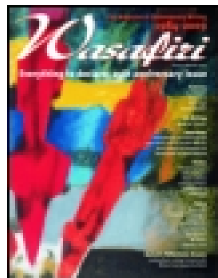
This article was downloaded by: [Institutional Subscription Access]
On: 09 October 2011, At: 06:34
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Wasafiri
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwas20

Terrorism, Orientalism and Imperialism

Stephen Morton

Available online: 06 Jun 2007

To cite this article: Stephen Morton (2007): Terrorism, Orientalism and Imperialism, Wasafiri, 22:2, 36-42

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02690050701336774

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Downloaded by [Institutional Subscription Access] at 06:34 09 October 2011

Terrorism, Orientalism and Imperialism

Stephen Morton

In an essay published in the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram*, entitled 'Punishment by Detail' (2002), Edward Said notes how, in the western media, there has been

> such repetitious and unedifying attention paid to Palestinian suicide bombing that a gross distortion in reality has completely obscured what is much worse: the official Israeli, and perhaps the uniquely Sharonian evil that has been visited so deliberately and so methodically on the Palestinian people.

This sentence is significant not only because it clarifies the way in which a discourse of terrorism serves the political interests of the Israeli state and its policy of expropriating and ghettoising the Palestinian people, but also because it gestures towards a historical relationship between imperialism and the discourse of terrorism. For the 'gross distortion' in reality that Said diagnoses in the western media's representation of 'suicide bombing' is itself a contemporary example of what Said calls orientalism in his eponymous study. In criticising the discourse of terrorism, Said is not of course denying that acts of terrorism take place; rather he is questioning the way in which the discourse of terrorism is used by the United States and its allies to describe violent acts of resistance to imperial occupation rather than addressing the violence of imperial occupation itself.

In his 1978 study *Orientalism*, Said describes orientalism as a 'distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts' (12). Such texts did not merely describe the oriental world they imagined, but also contributed to the formulation of colonial law and the justification of its suspension during conditions of emergency, or threat to the sovereignty of the colonial state. As Nasser Hussain has suggested in his study of British colonial law in India, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency*, the colony was the place where the tensions between the rule of law and the absolute sovereignty of the state were played out (6–7). And it was in and through the discourse of colonialism – which Said calls orientalism – that such tensions were negotiated.

If orientalism provides the sovereign power of the colonial state with a discourse of otherness to justify the suspension of the rule of civil law in times of crisis, such as the fiction that Sepoy soldiers assaulted white women during the Indian rebellion of 1857 to justify the subsequent counter-insurgency campaign in 1858 (Sharpe), the contemporary discourse of terrorism would seem to serve a similar function. For the contemporary postcolonial terrorist is often invoked as the cause of the expansion of US and British military power in the twenty-first century, which has involved the war in Afghanistan and the military occupation of Iraq as well as British and American political support for Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Lebanon. Such a causal logic conceals the fact that the threat of terrorism is an instance of metalepsis: an effect of colonial discourse that is presented as a cause.[1]

The idea that the discourse of terrorism is a form of orientalism or colonial discourse is not entirely specific to the twenty-first century formation of western imperialism, however. In 'The Essential Terrorist', an article published in *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (1988), Said observed how terrorism had 'displaced Communism as public enemy number one' in American public discourse; and how this elevation of terrorism in American public discourse had 'deflected careful scrutiny of the government's domestic and foreign policies' (149). More specifically, Said argued that the scholarship on terrorism is 'brief, pithy, totally devoid of the scholarly armature of evidence, proof, argument' (150). Citing a book by the then Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, Benjamin Netanyahu, Said describes how Netanyahu's definition of terrorism is flawed because it depends 'a priori on a single axiom: "we" are never terrorists; it's the Moslems, Arabs and Communists who are' (152). In Said's argument, it is this orientalist axiom that provides the justification for Israeli state repression:

Wasafiri Vol. 22, No. 2 July 2007, pp. 36–42
ISSN 0269-0055 print/ISSN 1747-1508 online © 2007 Wasafiri
http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals DOI: 10.1080/02690050701336774

Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

> the spurious excuse of 'fighting terrorism' serves to legitimize every case of torture, illegal detention, demolition of houses, expropriation of land, murder, collective punishment, deportation, censorship, closure of schools and universities. (156)

The problem with this orientalist axiom of terrorism is that it effaces the imperialist interests that are served by the discourse of terrorism by focusing on the emotional and aesthetic connotation of terror instead of examining the geopolitical context of its production. Such a problem is also identified in some of the recent studies of terrorism in literature and culture, which start by referring to the French Revolution, and the way in which the experience of terror in late eighteenth-century France was reflected in aesthetic theories of the sublime. In a discussion of Kantian and Burkean theories of the sublime, for example, Terry Eagleton asserts that 'sublime eruptions like the French Revolution could be admired as long as they were aestheticized, contemplated from a secure distance' (47). Similarly, Gene Ray in *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory* has argued that the rethinking of the sublime as trauma after the events of Auschwitz and 11 September 2001 can only be understood as a problem (7).

This vicarious experience of terrorism as a spectacle, which evokes shock and fear, is also something that has preoccupied theorists such as Jean Baudrillard and Slavoj Zizek in their commentaries on 9/11. For Baudrillard, the spectacle of the World Trade Centre in flames after the attacks of 9/11 produced a sensation of fear amongst the public, which Baudrillard also deems to be a form of complicity with the event itself. In Baudrillard's account, the phenomenon of the suicide bomber is synonymous with the media spectacle of the terrorist attack; and the effect that this spectacle evokes in the viewer. Moreover, Slavoj Zizek's comparison of the Middle East to the Desert of the Real in the Wachowski brothers' film *Matrix* (1999) in his essay 'Welcome to the Desert of the Real!' seems to reinforce the aestheticisation of terror described by Eagleton rather than examining the geopolitical determinants of terrorism as a discourse. Such responses to the terrorist attacks on America of 11 September would seem to frame the event of terrorism as an aesthetic phenomenon analogous to the category of terror in aesthetic theories of the sublime in the writing of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant (Zizek).

Instead of simply treating terror as a merely aesthetic or philosophical category, this article begins by examining how postcolonial theorists such as Paul Gilroy, Gayatri Spivak and Luke Gibbons have interrogated the category of terror in European aesthetic theories of the sublime from the standpoint of the colonised; it then proceeds to consider how the aesthetic connotation of terror is complicated by the violent exercise of sovereign power in the European colony. With reference to the work of Achille Mbembe and Frantz Fanon, the article then assesses the claim that terrorism – understood as political violence – constitutes the political foundation of the European colony. Finally, the article briefly considers how two novels from Israel–Palestine have interrogated the imperialist agenda that the discourse of terrorism serves.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* distinguishes between terror as the emotional state of being frightened, which is often attributed to a novel or tale of terror, and terrorism, or a system of terror, in which either a government rules by intimidation or a person or group adopts a policy of intimidation intended to strike with terror those against whom it is adopted. These latter two senses of terrorism are often invoked to justify the relativist argument that 'one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter'. When it is used in this way, 'the term [terrorist] is vacuous, no more than an epithet for a system one hates' (Walter 5). What is more, this free-floating liberal understanding of terrorism not only denies the significance of legal and military force in defining terrorism, but also ignores the more fundamental point that terrorism – understood as political rule by intimidation and the threat of violence – is the ground upon which political sovereignty and freedom is defined in the colonial present.

The idea that terrorism is the ground of political sovereignty in the European colony has an analogue in European aesthetic theory. Indeed, the feeling of terror associated with the aesthetic category of the sublime in the writing of Burke and Kant is often predicated on the construction of the non-European other as a figure of fear and terror. By representing the anti-colonial insurgent as a figure who must be civilised, European aesthetic theory denies the political foundation of terror and violence upon which the European colony was founded. The rethinking of the aesthetic category of the sublime in postcolonial theory breaks this aesthetic frame in which the colonial subject is contained. In so doing, theorists such as Luke Gibbons, Paul Gilroy and Gayatri Spivak have demonstrated that the unstable category of terror in the work of Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke is an effect of the aesthetic structure of the sublime, which is marked by the age of European colonialism in which it was produced.

At the end of an article on terrorism and the sublime in Lyotard, Kant, Hegel and Burke, Christine Battersby raises the question of why Auschwitz is

> so often evoked as the paradigm example of the sublime in the scholarly literature on this subject, and not, for example, The Middle Passage in which slaves were transported from Africa to Britain, Europe and the Americas or the genocide of the Aboriginal people in Australia? (87)

Thinking within the conceptual schema of Lyotard's reading of the sublime in Kant, Burke and Hegel, Battersby concludes that what 'gets counted as sublime is that which "we" (Western) subjects find hardest to cover over or "screen" out through fantasy imagery or metaphors that contain the horror within manageable bounds'. In Battersby's account it is the

Downloaded by [Institutional Subscription Access] at 06:34 09 October 2011

Downloaded by [Institutional Subscription Access] at 06:34 09 October 2011

'geography of Europe, America and the West' that has 'helped shape the boundaries of what is – and what is not – fundamentally disturbing to [western civilisation]' (87).

As mentioned above, it is precisely this process of screening out terrifying events in the history of European colonialism in the conceptual space of western aesthetic theory that has been addressed by postcolonial theorists such as Paul Gilroy, Gayatri Spivak and Luke Gibbons. In *The Black Atlantic* Paul Gilroy questions the Eurocentric narrative of Enlightenment modernity, which regards the history of slavery as the province of black people 'rather than a part of the ethical and intellectual heritage of the West as a whole' (49). As a counterpoint to this exclusion of transatlantic slavery, Gilroy posits a black Atlantic counterculture that transfigures the signs and codes of European modernity in a pursuit of the sublime, and which struggles 'to repeat the unrepeatable' and 'present the unpresentable' (37–38). This counterculture is prefigured in Gilroy's discussion of Turner's painting of the slave ship and the terror of the middle passage. For Gilroy, the slave ship functions as a powerful chronotope,[2] which exposes the geopolitical determinants of the aesthetic category of the sublime.

In a different but related discussion, Gayatri Spivak has developed a strategic misreading of Kant's theory of the sublime in *A Critique of Judgement*, to track what she calls the foreclosure of the native informant. By aligning Kant's notion of the raw man with figures such as the Australian aborigine and the man from Tierra del Fuego (figures who are mentioned in a separate passage from the *Third Critique*), Spivak argues that Kant's assertion that the sublime is experienced differently by the cultivated, bourgeois, masculine subject of the European enlightenment and man in the raw mirrors what she calls the axiomatics of imperialism.

The relationship between imperialism and the sublime is also addressed by Luke Gibbons in his study of Edmund Burke and colonial Ireland. For Gibbons, Burke's identification of terror and the body in pain as the most intense form of aesthetic experience is bound up with Burke's experience of state oppression and the death penalty in Ireland and India. In Gibbons's argument, 'one of the primary sources of the "fear" and "terror" that lies at the heart of the colonial sublime' in Burke's thought is 'the capacity of the servant to rise up against intolerable abuses of state power' (3–4). Gibbons cites the violation of young women in India by officials serving under Warren Hastings's East India Company and the execution of Father Nicholas Sheehy by the British military in Ireland for his suspected involvement in the Whiteboy uprisings, as two instances of state oppression. By doing so, Gibbons stresses the political dimension of Burke's aesthetic theory of the sublime, and how 'the sublime is present in all its terrifying force' when illegitimate political institutions 'rule by fear alone' (7).

What Gilroy, Spivak and Gibbons identify in their versions of the sublime is the various ways in which the histories of European colonial violence and oppression inflect the experience of terror associated with this aesthetic category. Whereas Gilroy and Spivak re-articulate the histories of colonial violence, which are often screened out or foreclosed in theories of the sublime, Gibbons's attribution of terror to the capacity of the servant to rebel against the terrorism of state power crucially links the aesthetic category of the sublime in Burke's thought to the fear of anti-colonial resistance. In different ways, each of these readings of the sublime expose the geopolitical determinants of western aesthetic theory and how the aesthetic category of terror framed the western encounter with the non-west, and subsequent acts of resistance to colonial power.

From the standpoint of the colonial subject, however, terror was not merely an aesthetic experience or feeling, but a brutal material and corporeal experience of sovereign power in the raw. The rethinking of the aesthetic category of terror in recent postcolonial theory gestures towards the violent foundation of sovereign power in the European colony. What I would like to do in the next section of this paper is to push this gesture further to examine how terrorism – still understood as political violence – constituted the political foundation of colonial rule and shaped the forms of resistance that anti-colonial insurgency took.

In order to comprehend how terrorism became instituted as the political foundation of the European colony, it is crucial to consider how colonialism reconfigured the relationship between sovereign power and governance. In his essay 'Necropolitics' Achille Mbembe re-frames European critical theories of sovereignty and biopolitics in the work of Hegel, Bataille, Foucault and Agamben by tracing the history of biopolitics and sovereignty in the colonial context.

Mbembe's reading of Hegel is mediated partly through Alexandre Kojève's reading of Hegel in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* in 'Idea of Death', and Georges Bataille's critique of Kojève in his essay 'Hegel, Death and Sacrifice'. Of particular significance to Mbembe is Kojève's argument that what Hegel calls the labour of the negative is the work that the human subject does to become conscious of its own finitude or death. In Kojève's reading of Hegel, an active confrontation with death is central to Hegel's account of the Spirit's achievement of absolute knowledge and freedom. 'And this is why', Kojève says, 'when "pure" or "absolute" freedom is realized on a social level [. . .] it must necessarily manifest itself as a collective violent death or "Terror"' ('Idea of Death' 141).

For Georges Bataille, however, Kojève's argument that the human subject's confrontation with death is central to Hegel's dialectical narrative of the Spirit's quest for absolute knowledge does not go far enough. In Bataille's argument,

> in order for man to reveal himself ultimately to himself, he would have to die, but he would have to do it while living — watching himself ceasing to be. In other words, death itself would have to become self-consciousness of itself. (19)

For Bataille, such a hypothetical situation is exemplified by the act of human sacrifice, a subject to which I return at the end of this article. Before doing so, however, I would like to consider how Mbembe traces the history of biopolitics and sovereignty in the colonial context.

For Mbembe, what Bataille's critique of Hegel and Kojève illustrates is the transgression of death as a limit. Whereas Hegel and Kojève regard death as the endpoint of the narrative of absolute knowledge and truth, Bataille anchors death in the realm of absolute expenditure and excess. Bataille's argument is important for Mbembe because it reveals how death and violence are also constitutive of sovereign power. Such a model of sovereign power is exposed in Frantz Fanon's essay 'Concerning Violence', in which Fanon examined the violent political formation of the European colony in more detail. One of the crucial points that Fanon makes in this essay is that the political relationship between the coloniser and the colonised is *based* on a relationship of violence:

> The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations. [. . .] In the capitalist countries a multitude of moral teachers, counsellors and 'bewilders' are placed between the exploited and those in power. In the colonial countries, on the contrary, the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the colonized and advise him by means of rifle butts and napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure violence. (86)

In Fanon's argument, the colonial world lacks a civil society or any form of meaningful political relationship between the ruler and the ruled. Since the European colony was spatially defined in terms of an absolute racial division between the settlers and the natives, the settlers refused to recognise the political sovereignty or humanity of the natives. Such an argument complicates the claims made by critics such as Hannah Arendt and Christopher Miller that Fanon equates politics and violence; for in the absence of a civil society the political would seem to be constituted by violence (Arendt 20–22; Miller 49–50, 62–63).

In 'Necropolitics' Mbembe develops Fanon's observations about the constitutive role of violence in the political formation of the European colony in more detail. Drawing on the work of Georgio Agamben and Michel Foucault, Mbembe contends that the regime of biopolitical control operating in European bourgeois civil society does not hold in the European colony; instead biopolitical control is replaced with necropolitical control, or the threat of violence and ultimately death by the colonial ruler:

> the sovereign right to kill is not subject to any rule in the colonies. In the colonies, the sovereign might kill at any time or in any manner. Colonial warfare is not subject to legal and institutional rules. It is not a legally codified activity. (Mbembe 25)

Following Foucault's argument in *Society Must Be Defended* (1975–76) that the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death, Mbembe argues that it is the right to violence and killing that defines relations of power in the European colony. In the light of this argument, Mbembe's claim that death is a form of agency for people who live under colonial occupation helps to clarify the significance of violent, anti-colonial insurgency as an assertion of political sovereignty in the context of a colonial regime that defines politics in terms of the right to injure, torture and kill its subjects with impunity.

What is crucial for Mbembe is that the use of sovereign political violence defined the horizon for political resistance within the European colony. This is clearly different from saying that violent, anti-colonial resistance is a causal response to particular acts of colonial terror or that counter-insurgency is a response to violent, anti-colonial insurgency. The problem with Mbembe's theory is that it seems to suggest that a violent struggle to the death is the only available form of political resistance in the European colony. Indeed this is particularly evident in Mbembe's account of the Palestinian suicide bomber, which I will now briefly examine.

Writing of the spatial enclosure, bulldozing and militarisation of the occupied territories in Israel, Mbembe argues that 'late modern colonial occupation is a concatenation of multiple powers: disciplinary, biopolitical and necropolitical' (27). It is in response to the political logic of this colonial order that Mbembe offers a theory of the martyr or suicide bomber. And to do this Mbembe pushes Bataille and Hegel to their conceptual and geopolitical limits. In a commentary on Bataille's theory of sacrifice in his essay 'Hegel, Death and Sacrifice', for instance, Mbembe invokes Bataille's observation that the human subject who sacrifices his own life 'voluntarily tricks himself' at the moment of death. Somewhat provocatively, Mbembe then proceeds to draw an analogy between Bataille's notion of violence and trickery and the material conditions of the suicide bomber:

> There is no doubt that in the case of the suicide bomber the sacrifice consists of the spectacular putting to death of the self, of becoming his or her own victim (self-sacrifice). The self-sacrificed proceeds to take power over his or her death and to approach it head on. This power may be derived from the belief that the destruction of one's own body does not affect the continuity of the being. The idea is that the being exists outside of us. The self-sacrifice consists, here, in the removal of a twofold prohibition: that of self-immolation (suicide) and that of murder. (38)

At this point, Mbembe seems to drop the analogy with Bataille's theory of sacrifice and picks up the thread of terror as a defining feature of both slave and late-modern colonial

Downloaded by [Institutional Subscription Access] at 06:34 09 October 2011

regimes. This rather abrupt shift in Mbembe's argument is significant because it marks a discontinuity between post-Hegelian theories of sovereignty and the permanent condition of 'being in pain' for a colonised population who may at times be driven to regard death 'as a release from terror and bondage'. Such a discontinuity suggests that theories of sovereignty and death from Hegel to Bataille may not be able to account for the singularity of the martyr in the contemporary postcolonial world.

Mbembe's argument may appear to offer a persuasive theoretical account of the political logic of terrorism in general, and suicide bombing in particular, in the colonial context. Yet his argument seems to overlook the importance of religion in many terrorist attacks in the twenty-first century. In the set of instructions left by Mohamed Atta in his luggage on 11 September 2001, for instance, one can see how the anonymous author of this text employed a religious discourse, loosely based on selected passages from the Qur'an to justify acts of martyrdom that simultaneously involved mass murder:

> Remember the battle of the prophet . . . against the infidels, as he went on building the Islamic state.
>
> Do not seek revenge for yourself. Strike for God's sake.
>
> When the hour of reality approaches, the zero hour [. . .] wholeheartedly welcome death for the sake of God. Either end your life while praying, seconds before the target, or make your last words: 'There is no God but God, Muhammad is His messenger'. (Makiya and Mneimeh 319–27)

Mbembe's claim that martyrdom is an expression of sovereign power over the life and death of the colonised certainly implies that the colonised subject also has control over her or his afterlife. In this sense, the theological rhetoric of the manual associated with the attacks on America of 11 September could be interpreted as a form of necropolitics. Yet necropolitics is the assertion of sovereign power over one's life at the moment of death, and as such it is an act which is immanent to a broader struggle for political sovereignty rather than an act of religious devotion. By contrast, the coded language of the manual does not articulate the strike as part of a broader political struggle, but a religious battle. Contra Hegel, Kojève and Bataille, what this document suggests is that the act of martyrdom is not necessarily a secular affirmation of the spirit's absolute knowledge and freedom at the moment of death. Rather, the document points to the importance of religion in the attacks on America of 9/11. Certainly the manual would appear to help its implied readers overcome their fears and doubts about the practice of martyrdom. But the text also defines this act of terrorism as a theological act committed in the name of Islam and against a community defined as the infidels. In this respect, as Bruce Lincoln has argued, the rhetoric of the manual attributed to 9/11 can also be linked to the influence of radical Islamic intellectuals such as the Egyptian intellectual Sayyid Qutb, who wished to abolish the influence of jahiliyah, or a new age of spiritual ignorance, in which humanity had rebelled against God's sovereignty on earth.

For the anthropologist Talal Asad, however, what is described in the western media as '"the Islamic roots of violence"' is rather misleading because it assumes a necessary correlation between religion and violence, where there is no such correlation. As Asad explains:

> [V]iolence does not *need* to be justified by the Qur'an — or any other scripture for that matter. When General Ali Haidar of Syria, under the orders of his secular president Hafez al-Assad, massacred 30,000 to 40,000 civilians in the rebellious town of Hama in 1982 he did not invoke the Qur'an – nor did the secularist Saddam Hussein when he gassed thousands of Kurds and butchered the Shi'a population in Southern Iraq. Ariel Sharon in his indiscriminate killing and terrorizing of Palestinian civilians did not – so far as is publicly known – invoke passages of the Torah, such as Joshua's destruction of every living thing in Jericho. Nor has any government (and rebel group), whether Western or non-Western, *needed* to justify its use of indiscriminate cruelty against civilians by appealing to the authority of sacred scripture. They might in some cases do so, because that seems to them just – or else expedient. But that's very different from saying that they are *constrained* to do so. (10)

The crucial point for Asad is that religion is supplementary to an act of terrorism: it can under certain circumstances provide a transcendental structure that justifies acts of terrorism in retrospect, but a scriptural precedent is not in itself essential for a terrorist act to be carried out. Ultimately, a religious text may be expedient for an act of martyrdom because it offers a rhetorical structure that allows an individual to focus on their being-towards-death at the moment of martyrdom. Yet the imperative behind so-called acts of terrorism is more often political rather than theological. As Robert Pape argues in his study *Dying to Win*,

> what nearly all suicide terrorist attacks share in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland. (4)

Pape concedes that religion is 'often used as a tool in recruiting and in other efforts in service of the broader strategic objective', but his claim that religion is 'rarely the root cause of terrorism' (4) undermines the straightforward equation of terrorism with Islam. For such an equation is precisely a form of orientalism, which obfuscates the political dimension of resistance against western imperialism.

Downloaded by [Institutional Subscription Access] at 06:34 09 October 2011

Downloaded by [Institutional Subscription Access] at 06:34 09 October 2011

The political dimension of anti-colonial resistance is developed in two novels set in Israel–Palestine: Sahar Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns* and Yasmina Khadra's *The Attack*. Khalifeh's novel, first published in Arabic in 1976 and translated into English in 1985, registers the condition of Palestinians living in the West Bank under occupation from the perspective of Usama, a young man who returns to Palestine from Syria five years after the Six Days War and the occupation of the West Bank in 1967 to participate in the resistance movement. Khalifeh establishes the conditions of life for Palestinians in the occupied territory in the second chapter through the description of an Israeli military checkpoint. The Israeli soldiers' interrogation of Usama and their beating of a young woman suspected of smuggling a coded message to the resistance movement highlights the way in which the colonial space is experienced as a space of terror: 'Usama found himself in such a turmoil of pain and nervous energy that for a moment he lost all sense of where he was' (Khalifeh 11). Moreover, Usama's response to the question posed by the Israeli soldier as to why he was fired from his job as a translator in Amman reveals his sense of non-being as a Palestinian in the Middle East: '"Because I'm Palestinian, Palestinian," he shouted angrily [. . .] "That was the only charge"' (15). Subsequently, Usama's attempts to mobilise support for the Palestinian resistance movement are hampered by the broken spirits of a people who 'had become soft, been brainwashed with lies and Israeli cash' (87). It is for this reason that Usama carries out a bomb attack on a bus carrying Palestinian labourers to an Israeli factory in Jerusalem. In so doing, Khalifeh suggests that the weakness of the Palestinian resistance movement is partly due to the recruitment of Palestinian wage labour in Israel following the expropriation of land in the West Bank.[3] It is significant also that Usama's death in the bomb attack on the bus is motivated by political commitment rather than religious fervour.

Like *Wild Thorns*, Yasmina Khadra's novel *The Attack* (2006) is also concerned with the issue of Palestinian commitment to revolutionary violence. Written from the point of view of an Arab Israeli doctor, Amin Jafaari, the novel details the martyrdom of Jafaari's wife Sihem in a suicide bombing operation in Tel Aviv, and Amin Jafaari's subsequent attempt to investigate the circumstances that led to his wife's involvement in the bombing attack. Following a three-day interrogation by the Israeli police, Jafaari's investigation leads him to the Arab slums of Bethlehem, and to the West Bank towns of Nablus and Jenin. Like the police who interrogate him, Jafaari at first suspects that his wife is involved with Islamic jihad. During a meeting with the commander of a paramilitary organisation, for instance, Jafaari demands:

> My wife was an Islamist? Since when, pray tell? I can't get this through my head. She was a woman of her time. She liked to travel, she liked to swim, she liked sipping lemonade on the terraces outside the shops, and she was too proud of her hair to hide it under a head scarf. What tales did you tell her? How did you make a monster, a terrorist, a suicidal fundamentalist out of a woman who couldn't bear to hear a puppy whine? (Khadra 156)

By privileging the point of view of an Arab Israeli doctor, who saves lives rather than destroying them, Khadra may seem to reinforce the stereotypes of the suicide bomber as a 'monster', an 'Islamist' or a 'suicidal fundamentalist'. Yet the commander's response to Jafaari's barrage of questions offers a counterpoint to these stereotypes by making a distinction between an 'extremist *jihadi* [. . .] who dreams of a single, indivisible *umma*' and 'the children of a ravaged, despised people, fighting with whatever means we can to recover our homeland and our dignity' (157–58). Such a view is echoed later in the novel, when Sihem's cousin Adel informs Jafaari that his wife was 'the daughter of a people noted for resistance' (227), who questioned the wealth and security offered by her husband's position within Israeli society. The doctor's repeated insistence that he saves lives rather than destroying them may appear to offer an ethical challenge to the political argument made by Adel and the anonymous commander that his wife's death was part of a national liberation struggle. Yet the novel also seems to raise questions about Jafaari's position in relation to the Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. For Sihem's suicide-bombing operation not only challenges Jafaari's position as a middle-class Israeli citizen; it also highlights the doctor's failure to grasp the distinction between biopolitics and necropolitics that underpins colonial occupation.

What both *Wild Thorns* and *The Attack* foreground is the way in which the discourse of terrorism aids and abets the interests of imperialism. In this respect, the discourse of terrorism is a form of orientalism. Instead of simply challenging the stereotype of the terrorist by presenting the anti-colonial insurgent as a heroic freedom fighter, these novels question the meaning and possibility of resistance in a colonial space, which has reduced political struggle to a struggle for sovereign power over life and death. In doing so, they also demonstrate the legal and geopolitical interests that are served by the discourse of orientalism. For orientalism does not merely define the East as an imaginary space of otherness, but also contributes to the representation of political spaces such as the West Bank as legal states of exception where the colonised can be killed with impunity. Moreover, as Bashir Abu-Manneh has recently observed, the contemporary western media's tendency to focus on the affect of terrorism excludes the voice and agency of the people from political organisation and resistance to colonial occupation. It is precisely such forms of organisation and resistance that Sahar Khalifeh and Yasmina Khadra address in their fiction. For by exploring political debates within occupied Palestine – such as the recruitment of Palestinian wage labour in Israel or the ambivalent position of the middle-class Palestinian Israeli in Israel–Palestine – both *Wild*

Thorns and *The Attack* seek to re-define agency and sovereignty in terms other than the language of political violence that underpins contemporary US foreign policy in the Middle East.

Notes

1 Gayatri Spivak discusses this idea of metalepsis in 'Deconstructing Historiography' (341).
2 The term chronotope (meaning 'space-time') comes from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin who uses the term to describe the 'intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature' (84).
3 For more on this, see Muhammad Siddiq 'The Fiction of Sahar Khalifah: Between Defiance and Deliverance'.

Works Cited

Abu Manneh, Bashir. Plenary Presentation at the British Academy Terror and the Postcolonial Workshop, U of Southampton, 30 June 2006.
Arendt, Hannah. *On Violence*. London: Allen Lane, 1970.
Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2003.
Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 1981. 84.
Bataille, Georges. 'Hegel, Death and Sacrifice'. *Yale French Studies* 78 (1990): 9–28.
Battersby, Christine. 'Terror, Terrorism and the Sublime: Rethinking the Sublime after 1789 and 2001'. *Postcolonial Studies* 6(1) (2003): 67–89.
Baudrillard, Jean. 'L'Esprit du Terrorisme'. *South Atlantic Quarterly* Spring (2002): 403–15.
Eagleton, Terry. *Holy Terror*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.
Fanon, Frantz. 'Concerning Violence'. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1968. 35–106.
Foucault, Michel. *Society must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France*. 1975–76. Trans. David Macey. London: Allen Lane, 2003.
Gibbons, Luke. *Edmund Burke and Ireland*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002.
Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso, 1993.
Hussain, Nasser. *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2004.
Khadra, Yasmina. 2005. *The Attack*. Trans. John Cullen. London: William Heinemann, 2006.
Khalifeh, Sahar. 1976. *Wild Thorns*. Trans. TrevorLeGassick and Elizabeth Fernea. London: Saqi, 2005.
Kojève, Alexandre. 'The Idea of Death in the Philosophy of Hegel'. Trans. Joseph J. Carpino. *Interpretation* 3.2 (1973): 114–56.
Makiya, Kanan, and Havan Mneimneh. 'Manual for a "Raid"'. *Striking Terror – America's New War*. Eds. Robert B. Silvers and Barbara Epstein. New York: New York Review of Books, 2002. 319–27.
Mbembe, Achille. 'Necropolitics'. *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003): 11–40.
Miller, Christopher. *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990.
Pape, Robert. *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. New York: Random House, 2005.
Ray, Gene. *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory*. New York: Palgrave, 2005.
Said, Edward. 'The Essential Terrorist'. In *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*. Eds. Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens. London: Verso, 1988. 149–58.
———. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.
———. 'Punishment by Detail'. *Al-Ahram* 8–14 Aug. 2002. 12 Dec. 2005 <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/598/op2.htm>.
Sharpe, Jenny. *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993.
Siddiq, Muhammad. 'The Fiction of Sahar Khalifah: Between Defiance and Deliverance'. *Arab Studies Quarterly* 8.2 (1986): 143–60.
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999.
———. 'Deconstructing Historiography'. *Subaltern Studies IV*. Ed. Ranajit Guha. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1986. 330–63.
Walter, E.V. *Terror and Resistance: A Study of Political Violence*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969.
Zizek, Slavoj. 'Welcome to the Desert of the Real!' *South Atlantic Quarterly*. Spring 2002: 385–89.

Downloaded by [Institutional Subscription Access] at 06:34 09 October 2011