sacrificial heroism are commonly based on discipline and strategy. Both of them are tightly related to the supreme objective of the army, that is to say, the preservation of the whole. Military discipline in terms of absolute obedience up to the point of self-sacrifice has been discussed above. At the same time, one should not ignore the impact of authoritarian control, which can sometimes be quite impressive in human psychology. Heinrich Mann, for instance, speaks in his novel *Man of Straw* (1918) of 'suicidal enthusiasm' in the military service of the German Empire (Mann, 1918/1995, p. 49; see also p. 51).

In Western societies, under the prevailing tendency to polarize the distinction between Occident and Orient (see Said, 1978/1995, pp. 45–46), it has gradually been forgotten that back in Western history there was a time when human integrity was much less a bodily matter and the preservation of honor was far more important than the preservation of life. Ajax, for instance, once idolized as a great hero of the Trojan War, then dishonored in the competition for Achilles' armor against Odysseus, and finally self-humiliated by slaughtering a herd of cattle in a fit of madness, has no doubt about what kind of action to take against his foes. His words in Sophocles' tragedy *Ajax* (*ca* 450 BC) are clear enough:

> O Zeus, father or my ancestors,
> if only I could destroy the craftiest of all,
> the trickster that I detest [i.e. Odysseus],
> and the two brother kings [i.e. Agamemnon and Menelaus],[14]
> and at last die myself!
> […]
> … I must think of some action
> that will prove to my aged father
> that I his son was born no coward.
> When a man has no relief from troubles,
> it is shameful for him to desire long life.
> What pleasure comes from day following day,
> bringing us near to and taking us back from death?
> I would not set any value upon a man
> who is warmed by false hopes.
> The noble man must live with honour
> or be honourably dead … (Sophocles, 1994, pp. 69, 75; ll. 387–391, 470–480)

What follows thereafter is not an ordinary suicide. Before falling upon his sword, Ajax calls upon, among others, the Erinyes for help. These avenging deities of the under-world shall 'snatch … up' his foes and 'utterly destroy them' (Sophocles, 1994, p. 107, ll. 839–840). Since the Erinyes can be, as a rule, called upon in case of some-one's death, it is Ajax's death that builds the prerequisite for the divine vengeance to be carried out. Therefore he gives a rhetorical description of what he intends to do, by wishing 'that they [i.e. the Erinyes] witness [his] destruction at the hands of the sons of Atreus [i.e. Agamemnon and Menelaus]' (Sophocles, 1994, p. 107, ll. 837–838).

Ajax's suicide hence serves an offensive purpose. Full of rancor, indignation, and thirst for revenge and with the desire to destroy both himself and his foes, he brings

about a virtual explosion in the middle of the tragedy. The virtual bomb fails to kill his foes, but his reputation is vindicated in the end (see Sophocles, 1994, p. 163, ll. 1413–1417). There is a relevant point we ascertain from this tragic plot: Ajax, in a transferred sense, discovers for himself the strategy of suicide bombing, which is the ultimate strategy of asymmetric warfare.

Compared with Ajax's strategically thought-out act, Samson's action was of a spontaneous nature, but his obvious suicide posed the question of its legitimacy already within the Jewish tradition and all the more in the Christian reception of the story.[15] Interestingly enough, the legitimacy of his mass murder, including women and children, has seldom been questioned – a fact explained by the hostility between Israelites and Philistines and the domination and the worship of idols by the latter. Despite all this, the Samson story is a very popular subject in Western art and literature, especially in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century moralizing plays. Whether avoiding the theme of suicide or excusing it to some extent, they generally keep the main focus of the plot on the motif of female intrigue and treachery (the Delilah episode, Judges 16:4–21), which is understandable from a historical point of view. This trend continues throughout the following centuries until into the early twentieth century. Yet within this more or less conventional cluster of texts, there stands out a work with striking radicalness: Milton's *Samson Agonistes* resets the focus of representation on the conclusion of Samson's life and reflects the political and strategic dimensions of his suicide.

In Milton's psychologizing representation which makes the inner voices of his characters audible, the blinded and bound Samson is utterly aware of what yet lies in the range of his possibilities. His strategic program is specifically designed in accordance with his desire for death:

> … my deadliest foe will prove
> My speediest friend, by death to rid me hence,
> The worst that he can give, to me the best,
> Yet so it may fall out, because their end
> Is hate, not help to me, it may with mine
> Draw their own ruin who attempt the deed.
> […]
> … I begin to feel
> Some rousing emotions in me which dispose
> To something extraordinary my thoughts.
> […]
> If there be aught of presage in the mind,
> This day will be remarkable in my life
> By some great act, or of my days the last. (Milton, 1968, pp. 387, 390–391; ll. 1262–
> 1267, 1381–1383, 1387–1389)

The disjunctive conjunction 'or' in the last quoted line is to be understood as expressing alternatives not between survival and death – the former is not included in the strategy – but between success and failure of the planned suicide attack. Samson simply admits the inscrutability of God's will, while his decision simultaneously to die and to kill is definite. What he intends by 'of my days the last', is not the last day of his life, but the last day of his glory. Samson eventually succeeds in concordance with the Old Testament narrative, and indeed his glory survives beyond his death. The chorus, notified of Samson's destruction of himself and his enemy, compares him with a phoenix: 'though her body die, her fame survives,/A secular bird ages of lives' (Milton, 1968, p. 400, ll. 1706–1707). Samson will live forth in the hearts of the Israelites, worshipped as their national hero.

For today's readers, severe ethical questions arise regarding the excessive solemnity of the finale. Despite the brutal massacre committed against civilians attending a religious feast – 'Lords, ladies, captains, counsellors, … priests,/Their choice nobility and flower' (Milton, 1968, p. 398, ll. 1653–1654) – the hymns of praise and panegyrics to the 'faithful champion' (Milton, 1968, p. 401, l. 1751) know no limits, and the chorus does not hesitate to affirm in the end, 'All is best' (Milton, 1968 p. 401, l. 1745). Is it not lamentable to lose a companion or even one's own son, for whatever purpose it may be? Is it not contemptible to kill innocent civilians? Samson's father Manoa is of different opinion:

> Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise, or blame, nothing but well and fair,
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble. (Milton, 1968, p. 400, ll. 1721–1724)

There emerges neither respect for the enemy nor any sense of accountability; everything culminates in a rhetorical glossing over and a lyrical extolment of the suicide mass murder.

## Doubtful heroes: from strategy to experience

The prominent examples discussed so far draw upon mythological material. Deeds of heroes such as Ajax or Samson, who were of colossal stature and superhuman strength, can be told and retold without any influence on the practical ability, but with certain consequences affecting the practical behavior of man. There is a gradual shifting from the realm of imagination to the realm of action, as one grows aware of his or her abilities and the means available. Here, the suicidal strategy enters an empirical stage. This is not to suggest, of course, that the strategy of offensive suicide does not leave the field of theory until a certain point of history, for instance, the early modern period when firearms and explosives were invented. The readiness of servants or soldiers to self-sacrifice, as it has been seen earlier, was of enormous practical use within asymmetric conflicts of any kind. However, the progress in weapons technology facilitates the fulfillment of the destructive imagination on a more ambitious scale and in a more systematic manner.

The agonistic and suicidal imagination is articulated not only in mythological, but also in empirical texts, when the asymmetric power relation is at issue. Rousseau, for instance, describes in his autobiography *The Confessions* (1782/1789) the raging imagination he had in his childhood after being violently punished for an uncommitted crime (Rousseau, 1782/1783, p. 20–23):

> This first sentiment of violence and injustice is so deeply graven on my soul, that every resembling idea brings back my first emotion; and this sentiment relative to me in its origin, has taken such a confidence, and is so far from personal interest, that my heart is inflamed at the sight or recital of an unjust action, whatever may be its object, or wheresoever it may be committed, as if the effect fell on me. When I read the history of a cruel tyrant, the subtle black actions of a knavish priest, I could set off heartily to stab these miscreants, though I should perish an hundred times in the attempt. (Rousseau, 1782/1783, p. 23)

The little Jean-Jacques neither has an explosive belt nor belongs to a terrorist organization, but his case encompasses a whole set of important mental components of a

potential suicide bomber: the trauma of violence and injustice, the asymmetric power relation, the pathological demand for justice, identification and solidarity with all those suffering oppression and injustice, and not least the suicidal aggression towards stereotypical enemy images. In another time and another milieu, he would easily have been recruited, indoctrinated, and used as a suicide bomber.[16]

While the little Jean-Jacques thinks of stabbing, the military weaponry has long since achieved more potent dimensions. A century later, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815), Carl von Clausewitz devotes a chapter to the subject of 'relative strength' in his unfinished military classic *On War* (1832) and ends the chapter with a reflection on ultimate strategies for the desperately inferior:

> Where the disparity of strength is so overwhelming that no limitation of one's objectives will provide protection from failure, or where the period of danger threatens to be so extended that not even the greatest economy of strength can lead to success, the tension will, or should, build up to one decisive blow. The hard-pressed army, not expecting help where none can be forthcoming, can only trust to the high morale that despair breeds in all courageous men. At that point the greatest daring, possibly allied with a bold strategem, will seem to be the greatest wisdom. Where success is out of reach, an honorable defeat will at least grant one the right to rise again in days to come. (von Clausewitz, 1832/1976, pp. 283–284)

What Rousseau experienced and contemplated within the interpersonal dimension of social frictions appears here transferred and adapted to the intergroup dimension of armed conflicts. Whether on the individual or the collective level, the same principle determines the most radical outcome of both cases. The inexorable sense of impotence, helplessness, and exasperation, combined with all the splendid images of legendary heroes in mind, engenders an exuberant boldness that eventually results in self-destruction.

Although it is unlikely that Clausewitz considered the possibility of ideologically transforming the 'honorable defeat' into an effective triumph, the idea remains tempting that the 'decisive blow' on the part of the weaker side might be so devastating that for the stronger enemy too there will be no escape from perishing all together. In realistic fiction, this apocalyptic dimension of organized violence is reflected especially since the period immediately preceding the French Revolution. Friedrich Schiller's play *The Robbers* (1781), for instance, exemplifies how a group of social outsiders and losers comes to form a gang of banditti to run amok against the whole bourgeois world order. The cause for the terroristic insurgency could not be more private than it is: Karl von Moor, the firstborn son of the reigning Count Maximilian von Moor, was cut off from succession and inheritance (through a plot of his younger brother Franz, but at the beginning Karl does not know this). In consequence – as Schiller observes later in a self-review written in the third person – 'the private bitterness against the unloving father degenerates into a universal wrath against the whole human race' (Schiller, 2004, p. 624). Karl announces to his companions:

> My soul thirsts after deeds of valour; I pant for freedom – Murderers and robbers! – With this word was all law stamped under my feet – Men renounced humanity; begone from me then sympathy and all forbearance! I no longer have a father, I have no longer love; and blood and death shall teach me to forget that any thing ever was dear to me! Come! Come! Oh! I will stir up a dreadful havock ! (Schiller, 1781/1799, Act 1, scene 7, p. 43)

Blessed by the charisma to mobilize the most heterogeneous pack, Karl calls for violence and murder, organizes terrorist attacks, and orchestrates sacrificial missions in the

broadest sense of the term. The band takes on important elements of a military force: 'fidelity and obedience' are to be sworn to him, the captain of the band, 'even till death' (Schiller, 1781/1799, Act 1, scene 7, p. 43). Towards the end of the play, the presence of his beloved father and the sight of his mistress Amalia threaten to collapse his ambitious project of wreaking terror and havoc. Karl reacts with the most desperate strategy:

> Tear her [i.e. Amalia] from my neck! – Murder her! murder him [i.e. Maximilian von Moor]! me! you! all! Let the whole world perish! (Schiller, 1781/1799, Act 5, scene 7, p. 185)

A serious intent of mass destruction is expressed here: only the right weapon is lacking to bring about the end of the world. In Western media today, it is often argued that Islam has as yet undergone no 'Enlightenment' (see, e.g., Bohrer, 2001; Hutton, 2004; Davidson, 2006); this claim, for its part, makes Islam appear to be particularly susceptible to the irrational life-despising conduct observed in suicide bombing (see, e.g., Smith, 2003; Conesa, 2004; Follath et al., 2004). It is interesting to note that the characters of *The Robbers* were designed to think and act precisely as excessively enlightened and thus all the more atrocious creatures. Schiller's aim with the play was to demonstrate the inherent 'risks of self-destruction of the Enlightenment' (Hinderer, 2005, p. 63).

Schiller is certainly one of the most prominent of the early modern playwrights who have dramatized the phenomenon of collective terror in terms of the Aristotelian postulates of *éleos* (Greek, 'pity') and *phóbos* (Greek, 'fear'; Aristotle, 1973, p. 23).[17] Yet he achieves more than this. In the preface to the 1799 English translation of *The Robbers*, the contemporary reception is summed up in a significant phrase: 'We feel alternately sensation of *abhorrence*, *anxiety*, *terror*, *compassion*, and *admiration*' (Schiller, 1781/1799, p. viii, emphasis in original).

During the course of the following centuries, not only in political, but also in literary consciousness, the lack of destructive potential to exterminate the whole universe is compensated for step-by-step by the growing lethality of available modern weapons. In Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, the old anarchist Karl Yundt still confesses to having

> always dreamed … of a band of men absolute in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means, strong enough to give themselves frankly the name of destroyers, and free from the taint of that resigned pessimism which rots the world. No pity for anything on earth, including themselves, and death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity – that's what I would have liked to see. (Conrad, 1907/2004, p. 32)

But in Italo Svevo's novel *Confessions of Zeno* (1923), the threat of – or the wish for – a worldwide disaster, triggered off by a single man and engulfing all humanity, is perceived in concrete visions of an apocalypse to come. In the last entry of his journal, Zeno Cosini, the tobacco-addicted, hypochondriac first-person narrator, assumes a prophetic tone:

> When all the poison gases are exhausted, a man, made like all other men of flesh and blood, will in the quiet of his room invent an explosive of such potency that all the explosives in existence will seem like harmless toys beside it. And another man, made in his image and in the image of all the rest, but a little weaker than them, will steal that explosive and crawl to the center of the earth with it, and place it just where he calculates it would have the maximum effect. There will be a tremendous explosion, but no one will

> hear it and the earth will return to its nebulous state and go wandering through the sky,
> free at last from parasites and disease. (Svevo, 1923/1958, p. 398)

In the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, such a tremendous catastrophe becomes more real than ever. Holden Caulfield, the disturbed adolescent hero of J.D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1945), welcomes the scenario of Armageddon with open arms:

> Anyway, I'm sort of glad they've got the atomic bomb invented. If there's ever another
> war, I'm going to sit right the hell on top of it. I'll volunteer for it, I swear to God I will.
> (Salinger, 1945/1994, p. 127)

It can be objected to that these examples remain within the realm of literary imagination. Yet in contrast to mythological representations, they draw upon the latest experiences of mankind. While revivals of mythological subjects can affect traditional views of history, products of realistic fiction construct them anew, by alerting the reader to specific dangerous mechanisms of human behavior.

Beyond the boundaries of literary texts, we in the West look back today on an alarming history of recent killing spree including, *inter alia*, the 1999 Columbine High School shooting and the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre, both of which significantly ended with the suicide of the culprit(s). Here, too, a culture-bound syndrome should not be postulated in view of the higher incidence of this phenomenon in modern Western societies. The novelists should not be held accountable for the mechanisms they illustrate; quite the reverse, they should be appreciated for the warnings they provide.

So far, we have traced a suicidal and nihilistic line of development along which the literary imagination of suicide bombing has made the transition from innocent strategic speculations to perilous empirical potentials. Yet there is another, agonistic and revolutionary line of development which should now be addressed in the last place. Ever since Joseph Addison's play *Cato* (1712) with its eponymous hero as the paragon of liberty and Patrick Henry's American revolutionary cry, 'give me liberty, or give me death!' (Wirt, 1817, p. 142), liberty has more and more become an ideal for which one could willingly kill or die. So Schiller's play included corresponding socio-political, socio-economic, and especially anti-feudal factors in the motives of his suicide bombers *avant la lettre*. Where the asymmetry of power is so extreme and the prospect of liberty so desperate that death in combat appears far preferable to life under tyranny, Alfred Nobel's epochal invention of dynamite in 1866 opened up a new and fascinating option for destructive suicide in the service of revolution. The Russian terrorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who gave their lives in order to save other lives from oppression by the czarist regime, were suicide bombers in the literal sense of the term.

Albert Camus's play *The Just Assassins* (1949) dramatizes a historical episode from 1905. The Combat Organization of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party plots the assassination of Grand Duke Sergei, Governor General of Moscow. Ivan Kaliayev, a passionate and rapturous member of the organization, is resolved to carry out the job not in spite of the risk, but because of the chance to die:

> For a year now that has never left my thoughts; I've been living for that moment day by
> day, hour by hour. And I know now that I'd like to die on the spot, beside the Grand Duke.
> To shed my blood to the last drop, or blaze up like tinder in the flare of the explosion

and leave not a shred of me behind. Do you understand why I asked to throw the bomb? To die for an ideal – that's the only way of proving oneself worthy of it. It's our only justification. (Camus, 1949/1962, p. 246, Act 1)

In his first attempt, Kaliayev fails to throw the bomb, because he catches sight of the grand duke's wife, nephew, and niece seated in the carriage with him. He proves to be too delicate to sacrifice children in the name of revolution (Camus, 1949/1962, pp. 253–255, Act 2). The second attempt, by contrast, eventually succeeds: this time the grand duke is travelling by himself. The bomb blows the grand duke's head off, but Kaliayev miraculously survives the explosion. He gets arrested and is later executed.

A careful collation of Camus's play with Boris Savinkov's *Memoirs of a Terrorist* (1917), who as the leader of the Combat Organization coordinated its activities during the period in question, leads to a differentiated view of the process behind the episode. First of all, throughout the planning stage, the presence of other people in the grand duke's carriage had not been taken into account. Kaliayev refused to throw the bomb on the first attempt, because he felt the need to clarify the question whether the organization consented to the killing of women and children (Savinkov, 1917/1972, pp. 99–100). In Camus's play, this aspect is less relevant, and the whole scene appears much more emotionally fraught than reported by Savinkov (Camus, 1949/1962, pp. 253–255, Act 2). Furthermore, the terroristic practice of the socialist-revolutionaries by and large was far less philanthropical and justice-oriented than Camus's play would make us believe. There was a rigidly hierarchical structure that enabled the unscrupulous use of 'willing tools' – even a 16-year-old boy – as human bombs (Savinkov, 1917/1972, p. 254); there were operations or operation plans in which civil casualties were accepted for the sake of certain success (Savinkov, 1917/1972, pp. 213, 236, 237, 254, 277); and, not least, there were *agents provocateurs* who double-crossed the whole revolutionary enterprise and turned the prolonged status quo to their profit (Savinkov, 1917/1972, chap. 3, pp. 312–350).

Camus's literary representation does little justice to the complexity of its historical subject. In his play, history and literature are amalgamated in so sophisticated a manner that literature presents itself as a piece of history, whereas history is subliminally shifted within literature. The merits of the play for the understanding of suicide terrorism cannot be overlooked: it identifies appalling social injustice and asymmetry of power as situational forces, and fanatical devotion, invisible indoctrination, and overwhelming idealism as systemic factors that all together produce the agonistic and suicidal behavior pattern. The dilemma of organized freedom fighting finds clear expression in the paradox between the proclaimed liberation of every man and the enforced obedience within the organization (Camus, 1949/1962, p. 236, Act 1). The heroism that has been celebrated throughout thousands of years relativizes itself and suddenly turns out to be doubtful in view of the fact that, with whatever justification, a murder takes place. On the other hand, Camus's 'just' assassins appear far too much estheticized and sentimentalized compared with the inwardly torn terrorists of Savinkov's autobiography.

Ultimately, the suicidal character of the bombing – be it in terrorism or in warfare – is not so much a matter of historical period, but rather a matter of technical equipment and the degree of desperation. More than 30 years later, during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), George Orwell marveled at the wretched conditions of the POUM

militia he had joined to fight against the fascists, taking special notice of the role of the bomb thrower as a virtual 'one-way tool':

> The bomb in use at this time was a frightful object known as the 'FAI bomb', it having been produced by the Anarchists in the early days of the war. It was on the principle of a Mills bomb, but the lever was held down not by a pin but a piece of tape. You broke the tape and then got rid of the bomb with the utmost possible speed. It was said of these bombs that they were 'impartial'; they killed the man they were thrown at and the man who threw them. (Orwell, 1938/1996, p. 34)

A few years later, concrete plans for suicide bombing were drawn up during the German resistance against the Nazi regime. Erich Kordt, Rudolf-Christoph von Gersdorff, Axel von dem Bussche, and Ewald-Heinrich von Kleist, to identify but a few, belong to those who were resolved to blow themselves up with Adolf Hitler (Doubek, 2001, p. 163; Fest, 1973, pp. 956–957). Only the irony of fate – which is a euphemism for historical contingency – prevented them from staging grandiose examples of heroic tyrannicide. All the same, there would have been no escaping the ethical question of suicide and murder.

## Conclusion

This article has attempted to trace a dynamic discursive lineage through prominent texts of Western literature, *inter alia*, from Sophocles' *Ajax* via Milton's *Samson Agonistes* and Schiller's *The Robbers* to Albert Camus's *The Just Assassins*, which reveals Western behavior patterns analogous to those of contemporary suicide bombers. The exemplifying method was applied in order to highlight specific important moments within the undercurrents of Western cultural manifestations and to elucidate the ambivalent historical development and dialectic transformation of Western views of what we call suicide terrorism today.

The investigated texts provide examples of figures who act according to an analogous pattern, but show markedly different profiles. Ajax, for instance, represents the archaic type of suicide bomber; he fights out his struggle for honor and revenge to the point of self-destruction. Samson embodies the religious type of suicide bomber; his faith makes him blind to the carnage he causes. The robbers depicted by Schiller play the part of godless suicide bombers; yet they fall back on theological thinking patterns and judge the world with violence and terror. The terrorists portrayed by Camus, finally, appear as ideological suicide bombers; they want to be 'just' assassins and accept death as the price for tyrannicide.

Ajax and Samson act individually, on their own initiative, and decide on retaliation through destroying themselves. It ought not to be forgotten, at the same time, that they are mythological figures. Schiller's robbers and Camus's terrorists, on the other hand, are historically inspired and present different qualities. They bring to light dynamic group phenomena which arise from the interaction between the sacrificers and the sacrificed. This aspect reveals the functional gap between suicide bombers and their command posts, that is to say, between proclaimed heroes and propaganda profiteers. The hidden inhuman system that instructs and sacrifices its allegedly holy warriors should be observed in its complex structure organized by hierarchical power relations and fed by ideologically controlled indoctrination.

This suggestion complies with Zimbardo's proposal to 'give greater consideration and more weight to situational and systemic processes than we typically do when we

are trying to account for aberrant behaviors' (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 445).[18] Recent literary attempts to thematize and analyze the phenomenon of suicide terrorism such as John Updike's novel *Terrorist* (2006) and Christoph Peters's novel *A Room in the House of War* (2006), however, tend rather to culturalize or religionize the motives for suicide bombing and thus, independent of their authors' intentions, to risk reinforcing a biasing trend. Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, the hero of Updike's novel, is half Egyptian and half Irish-American, but the crucial factors that shape him are his Arabic identity and his Muslim faith. Jochen Sawatzky, the hero of Peters's novel, is a German convert to Islam whose faith becomes radicalized in the Islamic fundamentalist milieu. In reality, Updike originally had in mind a troubled Christian as the main character, but later he chose to follow fashion and to present a Muslim instead (McGrath, 2006).[19]

Culturalistic or religion-focused views of suicide terrorism obscure the situational (socio-political, socio-economic, etc.) and systemic (ideological, power-related, etc.) forces at work in the formation process of suicide bombers. They generate stereotypical images of 'dangerous' cultural otherness, transfer the polarity of good and evil to the dichotomy of the familiar and the unfamiliar, and promote the dubious idea that in certain cultures life is worth less than in others. For a peaceful coexistence of diverse cultures and religions, profounder insights into what is beyond cultural and religious differences are needed.

To conclude this analysis of a representative – though not exhaustive – series of examples, it can be stated that suicide bombings are not the expressions of specific cultural peculiarities or exclusively religious fanaticisms. Instead, they represent a strategic option of the desperately weak who strategically disguise themselves under the mask of apparent strength, terror, and invincibility (see Sophocles, 1994; Milton, 1968; Rousseau, 1782/1783; Schiller, 1781/1799; von Clausewitz, 1832/1976). Those who utilize such an option make weapons out of human beings, violating their rights to life (see Shakespeare, 1986; Locke, 1967; Savinkov, 19171972; Camus, 1949/1962; Orwell, 1938/1996).[20] Panic over-reactions to suicide bombings are just as inappropriate as the celebration of the perpetrators as glorious martyrs.

In consequence, the alternative policies proposed here for more effectively countering the challenge of suicide terrorism are the following. First, the international defense policy in the so-called war against terrorism should take note of the enemy's desperate weakness and rethink their offensive strategies. Second, the international security policy should not concentrate their focus on specific cultural or religious perpetrator profiles in coping with the threat of terrorism. Third, the international cultural policy should not protect and promote one leading culture or civilization, but rather invoke those aspects which unite various cultures and civilizations. Fourth and finally, all the societies concerned should work together to break down the perceived cultural or religious polarities as well as the conflict-loaded myths and produce a common atmosphere of symmetry.

## Acknowledgements

## Notes

1. See, on the contrary, the concise and impartial historical survey of suicidal missions by Laqueur (2003, chap. 4, pp. 71–97); see also Kermani's claim in allusion to Nietzschean philosophy that suicide terrorism is 'just a variety of nihilism' (Kermani, 2002, p. 35).
2. Laqueur's introductory paragraph to the chapter 'Suicide' (Laqueur, 2003, pp. 71–97), is worth being quoted here at length: 'Suicide bombing, one of the most prominent features of contemporary terrorism, has been one of the most difficult to understand for those living in what is commonly known as the postheroic age. … it is frequently maintained that suicide attack is something new in history and specifically Muslim. (At one time, in the 1980s, it was believed to be specifically Shi'ite.) However, such missions have occurred over a long time in many countries and cultures. In fact, a review of the history of terrorism over the ages up to the 1960s shows that in the great majority of cases, all terrorism was suicide terrorism. … An attempt to understand the suicide bombers ought to take into account a great variety of circumstances and motives and should not focus on one specific group and religion, even if that group happens to figure very prominently at the present time' (Laqueur, 2003, p. 71; see also p. 77).
3. Atran, for instance, qualifies the suicide attack practiced by Russian anarchists and Japanese kamikaze as 'a weapon of terror' (Atran, 2003, p. 1534), even if the Japanese example does not fit into his description of suicide terrorism as 'the targeted use of self-destructing humans against noncombatant – typically civilian – populations to effect political change' (Atran, 2003, p. 1534). The Japanese kamikaze, as a military operation, did not target any noncombatant populations.
4. For an extensive analysis and a working taxonomy of heroism see Zimbardo (2007, chap. 16, pp. 444–488).
5. Note, for instance, the large number of so-called green-card soldiers serving in the US Army since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.
6. Needless to mention, the general trend described here applies only to conventional wars between states, not to civil wars or asymmetric conflicts including terrorism. George Orwell, for instance, who joined the POUM militia during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), laments not only the miserable instruction and equipment provided there, but also, with a cynical undertone, the astonishing lack of ethical restraints against using – and thus sacrificing – children 'of sixteen years at the very most' (Orwell, 1938/1996, p. 18): 'this mob of eager children, who were going to be thrown into the front line in a few days' time, were not even taught how to fire a rifle or pull the pin out of a bomb' (Orwell, 1938/1996, p. 8; see also pp. 25–26).
7. Hobbes substantiates his view a few lines above as follows: 'nothing the Soveraign Representative can doe to a Subject, on what pretence soever, can properly be called Injustice, or Injury; because every Subject is Author of every act the Soveraign doth; so that he never wanteth Right to any thing, otherwise, than as he himself is the Subject to God, and bound thereby to observe the laws of Nature. And therefore it may, and doth often happen in Common-wealths, that a Subject may be put to death, by the command of the Soveraign Power; and yet neither doe the other wrong' (Hobbes, 1651/1997, p. 117).
8. One of the prominent examples of human trade within the Western states, which is reflected in Friedrich Schiller's tragedy *Cabal and Love* (1784) (Schiller, 2004, p. 780; see also p. 977, n. 780), is the traffic in mercenaries. For Karl Eugen, the Duke of Württemberg, the sale of his soldiers to America in the late eighteenth century was a profitable business.
9. Among those figures who fit the behavior scheme of a suicide bomber and play important parts in dramatic texts, one can cite, for instance, Haimon in Sophocles' *Antigone* (442 BC), Stolzius in Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz's *The Soldiers* (1776), Max Piccolomini in Schiller's *Wallenstein* trilogy (1798–1799), Joan in Schiller's *The Maid of Orleans* (1801), and Ephraim in Friedrich Hebbel's *Judith* (1839/1840).
10. For further important reasons for the relatively rare occurrence of the motif of suicide bombing in Western literature see the analyses of motivic restrictions given by Aristotelian poetics and Hegelian aesthetics in Takeda (2010, pp. 71–76).
11. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, on the contrary, gives no indication in his version of the Samson story in *Jewish Antiquities* (*ca* 93–94 AD) that Samson's killing himself was intended (Josephus, 1988, pp. 125–143, here pp. 141–143).

12. Assum significantly summarizes Micca's deed as 'heroic sacrifice' (Assum, 1926, p. 145), albeit the two accounts he quotes (Assum, 1926, pp. 143–145) make it more or less clear that Micca actually wanted to save himself from the explosion.

13. There are various theories revolving around the etymology of the word 'assassin'. Its possible roots range from *hašīš* (Arab. 'hashish') via *asās* (Pers. 'foundation') to the name of the sect founder Hasan-i Sabbah himself. Kermani points out that medieval European knowledge of the Assassins was above all fed by the Sunni polemics directed against the Isma'ili sect as the epitome of evil (Kermani, 2002, pp. 39–40) and refers in turn to Daftary (1994). In any case, there is no historical evidence that the Assassins consumed hashish.

14. Agamemnon and Menelaus have influenced the judges of the competition for Achilles' armor in Odysseus' favor.

15. In *Jewish Antiquities*, as indicated above, Josephus portrays Samson as an avenger, but not as a suicide (Josephus, 1988, pp. 125–143, here pp. 141–143). In the *Letter to the Hebrews*, on the other hand, Samson is mentioned among those who were 'approved because of their faith' (Hebrews 11:39; see 11:4–38, here 11:32). John Donne sums up the problem in his sermon 'Deaths Duell' (1630/1962): '*God* … received *Sampson*, who went out of this world in *such* a *manner* (consider it *actively*, consider it *passively*, in his *owne death*, and in those whom he *slew* with himselfe) as was subject to interpretation hard enough. Yet the *holy Ghost* hath moved S. *Paul* to celebrate *Sampson* in his *great Catalogue*, and so doth all the *Church*' (Donne, 1630/1962, p. 241, emphasis in original).

16. For a review of the recruitment and use of children by Palestinian militant organizations see, e.g., Human Rights Watch (2002, pp. 89–93).

17. Note, however, that Euripides' *The Bacchae* (405 BC) can be referred to as the first extant tragedy that reflects the phenomenon of collective terror prior to the theorizing of poetics by Aristotle. For an analysis of the tragedy from this viewpoint see Eagleton (2005, pp. 1–41).

18. Zimbardo's objection is that 'Traditional analyses by most people, including those in legal, religious, and medical institutions, focus on the actor as the sole causal agent. Consequently, they minimize or disregard the impact of situational variables and systemic determinants that shape behavioral outcomes and transform actors' (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 445). With regard to terrorism at large, different approaches are pursued. Whereas Laqueur claims that 'the decision to engage in terrorist acts' is 'as much a matter of personality as of ideological conviction' (Laqueur, 2003, p. 13), Eagleton asserts that 'Justice is the only prophylactic of terror' (Eagleton, 2005, p. 15).

19. Doris Lessing, in her novel *The Good Terrorist* (1985), anticipates the perceptual shift toward cultural and religious biases with regard to the terrorists' life-despising conduct already in the 1980s. After a dreadful terrorist attack perpetrated by a group of left-wing activists on a luxury hotel in central London – it is to note that Faye, who drives the car bomb to the target destination, uses the opportunity to commit suicide – Lessing lets a third party express its point of view: 'The taximan said it was a shocking thing; probably those Arabs again; they had no sense of the sacredness of life, not like the Westerners, if he had his way he would stop the Arabs from coming here' (Lessing, 1985, p. 357).

20. Hoffman, for instance, quotes an Israeli policeman as saying, 'There was one event where a suicide bomber had been told all he had to do was to carry the bomb and plant explosives in a certain place. But the bomb was remote-control detonated' (Hoffman, 2003). Recall, furthermore, the al Qa'ida suicide bombing using two mentally ill women as unwitting suicide bombers in Baghdad on 1 February 2008.

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