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Representation of Terror and Terrorism in Two Arab Films: *Paradise Now* (2005) by Hany Abu-Assad and *Horses of God* (2012) by Nabil Ayouch

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Abstract:
Middle Eastern violence and terrorism are not novel subjects in world cinema, especially American cinema. The Arab and/or Muslim other in these films is always presented as someone who epitomizes a culture of violence, directed mostly against innocent civilians. Against the backdrop of Hollywood's stereotypical representation of Middle-Easterners as advocate of indiscriminate terror and terrorism, Arab filmmakers have turned in recent years to the representation of terror and religious extremism. *Paradise Now* (Abu Assad 2005) and *Horses of God* (Ayouch 2012) address the controversial issue of suicide bombing with the same motivation: to examine the choice of suicide bombing within its immediate socio-economic and politico-religious milieu. Both works have raised eyebrows in the Arab world as well as in the West as to their unorthodox cinematographic representation of terrorism. For a reason. Both films tend to demystify the idea of martyrdom while still granting the suicide bombers their humanity.

Mustapha HAMIL

Representation of Terror and Terrorism in Two Arab Films: *Paradise Now* (2005) by Hany Abu-Assad and *Horses of God* (2012) by Nabi Ayouch

Introduction

Middle Eastern violence and terrorism are not novel subjects in world cinema, especially American cinema. If Cold War stories and movies were popular in the late 1940s and 1950s, the 1960s ushered in a new phase of terrorist-action films that focus on transcontinental terrorist groups determined to destroy the political and cultural primacy of the West and to sabotage its economic interests. With the dawn of a new era in the late 1980s (the end of communism in Eastern Europe), terrorism cinema turned to the Middle East where Arab/Muslim various terrorist groups were allegedly engaged in an unremitting battle against the state of Israel and, to a lesser extent at the time, against the United States and Europe. As John Nelson puts it, "Hollywood has played a leading role in replacing the outdated villains of the Evil Empire with Ruthless Terrorists ranging from the Middle East to Middle America" (Nelson 2003: 4). The 1993 and 2001 al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Twin Towers, and the Pentagon fueled the production of films with staggering plots of international Middle Eastern terrorism. Some examples of this new genre of terrorism films include *True Lies* (1994), *The Siege* (1998), *The Peacemaker* (1997), *The Sum of All Fears* (2002), *United 93* (2006), and, to some extent, *Syriana* (2006). In these films and others, the demonized Arab or/and Muslim is always cast as someone who epitomizes a culture of merciless violence, directed mostly against innocent civilians, and who, in most cases, proves unable to provide a clear rationale for his actions beyond mere hatred and baseless ire. The recent terrorist attack in Spain (August 2017) or the 2019 Sri Lanka Easter bombings substantiate among many westerners the idea that Islamist terrorist groups incarnate a somber and enduring threat to the very core of western civilization and values. As Carl Bogg and Tom Pollard put it:

> The main political and media discourses stress an epic struggle between (Western, democratic, modern) 'civilization' and (Jihadic, Muslim, primitive) 'barbarism'—a self-serving, hypocritical grand narrative that frames political violence as a monopoly of cultural/national Others whose modus operandi, mostly local attacks, contrasts with the 'legitimate' military actions of powerful governments launching high-tech missile strikes and bombing raids. (Bogg and Pollard 2006: 336)

Against the backdrop of Hollywood's stereotypical representation of Middle-Easterners as "dirty, thieving, lecherous, involved with vice, crime and corruption" (Koslovic 2007: 218) and terrorism, Arab filmmakers have turned in recent years to the representation of terror and religious extremism. As a genre terror or terrorism films are new to Arab cinema; the first Arab film dealing with Islamic radicalism and violence is probably *al-Irhabi* (*The Terrorist*,1994) which presents an Islamic radical group led by Brother Saif who organizes attacks against the Egyptian government and the civil society. Other films and novels coming out of different Arab countries have subsequently tried, with some success, to address the issue of religious extremism and political terrorism from a variety of perspectives. They all share one ambition however: to explore the socio-politico-religious networks and the conscious and unconscious processes that put ordinary individuals on the fatal trail of death.

In what follows I will compare two of these perspectives in two films whose storylines are shaped by two dissimilar contexts, but whose focal motifs tend to overlap. These are *Paradise Now* (Abu Assad 2005) and *Horses of God* (Ayouch 2012). *Paradise Now* is set in the West Bank in Palestine and addresses the controversial issue of suicide bombing as a form of political resistance to the Israeli occupation, whereas *Horses of God* takes place in Morocco and revisits the terrorist attack that took place in Casablanca (Morocco) in 2003[1]. Both films are driven by the same effort to examine the choice of suicide bombing within its immediate socio-economic and politico-religious milieu.[2] Both works have raised eyebrows in the Arab world as well as in the West as to their unorthodox cinematographic representation of terrorism. Moreover, both stories—and this is the ground for the comparison I am conducting here—are informed by a cluster of antagonistic forces that comprise religion, politics, personal guilt, local and global tension, and aborted dreams of sovereignty and independence. Seen together the two films shed additional light on the unthinkable reality of suicide bombing through Arab

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[1] On May 16, 2003, 14 suicide bombers from the Sidi Moumen slums killed 45 people in Casablanca, the biggest terrorist attack suffered by Morocco to date. Moroccan authorities blamed the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) for the attacks.

[2] In terms of their avowed objective to communicate a hermeneutics of terrorism, the two films can be easily added to a long list of novels and films which deal with the subject of violence and terrorism in the Arab context.

eyes, and thus challenge the prejudiced premises that inform the way this controversial phenomenon has been perceived and construed in the West.[3] Despite their apparent differences in context and motives, both films establish a dialogue between them at the level of their major themes. In the second part of the discussion, I will examine three of these themes: the suicide bomber's body, the spatial background of the story, and the female presence-absence in both films.

***Paradise Now* (2005)**

Hany Abu-Assad's *Paradise Now* is a Palestinian film about a suicide terrorist mission to be executed inside Israel. The story takes place in Nablus in the West Bank where extreme poverty, routine rocket explosions, and daily scenes of humiliation at the Israeli checkpoints punctuate the day-to-day life under occupation. Said, the main character, and his friend Khaled lead ordinary lives of semi-skilled mechanics at a car repair shop. Their life follows a predictable monotony—work, hookah and tea, family dinners and the inexorable reminders that Said's father was executed as an Israeli collaborator. The appearance of the female character Suha, a liberal human activist who lives abroad, throws some cheerfulness in the rather uneventful life of the two friends. Besides being an outsider, Suha is also the daughter of an iconic martyr of Palestinian resistance, Abu Azzam, who was killed by the Mossad (the National Intelligence Agency of Israel). Notwithstanding her symbolic capital and female charms, Suha, as I will discuss later, fails to persuade Said and Khaled against their 'terrorist' mission in Tel Aviv. As soon as a love relationship starts to develop between her and Said, a representative of the *al-Kataib* political organization announces to Said and Khaled that their turn to carry out a suicide operation in Tel Aviv has finally arrived. Both friends are elated by the news. Despite the very careful outlining of the mission, some unforeseen mishaps will eventually thwart its execution as initially envisioned. Determined to carry out the operation on his own, Said, for whom the mission has become now more personal than political, is shown at the film's conclusion, seated on a Tel Aviv bus carrying Israeli soldiers, explosives still strapped to his body, about to fulfill the fated act.

In his study of Palestinian suicide bombing during the second Intifada, Assaf Moghadam insists on the difference in motivation between individual and organizational suicide bombing. While, for example, individual motives may "include the desire to reap expected benefits in the afterlife, the urge to seek revenge for the death or injury of a close friend or family member, or the real or perceived humiliation brought about by Israeli occupation," political motives of suicide bombing may involve "political aims of and tactical considerations for the use of suicide bombings" (Moghadam 2006: 68). The last scene of the bus communicates the complexity of the Palestinian-Israeli historical relationship by bringing together the Israeli soldier and the suicide bomber, the colonizer and the colonized, the oppressor and the oppressed, the victimizer and the victim. The closed space of the bus represents, metaphorically, the kind of existential imprisonment that defines and determines the reality of occupation. The camera slowly moves toward Said, in his seat, still wearing a black suit and a white shirt, then gradually zooms on his unblinking eyes after which the film cuts to white, which insinuates the impending explosion.

Contrary to American films on Middle Eastern and Muslim terrorism, Abu Assad's *Paradise Now* deliberately does away with the spectacular melodrama of explosions and chopped bodies Instead, he uses different cinematographic techniques (e.g., the thriller genre, camera malfunction, and new realism) in order to challenge the viewers' habitual expectations and to force them to focus more on the historical, cultural and ideological context that influences the choice of suicide bombing. By so doing, Abu Assad seeks to draw attention to the correlation between the daily experience of occupation and the gradual erosion of the film's main characters' psychological fortitude. More importantly, the film's title itself, *Paradise Now*, demystifies the religious belief that sacrificing one's life for God guarantees admission to paradise. Abu Assad rejects this idea, predominant in the populist *fatwas* and discourses on *jihadism* and martyrdom, by intentionally opposing two conflicting temporalities: the *after-death* and the *now*, the projected Paradise and the lived Hell. For Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, the *Now*, the present is more desired than the hereafter; that is, the kind of Paradise they would prefer to inhabit should be realized on earth, embodied in a free and sovereign nation. For their *Now* under Israeli control has actually turned into a man-made Hell, the opposite of the virtual Paradise promoted through the propaganda of martyrdom. In his overexcited conversation with Suha about martyrdom and Paradise, Khaled admits, "I'd rather have paradise in my head than live in this hell." Like many other 'martyrs' before him—and probably after him—Khaled has reached a point in his life where he is all too willing to sacrifice his life for a symbolic or phantasmagoric image of Paradise. It is at this juncture in

[3] For a detailed discussion of this point, see Tim Semmerling, *"Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film* (2006), John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (1995), and Evelyn Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11* (2012).

the film when the symbolic supplants the real that viewers—Western and non-western alike—are challenged to pinpoint the thin line separating reality and phantasmagoria, fact and fiction, martyrdom, and suicide.

The opening scene of the film—Suha crossing into Nablus—imposes on the audience a shocking image of a hellish existence under Israeli occupation. Required to pass through a roadside checkpoint, Suha finds herself face-to-face with an Israeli soldier who asserts his absolute power over her, intimidating her with his unsympathetic look and sophisticated weapon. Through this scene Abu-Assad introduces in *medias res* a reality of unspoken hostility and outrageous humiliation. Hage argues that "many Palestinians consider colonial humiliation as one of the main factors behind the rise of suicide bombings." He defines humiliation as "the experience of being psychologically demeaned—treated like less than a human being, by someone more powerful than you, without a capacity to redress the situation" (Hage 2003: 82). The decision to carry out a suicide operation is thus presented as being primarily determined not by the belief in the artifice of some cosmic pleasure or divine reward but, instead, by the crushing reality of life-death inside the Occupied Territories. As Michele Aaron puts it, "The to-be-dead figure is the dead-already Palestinian, not as a condition of Western fiction and its erotic economies but as a condition of life in the Occupied Territories and its political realities" (Aaron 84). Thus, one cannot understand the disposition toward self-sacrifice in *Paradise Now* without understanding the smothering nature of Israeli colonialism which annihilates the Palestinian sense of identity and belonging. As Yasmina Khadra states in his novel addressing the issue of suicide bombing:

> Tous les drames sont possibles lorsqu'un amour-propre est bafoué. Surtout quand on s'aperçoit qu'on n'a pas les moyens de sa dignité, qu'on est impuissant. Je crois que la meilleure école de la haine se situe à cet endroit précis. On apprend véritablement à haïr à partir de l'instant où l'on prend conscience de son impuissance…. Quand les rêves sont éconduits, la mort devient l'ultime salut….
>
> All tragedies become possible when self-esteem is violated. Especially when one realizes that there is no means of one's dignity when one feels helpless. I think that the best school of hatred is at this very spot. We truly learn to hate from the moment when we become aware of one's powerlessness…. When dreams are denied, death becomes the ultimate salvation…. (Khadra 2005: 211-213) [my translation]

In the absence of a conclusive dialogue between the Israelis and the Palestinians, suicide bombing presents itself as a viable alternative to the intolerable and enduring Hell-like present. An intolerable existence that can only be matched by the internal sense of guilt that Said, the leading character, endures in silence. Instead of depicting scenes of violence and destruction, *Paradise Now* focuses on Said's inner experience of shame that seems to alienate him from the present and to blur his vision of a brighter future.

As a candidate for martyrdom, Said incarnates the death-in-life condition prevailing in the Occupied Territories. *Paradise Now* translates the dead-already character—the powerless victim of occupation—into a to-be-sacrificed body. Said and Khaled are fully aware that they will die, literally, but they also know that they are already dead, figuratively. The state of being dead-already is intimately associated with the reality of Israel's colonialism itself. All the characters in the film seem to be affected directly or indirectly by Israel's colonialist management of its occupied territories—checkpoints, barbed fences and roadblocks—and by the scarcity of life's basic provisions such as clean water or water filters. "Life here," Said says, "is like life imprisonment." One is born into it and there is nothing one can do about it. Khaled stresses the direct equation of the occupation with death. He responds to Said's doubts about their mission: "Under the occupation, we're already dead." Later, Suha, who is in favor of a political resolution of the conflict, expresses profound disagreement with violence, especially suicide bombing, as a means of political resistance. When she suggests to Khaled and Said that there are other methods to live and to resist, Khaled replies, "In this life we're dead anyway."

The equation of the Israeli occupation with death pervades the film and points to the strategic and deliberate suppression of a whole people's identity and sense of belonging; indeed, Palestinians, as Ibrahim Kira puts it, "perceive that the denial of their statehood reflects their annihilation as a group" (Kira 2006: 125). Gana adds in this respect that "A contested identity is essentially an identity forced not only to despise itself but also, and whenever possible, to reduce itself to (the status of) nonexistence, or, at least, of disposability — to liquidate or annihilate itself *tout court*" (Gana 2008: 22). The Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories (the West Bank including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip) is thus obliquely blamed for creating the conditions—economic, social, and psychological—favorable of all kinds of voluntary and involuntary acts of violence, including suicide bombing. Robert A. Pape and James K. Feldman have argued in their study of the practice of suicide bombing that Israel's

long occupation of Palestine may be "the principle cause of suicide terrorism," not Islamic fundamentalism (Pape and Feldman 2010:20).

When the first attempt at crossing the fence to Tel Aviv fails, Khaled manages to reach the organization headquarters while Said goes missing. The members of the organization, who know very well Said's father and his collaborative work with the Israelis, start to doubt Said's loyalty to the mission. When he finally manages to establish contact with the organization, he finds himself forced to prove to them that he is not a traitor like his father. His final speech in the film, in which he attempts to dissipate the terrorist group's doubt in him to execute the mission, makes it very clear that suicide bombing remains the only available response to Israeli violence: "If they take on the role of oppressor and victim … then I have no other choice but to also be a victim … and a murderer as well." As O'Riley demonstrates in his book, *Cinema in an Age of Terror* (2010), the battle in "the age of terror" is a battle over the appropriation of victimhood and the entitlement to the space and culture of the victim. He argues in this context that:

> the victim's position is the new space of the age of terror, where the victimized might generate other victims, the terrorized might terrorize, and the terrorized nation state might establish, at a very minimum, the illusion of control through its victimization of other nations. What is at stake is a contest over the space and image of the victim. (O'Riley 2010: 2)

Said's determination to carry out the mission and to act as an agent of national redemption seems to confirm indirectly this argument. Viewed against the background of the second Intifada (2000-2005), the film seems to justify Said's action as an attempt to appropriate the space of victimhood even though it refuses to establish a monolithic explanation for Said's desire to die. It is this same desire "to appropriate the space of victimhood" that drives the suicide mission in Ayouch's *Horses of God* (2012).

***Horses of God* (2012)**

While *Paradise Now* contextualizes the choice of suicide bombing within the Israeli occupation, *Horses of God* revisits the tragic terrorist act that shook Casablanca, Morocco, on May 16, 2003, killing 45 people (including the terrorists themselves). Although the film is inspired by Mahi Binebine's novel, *Les Etoiles de Sidi Moumen* (*The Stars of Sidi Moumen*, 2010), Ayouch chooses a very symbolic title to his film. In an interview with Dennis West, he explains,

> [*Horses of God*] is statement by one of the Prophet's companions during the very beginnings of Islam, the seventh century AD, when he was calling men to the *jihad*, the Holy War. This man, to convince them to go, uttered this terrible yet also very poetic and beautiful sentence: 'Fly, horses of God, and to you the gates of heaven will open with joy.' This language was repeated much later at the end of the Nineties and the beginning of 2000 by Osama bin Laden and his followers in their speeches for the new *jihad*, the modern *jihad*. (West 2014: 42)

All five terrorists in the film come from the same slums of Sidi Moumen which is home to more than 150.000 residents who lead a miserable life in tin-roofed shacks without electricity, running water or modern sewage disposal. Aerial shots show the slums sitting atop a garbage dump where boys play soccer all day and engage in fierce scenes of extreme violence. To contextualize the story within Moroccan postcolonial reality, Ayouch injects background references to national and international history through select TV news footage of important historical moments, such as the death of King Hassan II (1999); the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York (2001); and the fall of Baghdad in April 2003 (West 2014: 42).

Despite its treatment of social and religious issues, the film is not about politics or religion *per se*, but about poverty, social inequity, and the children's psychological vulnerability. Contrary to *Paradise Now* which deals with the question of political resistance to Israel's occupation, *Horses of God* presents a compelling examination of the roots of terrorism in poverty, social marginalization, and hopelessness.

In its demystification of the harsh conditions of living in a slum, *Horses of God* makes the choice of terrorism alarmingly logical. Because it follows its main characters from childhood into adulthood, the film gives their fates a sense of tragic irrevocability. When first seen, Yachine and his older brother, Hamid, are 10 and 13 years old, playing soccer with other children of the slums. Older, Hamid has become a drug dealer and a local hero after he has thrown a rock at a police car and ends up in prison. When he is released after a two-year incarceration, he reappears a transformed man, having discovered and embraced Islamic fundamentalism in prison, with its emphasis on strictness and self-discipline in the service of a greater cause. Yachine, who has always looked up to his brother as a role model, is easily converted. So are their friends, Nabil, Khalil, and Fouad. In fact, all five of them become members

of an Islamic extremist group led by Emir Abu Zoubeir who teaches them how to live a clean life through discipline, prayers, martial art, and spiritual nourishment; "Here you will find your path through prayer. You have lived with rakes and libertines. They are the criminals, not you," says Emir Abu Zoubeir. More than just spiritual fortification, Abu Zoubeir's circle also offers protection to Yachine and his friend Nabil after they have inadvertently killed their drunk boss who tried to rape Nabil.

In their discussion of the topic of political Islam in Egyptian films, Allagui and Najjar argue that the miserable conditions of life in the slums, the absence of any socioeconomic support for the inhabitants of these slums "leaves them subject to physical, moral and psychological aggression as well as violence, exercised by both state bodies and society" (Allagui and Najjar 2011: 249). In fact, the social and economic conditions of life in the slums are presented in such films on political Islam as *Ya Khail Allah* (Horses of God), *Hena Maysara* (Hena Maysara, 2007), and *Dam el-ghazal* (The Gazelle's Blood, 2005) as the predictable ingredients for the formation of future suicide bombers.

If in *Paradise Now* the enemy is well-defined, in *Horses of God* the enemy remains a vague entity; sometimes it is referred to as the corrupt state, sometimes as the community of infidels and apostates, and in other times as the satanic West. But the one thing that Yachine and his friends know now for sure is that they are the victims of a harsh social reality they cannot change or escape. When asked about the most significant factors that influence the youth in the slums, Ayouch, the film director, responded: "Feeling abandoned, cut off from the rest of society" (West 2014: 44). The state of being abandoned by society, and even by their families, makes the children of the slums an easy target for the *jihadi* zealots and recruiters who convince them to give up their wretched lives in exchange of a grandiose illusion, the illusion of a better life in the hereafter. Yachine, Hamid, Nabil, Fouad, and Khalil succumb easily to Emir Abu Zoubeir's idea of redemption through martyrdom. Abu Zoubeir, the architect of the suicidal mission, applies a gradual process of indoctrination. He first makes his protégés aware of their social marginalization and then opposes their life of 'cockroaches' in the slums to the luxurious and clean quarters of the modern city of Casablanca. He eventually turns this topographical division into an overarching opposition between the poor and the rich, the righteous and the corrupt, Good and Evil, the local and the global, faith and reason, Islam, and the West. To restore social justice and equality among all believers as ordained by God involves the removal of that man-made border; that artificial frontier which indicates the line of demarcation between the powerful and the powerless, the privileged and the neglected, the virtuous and the corrupt. Convinced that they have all the reasons to revolt against their social marginalization and wretchedness, they start to entertain the dream of leaving behind the dejected life of Sidi Moumen and savoring the dignified life that God has prescribed for all mankind. Consciousness of their humiliation makes the prospect of self-sacrifice more acceptable and less inhumane. Suicide bombing becomes in this respect "a path of social meaningfulness and self-fulfillment in an otherwise meaningless life" (Hage 2003: 79). The idea of being admitted into Paradise as a martyr shows how individuals can be easily convinced to believe in an "imagined enjoyable symbolic life following the cessation of their physical life" (Hage 2003: 79). What is so alarming in the case of the Sidi Moumen children is that they have practically nothing to lose; in a way, they are already 'dead'. As Chahine puts it, "In reality, we are already dead. Then, a little more or a little less, is not important." Like Khaled and Said in *Paradise Now*, Yachine and his friends do not need to be convinced to die—not because they fear death, but because they do not care one way or the other, a disregard to death which is as appalling as the actual killing.

Unlike other movies about *jihadism*, *Horses of God* does not attach a perverse fascination with suicide bombing. Even after Yachine has been chosen to lead the operation—the bombing of an Italian restaurant—he is shown shaking with fear, a little bit befuddled, and his eyes do not twinkle with divine illumination. Regardless, he lives this instant of his futile life in full consonance with his destiny, a master of his own life and that of others, a freedom of choice he has never experienced before. As Terry Eagleton explains: "By disposing of his life, the suicide bomber hopes to draw attention to the contrast between this extreme form of self-determination, and the absence of such autonomy in his everyday life" (Eagleton 2005: 90). In a suicide bomber's scheme of things, self-execution becomes his/her ultimate exercise of freedom; Yachine and his friends would have liked to live as they die, masters of their own fate.

Abu Zoubeir who represents in the film the *takfiri* branch of Salafism—extremists who accuse others of apostasy to legitimize violence against the West and its Muslim allies—capitalizes on the children's social condition of marginalization and hopelessness to prepare them for the ultimate act. It is interesting to underline the difference between the two films as to their religious motivation. While *Paradise Now* is infused with a discourse on nationalism, liberation and resistance, *Horses of God* is couched in a language of religious duties, a prophetic vision of remapping the world according to a predictable triumph of Islam. The West appears in this religious configuration of the world as a

threatening and pervasive modernity; a modernity that a traditionalist Arabo-Islamic world needs to destroy in order to get rid of the mirror that exposes its (Arabo-Islamic world's) political, social, and cultural debacle. For many ultra-conservative segments of Islamic movements, the West represents a threat to the core spiritual values of the Islamic *umma* (community) through its excessive celebration of secular science, technology, and a ruthless capitalist culture. Indeed, it is the West's industrial and cultural values that are most rejected by these extremist religious groups and whose symbols and landmarks (e.g., the Twin Towers) are the main targets for their terrorist violence.

Abu Zoubeir constructs the modern world for his protégés in terms of a perpetual religious fight against the West and its Muslim apostates. His unconscious reformulation of Samuel Huntington's famous catchphrase "the clash of civilizations" points to a cultural battle where Islam has become the targeted victim. Abu Zoubeir deliberately manipulates his protégés' ignorance of world politics in order to execute his sinister attack not only on select material targets (a luxurious hotel, an Italian-owned restaurant, and a Jewish cemetery), but, more importantly, on modernity and its different indexes of rationality, democracy, and secular culture. Walter Laqueur, an expert on terrorism, argues that fanaticism—whether sectarian, religious, or nationalist—is usually fueled by "sheer madness" and lacks clear political goals other than "destroying civilization, and in some cases humankind" (Laqueur 1999: 5).

While Abu Zoubeir in *Horses of God* uses a medievalist religious rhetoric to legitimize suicide bombing as a means of resistance to a powerful and hostile West, in *Paradise Now*, however, the choice of suicide bombing as a means of political resistance is determined by a combination of private and external motives: a history of internalized violence, religious and ideological indoctrination, structured by the specificity of Israeli colonialism, and Said's personal sense of guilt. Despite the apparent differences in context and motivation, both films do share certain key themes. In what follows I will discuss three of these themes: the suicide bomber's body, the spatial background of the story, and the female presence in both films.

The Suicide Bomber's Body

In both films, self-destruction establishes a new form of agency and a new type of language. In recent years, suicide bombing as a tactic of war has become, alongside vehicle ramming terrorism, the emblematic and most terrifying weapon of contemporary geopolitical struggle, confirming the alarming effectiveness of the human body on the international stage of conflict. At a point when technology has revolutionized how (post) modern wars are conducted and staged, the power of the human body has suddenly returned in the form of an agency whose traumatizing language reverberates throughout the contemporary world (Burgoyne 2012: 9). In both films, the body functions as a sacrificial offering (*Paradise Now*) and as a weapon (*Horses of God*). There is however a slight difference as to the set goals to be achieved. On the one hand, in *Paradise Now,* the sacrifice of the body is part of a logic of political resistance intended to achieve the liberation of Palestine, to reclaim a lost sovereignty. In fact, the film contextualizes the circumstances that make the suicide bomber sacrifice his body for the sake of an independent and sovereign nation. In a sense, the birth of a new nation seems contingent upon the body's death, or the sacrifice of its members. As Gayatri Spivak puts it, "Suicidal resistance is a message inscribed in the body when no other means will get through. It is both execution and mourning, for both self and other" (Spivak 2004: 96). On the other hand, in *Horses of God,* the body is bartered here in exchange of a vague ideal; the reconstitution of a whimsical Islamic *umma* (nation). The pursuit of such an absurd ideal is better described as a deceptive "swapping of physical existence with symbolic existence" (Hage 2003: 76). In both cases, to valorize the body's 'insignificant' materiality in a death-in-life context, it must be sacrificed for the sake of a nebulous idea of paradise, whether in the present (*Paradise Now*) or in the hereafter (*Horses of God*).

The elaborate preparations leading up to the ultimate sacrifice of the body in both films remain tangential to the act itself; they include, in particular, videotaped martyr farewells that laud the suicide mission and forbid families to mourn (*Paradise Now*); shaving and bodily washing (a rite of passage that suggests they are already 'dead corpses' or living dead). In addition, photos of the protagonists are put on posters (later to be displayed in the slums or in the city center, as a showcase of martyrdom). Both films linger on the suicide bombers' meek surrender to the call of death as they offer their bodies to the lethal straps of explosives. To conclude this ritualistic preparation for death, they are offered dinner, a 'Last Supper,' implying thus their imminent crucifixion (for the sins of the Israeli occupation and for the evils of the modern and postmodern apostates).

The religious meaning of sacrifice is also important here. In the martyr rituals, the bodies of the characters are transformed from what Gilles Deleuze calls the quotidian body into the ceremonial body (1986). Along with the filming and the narrating of the martyr speech, the films detail the careful

washing of the characters' bodies, the shaving, and the close haircut which are rendered in a slow montage accompanied by the melodious calls for prayer. The dimmed light in this scene adds to the phantasmagoria of the act. Highlighting the ceremonial transformation of the body, a ritual purification of the self dominates this sequence in both films. The closing scene of this sequence reinforces this idea. The connotations of sacrifice and the body are emphasized in a way that is simultaneously religious, national and cross-cultural.

The literature on the symbolism of martyrdom in contemporary Palestine highlights an intricate sociological idiosyncrasy in which religious, political, and military discourses and intentions blend in the same act. As Robert Burgoyne argues in his discussion of the symbolic meaning of the body in *Paradise Now* and *The Hurt Locker* (2008), "the body of the human bomb represents the dark dream of an imagined nation formed only in the act of sacrifice" (Burgoyne 2012: 8). "Our bodies," as the main character Said states, "are all we have left." Death, regarded as a gift rather than a sacrifice for the communal good, is perceived in this context as the only viable route to achieve the dream of an independent Palestine. Said remains committed to his desire to execute the suicide mission, partly because he is firmly convinced of its political obligation and partly because he wants to 'kill' the memory of his father's reprehensible cooperation with the Israelis. His act of self-sacrifice is thus directed against his past as much as against the Israeli Occupation, both being the obsessions that disrupt the tranquility of his present. As the story unfolds, it becomes obvious that the enemy to destroy is perceived not simply as existing outside but also 'inside', internally, inside a body that must be sacrificed, annihilated. Martyrdom—or *shahada*—offers Said an ultimate opportunity for self-purification and rebirth; "Death allows martyrs to recover their spiritual virginity, to wash away their sins […] a beatifying death releases them from their everyday humiliation" (Khosrokhavar 2005: 133).

Abu Zoubeir refers to the idea of *shahada*/martyrdom in a very suggestive speech in *Horses of God*: "We are stronger than them, and they know it" and "Death does not scare us." Abu Zoubeir reiterates the belief that his chosen 'horses of God' will overpower the supremacy of the West because they possess something that the West does not possess: their bodies. Before the execution of their mission the five friends (Yachine, Hamid, Nabil, Fouad, and Khalil) undergo, like in *Paradise Now*, the customary rituals of purification. In both political and religious contexts, *istishhad*, martyrdom, requires that the body be cleansed before it meets its ultimate annihilation. If the idea of sacrifice in *Horses of God* is more immersed in religion than in *Paradise Now,* it must be noted that the use of violence is the least advocated method of spreading the word of Allah and re-connecting with the model of the righteous forefathers (*al-salaf al-salih*). Recourse to violent action is defended and legitimized by a marginal group in the Salafi community known as *jihadis*. Members of this group argue that it is legitimate to use violence to remove leaders who do not comply with and or implement the 'true' precepts of Islam. Al-Qaeda and ISIS are the most prominent *jihadist* movements in our present times. Given the fact that they are in a position of powerlessness, they turn the human body into a lethal strategic weapon with worldwide psychological and political repercussions. Contrary to conventional military combats, the body warfare can take place almost everywhere and at any given moment, aided in that by our (post) modern communication technologies and the porosity of frontiers. As Samuel Thomas puts it, "Suicide terror is a practice that can not only shatter the rhythms of everyday life but also the most sophisticated machineries of governance and military industrial control" (Thomas 2011: 432). In *Horses of God,* Emir Abu Zoubeir summarizes the significance of the body in the fight against the West and its Arab-Muslim apostates as follows: "We would turn their lives into hell. Their sophisticated military arsenals would become obsolete and ridiculous" (*Horses of God*). The human body, whether deployed in an irrational mass killing or in a desperate political resistance has established itself as "an insurgent tactic capable of matching, or at least confounding, the most advanced technologies deployed by the US, European, and Israeli militaries" (Thomas 2011: 433). There is no doubt that suicide bombing in this new East-West configuration has challenged the world to review many of its assumptions about self-sufficiency, world peace, and military and technological supremacy. Jean Baudrillard argues in his discussion of the spirit of terrorism that the recommendation informing any act of terrorism is: "Never attack the system in terms of relations of force" because the system survives precisely by drawing those attacking it on the ground of reality, which is always its own. Instead, "shift the struggle into the symbolic sphere, where the rule is that of challenge, reversion and outbidding. So that death can be met only by equal or greater death" (Baudrillard 2003: 17). Suicide bombing defies the West and its allies by a gift to which they cannot respond except by their own destruction and their own downfall.

The 'gift' that the suicide bomber is willing to offer is precisely his body. In both films the human body is turned into a lethal weapon; its victory lies in its self-induced explosion. Emir Abu Zoubeir reassures his recruits of a sure triumph in the fight against the West and its followers because "We have weapons that the unbelievers do not have: our flesh and blood" (*Horses of God*). In *Paradise Now*,

Said explains his terrorist mission to Suha who advocates peaceful methods of political resistance that "Our bodies are all we have left to fight with." In both films, the orchestration of violence demonstrates something beyond the horror of death: it expresses the terrorist's power to seize the responsibility of his life and death from those who govern or humiliate him. In sheer defiance to the supreme power of God, the terrorist appoints himself as the master of his own destiny: he can decide where and when to die. Indeed, the only freedom the suicide bomber can claim to enjoy is the freedom to kill or not to kill himself and others. In his *Hypothesis of Terrorism*, Baudrillard argues that terrorism does not invent or inaugurate anything; it merely "carries things to the extreme, to the point of paroxysm" and "exacerbates a certain order of things, a certain logic of violence and uncertainty" (Baudrillard 2003: 58). Not only does suicide bombing impair the 'logic of violence and uncertainty,' it also eliminates all options of dialogue and negotiation. Terrorism, as Gana puts it, is anti-communication and anti-narrative. It is an inhospitable language that does not establish the ground for mutual interaction; a language that denies its audience the option of objection or counterargument: "Terrorism is inconclusive in content and form; it breaks off, it interrupts, and it terminates" (Gana 2008: 22). Chahine complains in Mahi Binebine's novel, *Les Etoiles de Sidi Moumen* (2010): "They are killing us little by little. But to die just to die, we may as well take them all with us and put an end (to their life) once for all" (Binebine 2010: 124). The decision to die as a suicide bomber is therefore not only "the solution to your existence, but also a commentary on it" (Eagleton 2005: 90). Chahine captures here the complex interplay in the decision to die as a suicide bomber of two contradictory desires: the desire to assert oneself and the desire to misappropriate one's body.

The sacrifice of the body in a self-willed death may be read as a form of language, but a language that paradoxically dismisses the logic of normal negotiation or communication. According to Edward Said, "Sequence, the logic of cause and effect as between oppressors and victims, opposing pressures—all these vanish inside an enveloping cloud called 'terrorism'" (Said 1984: 37). Despite their lack of logic, these well-orchestrated deaths are, however, informed by a buried desire to diffuse a message that outlives the moment of their happening. As Ivan Strenski writes:

> While these deaths seem to be calculated, utilitarian acts of individuals…they are motivated by a vengeance marked by a strong desire for 'spectacular revenge'. They are thus exemplary signs that are intended for certain audiences … . Their success seems necessarily to rely upon the kind of communal recognition and subsequent ritual celebration of the operations by the community from which the bomber comes. (2003: 7)

Both films resort to similar techniques of glorification of the martyrs. The disintegrated body of the human bomber is resurrected posthumously in the martyr videos and photos. In *Paradise Now*, Said's implied, if not imminent spectacular explosion is made to embody the frustration and suffering of the Palestinian community under Occupation. As Farhad Khosrokhavar puts it, "Although (Said's) body will be shattered into thousands of pieces, his martyrdom will make it intact as is the idealized Palestine in his mind' (Khosrokhavar 2005: 135). While in *Paradise Now* farewells and confessions videos of the two protagonists will eventually be put for sale in video stores in Gaza and the West Bank, in *Horses of God*, it is Emir Zoubeir who will immortalize the "heroic" act of his protégés. In Mahi Binebine's novel, Chahine reports how Emir Zoubeir exhibits their photos to other young kids in the slums of Casablanca as a tool of recruitment of new candidates of martyrdom. In both films, the use of the martyr video and photos serves two different objectives. While the video tapes used by Abu Zoubeir in *Horses of God* are intended to connect the fate of the children of the slums with a transnational community of martyrs locked in a continuing battle against the infidels, the martyr video in *Paradise Now* serves as a way of mediating between the personal lives of the character and the larger, imagined community of Palestine. In both cases, the suicide bombers are given a second life, a posthumous life where they hold a venerated position as both local heroes and transnational martyrs. A new life that transcends the spatial imprisonment of the Sidi Moumen slums and the Occupied Territories. Besides their adulation in the collective memory of the community, suicide bombers also aspire to gain religious immortality. It is no coincidence that videotaped farewells of martyrs are signed with the words 'the living martyr.' A signature consistent with the Quranic verse, "Count not those who were slain in God's way as dead, but rather living with their Lord, by Him provided" (Chapter 3: 169)

Spatial Apartheid

Both films set their stories against a topographical background characterized by a stark opposition between two antagonistic spaces: Nablus and Tel Aviv in *Paradise Now* and the slums of Sidi Moumen and the modern city of Casablanca in *Horses of God*. Not only does this opposition define how the inhabitants of the West Bank and Sidi Moumen view themselves, but it also informs the way they look

at their immediate neighbors and at the outside world. Notwithstanding the avowed concern about security and containment in both films, spatial segregation always exacerbates feelings of resentment and antipathy. In their study of the spatialization of identity, Michael Klein and Steve Pile argue that "politics is invariably about closure; it is about the moment when boundaries become, symbolically, Berlin Walls" (Klein and Pile 1993: 222). In recent years, these Berlin Walls—whether political, economic, spatial, or cultural—have become targets to either discursive or political resistance or, on occasion, terrorist attacks. The first scene in *Horses of God*—Hamid throwing a rock at a police car—is a symbolic characterization of a deep-seated resentment to all forms and figures of authority; a resentment that will morph overtime into a political and ideological conflict between the Islamists and the Moroccan State. Fences or walls erected around the slums, or the Occupied Territories may give the impression of security, containment, and control, to use Michel Foucault's words, but, as de Certeau shows in his seminal work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), space can also be dynamic and explosive. Individuals may submit to the disciplinary and organizational regulations of society only with the intent to subvert them.

Furthermore, space does not only provide a neutral backdrop for social and identity distribution—us and them, colonized and colonizer, poor and rich, etc.; it is also, following Soja, filled with politics and ideology, inscribing the "relations of power and discipline…into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life" (Soja 1989: 6). Turning walls into borders or limits enables thus the power of politics to successfully conceal the politics of power, as the hierarchical classification of space into 'ours' and 'theirs' legitimates spatial as well as political segregation and dominance. As Michel Foucault explains in his essay, *Discipline and Punish* (1977), space is no longer poetic but political; it is no longer disciplinary but ideological. Both Foucault and Soja insist on the dynamics of space as an external sphere of influence, where political practices turn social spaces into tropes of incarceration and domination. The space inside which the inhabitants of Nablus and Sidi Moumen are incarcerated no longer feels like their choice of living environment, but rather like a large prison in which they are condemned to endure death in life.

Spatial segregation in both films becomes a metaphorical representation of the opposition between freedom and oppression, hope and despair, life and death. The inhabitants of the West Bank and the slums of Sidi Moumen are affected in different ways by the inevitability of death, literal or metaphorical. Hence the choice of an express or orchestrated death may appear as a triumph over a slow but sure death. As Chahine puts it in *Horses of God*, "We are already dead, a little more or less does not make a big difference." If the slums of Sidi Moumen are home to the dark desires and obsessions of the repressed part of the modern city, the West Bank is home to the repressed dream of a sovereign nation, to be built on the many deaths of its own citizens. The suicide bomber who crosses the line of demarcation that separates—and unites—the two antagonistic zones of the city seek to attain power, albeit an abject power, to destroy the terms of the opposition.

In both films, the modern city appears vulnerable, unable to protect itself and its citizens. The ability to execute a terrorist attack in the heart of Casablanca or Tel Aviv shows how misleading are the artificial boundaries of walls and fences. In the past, cities and their inhabitants were protected by indestructible walls and fortresses. Today, urban terrorism does not recognize the modern cities' topographical organization or lines of demarcation. All over the world, terrorists deliberately target the symbolic and economic landmarks of cities and their ideals of freedom and security. Terrorism disrupts these ideals and erodes people's trust in their government's ability to protect them. Lawrence Freedman defines urban terrorism as "deliberate acts of violence, or threat of violence, intended to produce a particular psychological effect—terror—on the assumption that this will then lead to shift in the target's attitudes and behavior" (Freedman, 2005: 161).

While Said in *Paradise Now* attributes a certain political legitimacy to his mission in Tel Aviv, Chahine and his friends do not have a clear idea of the purpose of their suicidal mission. Even their mentor, Abu Zoubeir, does not provide a convincing rationale for the terrorist attack. Casablanca becomes for him a battlefield where the horses of God will engage in the eternal fight against the obscure forces of evil. While Said's intended action aims to draw the international community's attention to the plight of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, the terrorist attack in *Horses of God*, despite Abu Zoubeir's claim of its global effects and connections, remains localized with no obvious message or claim. Although Casablanca does not have the same symbolic and political prominence as Tel Aviv, it nonetheless offers the terrorists easy targets consistent with their amateurish resources and execution. Because Morocco has never had a terrorist attack before 2003, the population's response was unexpectedly disastrous for Morocco's Islamists and religious fanatics. Instead of harming the authority and legitimacy of the monarchical regime, the terrorist attack has instead

energized the population's trust in Morocco's political leadership and in its ability to defend the country's social stability and peace.

The Figure of the Female Character

In most Arab films and novels dealing with terror and terrorism the figure of the woman—whether a mother, a wife, or a girlfriend—often fulfills the same role: she is the opposite embodiment of what the dead suicide bomber is promised to find after death: the celestial *houri* or virgin. As such, she plays a secondary part in the suicide mission's preparation or execution. (There seems to be one exception to this general rule: Yasmina Khadra's *L'Attentat* (*The Attack,* 2005), where Sihem, Amin Jaafari's wife, is the one who carries out a terrorist act). In both *Paradise Now* and *Horses of God,* Suha and Ghislaine do not seem to have any significant impact on the unfolding of the events. Even though Suha enjoys a privileged status in the community as the daughter of a renowned Palestinian hero of the Second *Intifada*, she remains incompetent in her role as a foil to Said's mission. Her embryonic love relationship with him has not reached a point where Said must take it into consideration. Despite her obvious flirtations with him, Said remains uninterested to get involved in any serious love relationship. One of the very few scenes where they are together, in what looks like a furtive moment of love, is in a car scene after Said has come back from his failed attempt to sneak into the Israeli territory. Symbolically enough, the emotional intensity of the scene itself is weakened, as remarked by Aaron, by the sad reality of its own ephemerality as Said's future no longer belongs to him but to the explosives that he carries around his body. When Suha encourages him to share with her the story of his father's collaboration with the Israelis, Said responds, "Why talk? To get your pity? To entertain people whose life is a bit better?" Convinced of the impossibility of their love relationship, Said kisses Suha farewell; "The pink-tinged sky beyond their silhouetted figures invokes the iconic sunset of the love narrative" (Aaron 88). The distant horizon, the nonchalant kiss, and the timed bomb fastened around his body all presage a painful extrication of Said's last attachment to the dejected and Hell-like Now, to Suha's naïve optimism, and to a merciless reality that constantly reminds him of his guilt, the guilt of being the son of a traitor.

While Suha in *Paradise Now* is willing to offer her love to Said, Ghislaine in *Horses of God* appears as a distant object of desire that is forbidden to Chahine. Contrary to *Paradise Now*, there is no scene where Chahine and Ghislaine are together. In most of the scenes involving the two one can notice how distant from each other they are, always being accompanied with or watched by others. Even when Chahine has joined Emir Abu Zoubeir's group he has not tried, like Taha has done with his girlfriend in *The Yacoubian Building* (2006), to impose on her the traditionalist Islamic garment. In fact, intimate interaction between the two is almost non-existent. It is Ghislaine's brother who announces to Chahine his grandmother's decision to marry off Ghislaine to a rich cousin. As Ayouch puts it, in the slums of Sidi Moumen there is

> no space for intimacy. No space for giving and receiving love—whether in private or public spaces—and no place for sexual education. Boys and girls don't mix—they learn, they are taught, not to mix. So learning about sexuality is done between them: boys between boys and girls between girls (West 2014: 44).

When Chahine expresses his concern, heard over a black screen in the opening scene of the film, how Ghislaine would react to his act— "What would Ghislaine think when she knows I died as a martyr?"—one of his friends responds that there will be loads of *houris* in the image of Ghislaine—in Paradise. In his interview, Ayouch states that "Had he been capable of telling Ghislaine that he loved her, I think he would not have gone" (qtd. in West 2014: 45). If the love relationship between Suha and Said is undercut by Said's obsession with his desire to redeem his father's 'sin' of collaboration with the enemy, in *Horses of God*, the love relationship between Chahine and Ghislaine cannot reach fruition because Chahine has not been taught the language of love. Expressing love and appreciating the beauty in other people and objects are not innate gifts with which humans are born. A childhood filled with happiness and feelings of security and love creates in the child a more positive outlook, and subsequently the child appreciates more the value and beauty of his or her environment. A childhood spent in a brutal shantytown and in extreme poverty instead forces the children of Sidi Moumen to learn, from an early age, the language of violence and the skills of survival at any cost. As Chahine puts it in Mahi Binebine novel, *Les Etoiles de Sidi Moumen*, "I was not taught the words to tell the beauty of human beings and things, the sensuality and harmony that exalted them" (Binebine 2010: 72).

Because the suicide bomber already lives what is left of his life as a transitional or as a preparatory phase before his ultimate embrace of death, the figure of the woman may appear to him at this point

as one of God's many tests of his convictions. Both Ghislaine and Suha represent in this respect worldly attachment to life, historical continuity, and hope; worldly options that a hero in a terrorist film or novel is usually expected to rebuff. In *The Attack* (2005) by Yasmina Khadra, Dr. Amin Jaafari rejects Kim Yehuda's offer of normalcy precisely because the state of normalcy undermines his determination to inflict harm on those whom he is supposed to save. More than just a test intended to strengthen the suicide bomber's determination to leave behind the corrupt world of the humans, the unequivocal predisposition to leave the woman behind attests to a lack of emotion, of passionate love, the only means of attachment to the world, to life. In *The Yacoubian Building* (2006) by Marwan Hamed, Taha's love relationship with Buthayna is not strong enough to a point where it can deter him from joining the Islamists who turn him into a terrorist. Although his girlfriend Buthayna reminds him of the predictable end of his Islamist journey— "You grow your beard and lead yourself to the gallows"—he does not seem inclined to abandon or soften his religious fanaticism. Moreover, instead of Buthayna's worldly love and physical pleasure his spiritual supervisor, the venerated Sheikh, offers him the eternal love of God: "God's love transcends a woman's love." According to the Sheikh, to enjoy the company of celestial virgins, never touched by men or *djinns*, the suicide bomber must sacrifice his life as a token of his commitment to this give-and-take deal.

The difficulty of expressing love or establishing a strong love relationship in such films on suicide bombing begs the question: What is so human (or inhuman) about a suicide bomber? This is of course a provocative question to ask in the West today, or anywhere else, because the West has for centuries been unable to see or recognize the Other, the Arab or the Muslim, in his or her humanness. In his seminal book *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said criticizes the Eurocentric discourse of the West that constructs the Orient as the opposite of everything that is western, i.e., reason, technological progress, economic development, democracy, and so forth. The ability to produce and disseminate such a discourse through diverse systems of communication and instruction confirms Foucault's argument that "Power and knowledge directly imply one another, that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault 1977: 27). American cinema's construction of the stereotypical image(s) of the Orient and the Oriental continues the Orientalist tradition of vilifying the Other and serves to impose itself as a monolithic reference to understanding the other.

Conclusion

Given Hollywood's prevalent image of the Arab or/and Muslim as irrational, violent, and vengeful, Arab directors are challenged to tread the thin line separating the suicide bomber, the terrorist, and the ordinary man (or woman). Properly contextualized, these films have the "potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of a phenomenon that is certain to bind the United States and the Middle East into an intensely uncomfortable embrace" (Armbrust 2002: 928). Although *Paradise Now* and *Horses of God* make viewers feel and see the humanity of those who participate in suicide attacks, both films remain critical of these actions and of those who commit them. Rather than imposing a monolithic morality message, *Paradise Now* and *Horses of God* present realistic portrayals of the socio-political background that makes the choice of violence a viable alternative. Even though both stories do put a human face on their suicide bombers, they do not romanticize or glorify them. In addition to demystifying the mystique of martyrdom, the two films are clever enough to deny the audience the mediated excitement of a dramatic explosion. All the viewers are left contemplating is the suicide bombers' wasted lives and naïve dreams.

Both films end on a note of uncertainty—a white screen—and thus raise a series of questions. What happens after the event? Who are the designated victims? What kind of vocabulary will be appropriate to understand the act of self-destruction? How should viewers react to these stories of mutual deaths? Even though both directors do not condone suicide bombing as a political statement against the injustices of the Israeli occupation (*Paradise Now*) or against social marginalization and poverty in the Sidi Moumen slums (*Horses of God*), average Arab viewers may celebrate suicide bombing as an act of martyrdom for the sake of a just cause. The attribution of the controversial status of martyrdom to suicide bombers who inflict death on themselves and on others becomes in this reading a more appealing explanation of an act which otherwise defies rational thinking. As Appelbaum and Paknadel put it, the term '*shaheed'* or 'martyr' itself is "value laden and often a term of abuse: whether one is a freedom fighter or a terrorist" may be determined by "not only on what side one is on, but whether one's actions are judged to be good or bad, strategic or futile, honorable or desperate" (Appelbaum and Paknadel 2008: 390).

By focusing on the political and social conditions that breed and favor the alternative of suicide bombing as a means of resistance, Ayouch and Abu-Assad communicate a political statement that draws

attention, contrary to Hollywood films on 'Arab-Islamic' terrorism, to the root causes of anger and hatred directed against either the Israeli occupation or an arrogant West. We should also underline that both films do not offer any political solution or alternative to the present dreadful socio-economic situation, apart from the *terror* approach to the problem. The different socio-political contexts presented in these two films, their divergent receptions, and the dialogue between their filmic aesthetics and narrative techniques that such a comparison initiates, all combine to provide a uniquely instructive framework for coming to terms with what exactly is at stake in the attempt to dramatize both the temptation and the execution of suicide bombing. Away from the simplistic and irrational indictment that suicide bombing is somehow embedded in the religion of Islam, Abu-Assad and Ayouch invite viewers and critics to understand instead the choice of terrorism as "the outcome of modern socio-political conditions" (Žižek 2002: 41). As long as these socio-political conditions have not improved throughout the region of the Arab world, suicide bombing or any other form of violence will always remain a viable route to pursue. One positive certainty is that no matter how destructive it can be, suicide bombing will never prevail or succeed. And as Gayatri Spivak intelligently puts it, "In the face of this, public criticism can only repeat, taking the risk of responding with the utmost banality: it is not worth the risk" (Spivak 2004: 97).

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