



## **Discourse – Occidentalism – Intersectionality Approaching Knowledge on ‘Suicide Bombing’**

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*The paper deals with questions of ‘epistemic violence’ within terrorism research by focusing on the three terms mentioned in the title: discourse, occidentalism, and intersectionality. These are the elements that will allow me to point at hegemonic and ideological dimensions of discourses and dispositives (Demirovič, 1988; Shi-xu, 1994) within academic knowledge production on ‘suicide bombing’. In short, I want to speak about methodology and epistemology as constitutive elements of academic work within international power relations, and about the epistemic violence inherent to them. The lack of reflection on epistemic violence in contemporary mainstream research on political violence and terrorism seems to be systematically constitutive for parts of the academic field itself – especially when this research is personally, institutionally or at least inter-discursively linked to policy counselling and policymaking. To illustrate my endeavour, I will analyse the book cover of one selected piece of academic work called *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* by terrorism expert Mia Bloom (Bloom, 2005; see appendix). I suggest that such covers constitute an interface between academic and public discourse and argue that this aspect makes the boundary object ‘suicide bombing’ – as enacted in a provocative book cover, aimed at both raising sales and transmitting messages – a very powerful one, reaching beyond the realms of academic debate and public discourse as such. It is one form of epistemic violence that is co-produced by academic work itself. To practice a politics of epistemology means to ask in which ways counterterrorism research produces knowledge about the object/subject that is said to threaten the entire ‘Western’ civilisation: ‘the suicide bomber’ (as the personified, embodied Other) ‘suicide bombing’ (as the generalised, disembodied Other), and the ‘naturalness’ of the label of terrorism that comes along.*

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*'It may indeed be that your desire to solve the problem is creating it,  
that burrowing into the psyche of the enemy,  
far from being an attempt to dignify them with understanding,  
is a form of evasion that blinds you to your responsibility  
for the state that they are in.  
(Rose, 2004)*

## **Introduction<sup>i</sup>**

In this paper, I will outline the epistemological starting point of my current research<sup>ii</sup> on power and knowledge by focusing on the three terms mentioned in its title: discourse, occidentalism, and intersectionality. These are the elements that will allow me to point at hegemonic and ideological dimensions of discourses and dispositives (Demirovič, 1988; Shi-xu, 1994) within academic knowledge production on 'suicide bombing'. In short, I want to speak about methodology and epistemology as constitutive elements of academic work within international power relations, and about the epistemic violence inherent to them. The lack of reflection on epistemic violence in contemporary mainstream research on political violence and terrorism seems to be systematically constitutive for parts of the academic field itself – especially when this research is personally, institutionally or at least inter-discursively linked to policy counselling and policymaking. The leading question thus is: why and how has 'suicide bombing' become a privileged significant for the 'Western' world that quite successfully enables national governments and international bodies to dramatically change their policies and the lives of all of us?

Informed by feminist and postcolonial theory<sup>iii</sup>, I will reflect on major patterns of how suicide bombers are conceived as representatives of an absolute Other that is opposed to an unquestioned 'Western' Self. I will suggest considering an 'epistemology of the West' (Coronil, 1996). This means

reflecting on its own premises, participation and responsibility in global asymmetric power relations that are challenged by both the idea and the practice of self-sacrifice as a political weapon.

To illustrate my endeavour, I will analyse the book cover of one selected piece of academic work called *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* by terrorism expert Mia Bloom (Bloom, 2005; see appendix). I suggest that such covers constitute an interface between academic and public discourse and argue that this aspect makes the boundary object 'suicide bombing' – as enacted in a provocative book cover, aimed at both raising sales and transmitting messages – a very powerful one, reaching beyond the realms of academic debate and public discourse as such. It is one form of epistemic violence that is co-produced by academic work itself.

My critical reading of contemporary counterterrorism research is based on questioning the relation between its objects and subjects. Thus, what I intend to examine is precisely the very perspective from which the analyses take place within that research. To practice a politics of epistemology means to ask in which ways counterterrorism research produces knowledge about the object/subject that is said to threaten the entire 'Western' civilisation: 'the suicide bomber' (as the personified, embodied Other) 'suicide bombing' (as the generalised, disembodied Other), and the 'naturalness' of the label of terrorism that comes along.

## **Discourse**

By discourse I understand a practice of articulation, which does not passively represent social conditions, but constructs and organises them as a

flow of social knowledge supplied through time (Jäger, 1999: 23). Discourses are attempts to stabilise conceptual frameworks at least for a certain time period. By that, they help institutionalise a binding order of knowledge within a given social context. Knowledge is generated, established and challenged in an ongoing process within and across socially constructed symbolic orders. These do not only remain symbolic, but are vividly interacting with discursive and non-discursive practices. In his book *Writing the War on Terrorism*, analysing counter terrorism discourse and practices, Richard Jackson notes that:

[...] the construction of a military and political project on this scale – one that simultaneously extends externally over the entire globe and at the same time penetrates inwardly into almost every aspect of domestic life – could not be initiated or sustained without widespread public consent or at least acquiescence. Nor would it be achievable without an overarching rationale or a set of guiding assumptions, beliefs and forms of knowledge about the nature of terrorism and counter-terrorism. (Jackson, 2005: 8)

I suggest that the discursive making of the 'phenomenon of suicide bombing' constitutes a major and privileged significant within the rationale of knowledge mentioned by Jackson. The term and imaginary named 'suicide bombing' or 'suicide terrorism'<sup>iv</sup> is a product of an ongoing process of making sense of something that seems to be beyond any sense. And this discursive process takes place within asymmetric global power relations, where hegemonic knowledge and politics go hand in hand. Diego Gambetta speaks of 'the phenomenon, which has become a defining act of political violence of

our times' (Gambetta, 2005: v). I argue that it has also become one of the defining boundary objects of scholarly work within the controversial debates on political violence, resistance, power, and terrorism. This process of definition is often achieved through an occidentalist practice that makes use of an orientalist dispositive.

## **Occidentalism**

Orientalist dispositives have a long tradition and are integrated in discourse, institutions, practices, methodologies, and theories. Today, after almost thirty years since the publication of *Orientalism* (Said, 1979), orientalism is a well-known paradigm of scholarly research in many disciplines. This is *not* true for most of the field of political science and international relations. This non-compatibility has to do with questions of epistemic violence and with the politically subversive potential of postcolonial and feminist critique that necessarily challenges existing orders of knowledge and sets of power relations. A term that aptly refers to this epistemic dimension of orientalism is occidentalism, which is rarely heard of in that sense.<sup>v</sup> Rather, it is understood as 'the West in the eyes of its enemies' (Buruma/Margalit, 2005), which in itself constitutes a very problematic epistemic framing and a counterproductive simplification of orientalism's epistemological bases. Fernando Coronil wrote a groundbreaking article on this very question and filled the term with substantial critique by taking the path towards 'nonimperial geohistorical categories' (Coronil, 1996, 51). He defines occidentalism as a style of representation that produces polarised and

hierarchical concepts about the West and its Others.<sup>vi</sup> To Coronil, the core of occidentalism lies within the practices of representation that:

‘(1) separate the world’s components into bounded units; (2) disaggregate their relational histories; (3) turn difference into hierarchy; (4) naturalise these representations; and thus (5) intervene, however unwittingly, in the reproduction of existing asymmetrical power relations.’ (Coronil, 1996: 57)

Developing Said’s concept, he draws attention to those who implicitly and explicitly define and practice orientalism. Coronil’s definition of occidentalism provides a suitable tool to deconstruct unquestioned truth claims on many objects of knowledge and the dispositives within which those claims come into being. I want to propose a critique of occidentalist discursive practices in the making of academic knowledge on terrorism and political violence along these five assumptions. Only when focusing on the underlying conceptions of a rational, enlightened ‘Western Self in power,’ can one discern to what extent the discursive making of ‘the Other’ is a necessary element of this logic. In his critique of occidentalism, Coronil wants to proceed toward a ‘politics of epistemology’ (Coronil, 1996) of the West, and proposes that Western epistemology should examine its own premises, especially when analysing the Other and thereby constructing it. By doing so, he wants to encourage the focus on the relation between the object and the subject positions within research, between the products and the production of knowledge.<sup>vii</sup>

But what are the main components that render occidentalism so effective? In what ways do they enable and strengthen each other and the occidentalist practices of representation on the five levels named by Coronil? These questions allow me to introduce the third term in the title of the paper.

## **Intersectionality**

I want to show that it is the complex arrangement of a number of categories that work together intersectionally to turn the topic of 'suicide bombing' into a privileged significant. I suggest that the main 'ingredients' of this 'recipe' are sex, gender and sexuality, religion, race and culture, time, geopolitical space and to a certain extent nation and citizenship. Let me illustrate what I mean by that and what can be understood by a critical intersectional discourse research approach. Let us have a closer look at the cover of the book *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* by Mia Bloom (Bloom, 2005). I consider this cover to be an 'ideograph'<sup>viii</sup>, a visual abbreviation and condensed illustration of an enormous flow of discourse on the topic (McGee, 1980, in Handler, 2004, 14) and make use of it to develop my argument.<sup>ix</sup>

## **Sex, Gender, and Sexuality**

According to Regina Becker-Schmidt, feminist critique has to uncover the epistemological and ethical deficits of science and the capitalist, colonialist, racist and androcentrist patterns that frame various theoretical and methodological approaches (Becker-Schmidt, 1998: 112). It thus provides a suitable starting point for intersectional analyses. Since it allows for a fruitful exchange with other critical approaches, such as occidentalism, I depart towards an intersectional analysis from introducing sex, gender, and sexuality to the practices of occidentalist representations within my object of research. Looking at the cover of the book *Dying To Kill. The Allure of Suicide Terror* (Bloom, 2005), we immediately focus on the central figure of the picture: a

small girl, maybe five years old, wearing a fake dynamite belt around her tiny body, smiling into the camera and towards us, forming her little fingers into the sign of victory that constitutes the promise of the mission she embodies. Despite the central position within the picture, it becomes clear that she is not the true actor here, because she sits on the shoulders of a man that might be her father. The daughter figure seems to be directly manipulated and instrumentalised by her relative, indirectly by other male members of a community, and symbolically by this community's leader, whose picture is held up behind her back. Father figures are numerous in the picture, whereas the woman/girl stands in for a 'collective singular.' One can also see how she is raised up in a position of power and confidently looks into the camera. These two readings are not necessarily inconsistent, since the figure embodies both the little girl in person and the imago of *the* woman, of femininity as such. Like numerous other female allegories, her picture can also symbolically evoke notions of life and death or nation and territory, to name only a few.

The central message of the photo is very similar to most underlying frames of discussions of female suicide bombers, be it Kurdish, Tamil, Chechen, or Palestinian<sup>x</sup> women. Their acts are either framed as an outcome of patriarchal oppression, personal despair and exaggerated emotionality – or the women are oversexualised, vilified and turned into perverted monsters. Both strategies allow placing women suicide bombers outside of the realm of political agency. In this picture, the 'phenomenon of suicide bombing' is directly linked to the phenomenon of (rare) violent female agency, stripped of its specific context and embedded in a logic that contributes to effective



othering along the raced-gendered lines of orientalised patriarchy, staged by the framing of the girl between both a biological and a political father figure. Not *any* patriarchal society, but a very specific one, becomes visible within these contours: oriental, third world, Muslim/Arab, and necessarily 'Other'. In writings on 'female suicide bombing' (Victor, 2003; Skaine, 2006) orientalised patriarchy often turns into a very strong discursive frame that allows the dismissal of a detailed discussion of social, political, and economic circumstances in their context of structural violence in a setting of asymmetric global power relations. In this picture, orientalised masculinity only complements and underscores the staging of the issue. Excessive masculinity, emotionality, irrationality and the like are also applied to male actors of political violence – as long as the latter can be framed as illegitimate and beyond any order and rationality.

Taking gender into account as a way of defining power relations, one could extend some theoretical assumptions and focus on 'suicide bombing' instead of 'the suicide bomber'. As much of the literature indicates, 'suicide bombing' is often conceived of as something irrational, emotional, and illegitimate, no matter what the biological sex of their perpetrators and organisers. Of course these characteristics are not 'feminine' in themselves, but their being classed with femininity (while their respective 'opposite' remains within the realm of hegemonic 'masculinity') has been working for considerable time and constantly reinforces the hierarchical dichotomy of male/female and its all too well established equivalents. Such a discursive horizon narrows the space for a closer look at the circumstances and histories of specific settings of violent conflicts. It is the monopolising of truth and moral superiority that is implied in

such approach. This seems to be a strategy to assure readers of a rational, emancipated, and enlightened 'first-world Self in power' that is rightly worried by the question Bloom asks in her last chapter and implicitly runs through the whole book and through much of the US-based literature: 'Will Iraq [or whatever region may be at the focus of current politics, C.B.] Cause Suicide Terror at Home?' <sup>xi</sup> (Bloom, 2005: 166).

### **Race, Religion, and Culture**

Just as with sex, gender, and sexuality, race, religion and the notion of culture are very visible when entering the debate on political violence and terrorism, because they work well for 'reifying stereotypes of the other to discredit it' (Shi-xu, 1994: 659). Turning difference into hierarchy and naturalising these representations is – as Coronil stated – the most effective process that allows for easy explanations and powerful rhetoric, which we can see in almost any debate on 'Islam' and/or 'the Arab world'. One reason for the discursive prominence of 'Islam' in the process of occidentalist Othering seems to be its compatibility with well established discursive patterns on race as a major tool of drawing the line between 'us' and 'them', often working alongside notions of religion and/or culture. Through that discursive mechanism, the imaginary of an 'Arab Other' has discursively turned into the absolute and antagonistic 'Other' of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>xii</sup> In the book cover I chose to illustrate my endeavour, this 'Other' is clearly depicted as non-'Western', even though the real scene took place in Germany's capital. 'Western', at the same time, is implicitly framed by an imagined 'normality' of whiteness, Christianity, and enlightened-democratic-civilised culture;

otherwise, the imagined otherness would not work. All the persons in the material picture correspond to the image of what hegemonic discourse has most efficiently established as Others, and it is assumed that the photographer and the 'consumers' of the picture rather correspond to the category of 'selves' and not of 'others'. The 'iconograph' of the real or imagined suicide bomber turns into the antithesis of what is considered the normal, legitimate self.<sup>xiii</sup>

Religion, in this picture, is only indirectly addressed and appears behind the photo of Yassir Arafat. The Dome of the Rock near the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem does not incidentally appear on the photo; it is the whole resistance movement (or terrorism, as others would say), that bears its name, al-Aqsa Intifada, and of course it is – in the social movement as in the picture – closely linked to a nationalist cause, the struggle for a Palestinian state, signified by the flag in the background.

Many of the academic studies<sup>xiv</sup> on 'suicide bombing' accord a central role to what is framed as religion, putting Islam at the centre of the whole enterprise of 'reasoned discourse' (Shi-xu 1994); even where it is very unlikely to constitute a major variable of explanation. If religion once was said to be the opium for the *people*, in the context of my research, it seems to have comparable effects for part of *academia*. Only a few authors concentrate on national territorial confrontations and international asymmetric power relations in their analyses (Pape, 2005). Even if they do, this does not mean that they will avoid reproducing orientalism, exactly because of what I call occidentalist practices. It is the combination of national or political, religious or pseudo-cultural explanatory approaches in the studies that constitute the efficiency of

occidentalism. It is striking how easily most scholars handle Islam as the major explanation of political violence today, and how 'naturally' ideas of culture and race can be woven into such a pattern. Territorial and political conflicts anywhere in the world appear to be separated from hegemonic power relations and its global players today, and the world's components are separated into bounded units along the most flexible and stable line of 'us' and 'them'.

Let me return to the photo on the cover again. In the back, we can see two buildings that could stand in many cities around the world, so initially we do not know where the crowd is located. What must be irritating to the US and international audience of Columbia University Press is the German writings<sup>xv</sup> on the picture that is held up by another participant of the demonstration. It says: 'our democratically elected president' and shows Yassir Arafat, the long time leader of the Palestinian people, although in his younger years. Below we can see a line written in Arabic, and not knowing the language, one can only suppose what it means. What further remains unknown to most readers/watchers is the Arabic writing on the frown of the girl. Many participants, watchers or bystanders of the demonstration might have been able to read it, but to the general audience this picture is addressed to, they stand for '*An Enigma, Wrapped in a Puzzle*'<sup>xvi</sup> (Elster, 2005, 256), as if we were never able to read her 'oriental, minor, female, and fanatic' mind that is so impressively inscribed onto her body.<sup>xvii</sup>

## **Time and Space**

There are two axes from the past to the future that dominate the picture. First, a personalised and heteronormatively gendered genealogy from Arafat's generation of Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation to today's tactics and modes of fighting. Second, there is a symbolic genealogy from religion (the Dome of Rocks beneath the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem/al-Quds) via physical violence (the explosive belt) to patriarchal masculinity (the father forcing his daughter into the act), often accorded to 'Muslim/Arab' societies. The notion of time appears as the intergenerational dimension of the conflict, embodied by the figure of a young girl/daughter, her presumed father, and the political ancestor/father/grandfather Arafat present in the poster held up at a pro-Palestinian demonstration.

The question of time can be traced back to the whole discussion about 'New Wars' that has widely spread amongst IR (International Relations) scholars from Mary Kaldor<sup>xviii</sup> (Kaldor, 1999) to probably every single bachelor programme in IR. From the perspective of critical discourse research, one has to ask what this presumed temporal significance means and how it enables to legitimate a range of today's counterterrorism practices that seemed to be unthinkable from the end of the Cold War until the proclamation of the 'war on terrorism'.

The presumed 'eternal' dimension of examples like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is another incentive to critically reflect on the category of time. The conflict is often linked to biblical terms and metaphors and, thus results in mystifying and depoliticising specific social, political and economic developments. A similar 'time shift' can be observed in much of the scholarly work on 'suicide bombing'. While only a few authors discuss recent political

developments in the Middle East in relation to US foreign policies and their impact during the last decades, many publications (for example Shay, 2004, 24) refer to an ancient sect called Assassins.<sup>xix</sup> Even though little details are known, it seems to make sense to frame current political events – especially in the Middle East – along a timeless scale of violent political Islam. In Coronil's words, relational histories are disaggregated from each other. By that discursive strategy, notions of race, religion and culture are eternalised and essentialised as something inherent in what is labelled as 'Islamic/Arab violence'; a notion that the readers of *Orientalism* (Said, 1979) will be very familiar with.

The notion of geopolitical centres and what is interchangeably defined as their peripheries introduces an important element that helps separate the world's components into bounded units and disaggregate their relational histories, as Coronil stressed in the previously quoted article (Coronil 1996, 57). It is not only the scholarly habit of comparing a number of case studies (like Bloom's book does) that indicates the importance of geopolitical space when dealing with knowledge on 'suicide bombing'. More important is the fact that hegemonic scholarship objectifies selected positions while not making their premises explicit. For example, the imaginary of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is visually declared a *pars pro toto* for 'the phenomenon of suicide bombing' in general. Such discursive strategies construct the object of knowledge called 'suicide bombing' and generalise it. Once this is achieved, it seems less important to speak about specific historical, political, economic and other circumstances. The object of knowledge is then selectively made

use of for a very specific focus in the asymmetric dynamics of hegemonic power relations without explicitly mentioning its specificity.

It is not only the cover of the book that allows us to follow the traces of epistemic violence. The 'paratext' (Genette, 1989) continues on the back cover and on the book jacket, before the first and after the last word written by Bloom herself. The publisher does not fail to make use of a common practice: putting its author in the line of well known other actors in the field. All of them are quoted with supportive comments on their colleague's latest book and stress its importance for both terrorism research and the public. This indicates an interesting element of scholarly work on a topic that is said to be of public interest: its capacity to transcend the boundaries of discursive communities. Jessica Stern, Bruce Hoffman and David C. Rapoport, some of the leading scholars in the field of terrorism studies and on the topic of suicide terrorism, are not only quoted with their own comments on Bloom's book. It is their own participation in public discourse and their political and academic affiliation that is considered to render their voices authoritative. This paper does not provide the room to further elaborate on institutions and political agency within the academia and across the fields of policy counselling and policy-making. But a glimpse on these paratextual elements makes it clear that such a publication does not exist beyond time, space, and political importance within the complex of knowledge and power on a global scale. Those who are speaking/writing in IR and terrorism studies are mostly white men (and a few women) that have gone through prestigious academic socialisation and today are well situated in think tanks, universities or similar institutions that allow them to make use of the multiplicity of resources that are necessary to

participate in the elite-led discourse on terrorism and political violence in the centres of global academic knowledge production. Needless to say, hegemony begins with the power of defining, theorising and participating in public discourse, in scholarly expertise, and in policy counselling.

Let me mention one more detail that we cannot get from the picture itself: this book was published in the USA in 2005 with this photo on the cover, but the photo itself was originally taken at a demonstration in Berlin, Germany, in 2002. This is mentioned nowhere in the text or the 'paratext' (Genette, 1989) of the book. Why was this picture selected to illustrate a US-American scholarly work on the general topic of 'suicide bombing'? Neither German nor European politics is discussed here, nor is the Palestinian example at the core of the book. The 'ideograph' (Mc Gee, 1980) seems to carry a multitude of aspects that have become ubiquitous and are taken for granted in discussing the issue of self-sacrifice as a political weapon as suicide terrorism. We do not know if the author agreed with this choice, but to the publisher, it had made sense; politically and economically, as it seems. Undoubtedly the cover refers – unwittingly or not – to the dimension of discourse on an international level, to the importance of geopolitical space and to the power of images that intervene in the reproduction of existing asymmetrical power relations.

### **A note on nation, citizenship, and politics**

The Keffiyeh<sup>xx</sup> worn in traditional way by Arafat and in various other ways by demonstration participants shown in the photo has become a symbol of solidarity with 'the Palestinian cause'. In the picture it functions as a further iconic element and refers to the category of nation and citizenship that is



hardly spoken of within counterterrorism research. Still, nation and citizenship remind us to think of the political context the photograph was taken in; a demonstration. Having that in mind, we must agree that the whole picture – despite its central and deeply antidemocratic message, the girl wearing a dynamite belt and smiling from her father's shoulders – refers to a truly democratic political process. The reference to the democratically legitimated former president on the picture that is shown in the photo, and the setting of a demonstration – a collective articulation of political opinion – both point at the political background of what seems to be completely beyond legitimate political agency: 'suicide bombing.' In an 'ideograph' (Mc Gee 1980) like this photo, this basic precondition is easily forgotten. *Visually*, the line between politics and terrorism, between the legitimate articulation and the illegitimate use of violence, remains blurred. At the same time, the title of the book *Dying to Kill. The Allure of Suicide Terror* that we can see on the cover is clear: the author and the publisher<sup>xxi</sup> want to give an unambiguous definition of 'suicide terror' and make no reference to the difficult discussion of the legitimacy of political violence, resistance, and terrorism. And at least in its title, the book does not frame the object of research in primarily political terms, but as something fascinating, attracting, as an *allure*. But who is supposed to be attracted most: the perpetrators, organisers and supporters, or the scholars dealing with the topic, or their potential readers?

## Conclusion

My general thesis is that it is the occidentalist character of much of academic knowledge production on the topic of 'suicide bombing' that allows

the reassurance of a privileged 'Western Self' in dealing with the delicate question of what is legitimate violence today. I claim that an object of knowledge called 'suicide bombing' has emerged in its own right, and that it has become what Laclau and Mouffe would call a 'privileged significant' (Laclau/Mouffe, 1985) and Link would consider to be a 'Kollektivsymbol' (Link, 1988) that has a lot to do with power and knowledge, with national policies and global politics, and with occidentalism and discourse.

As Richard Jackson has stated in his book *Writing the War on Terrorism* (Jackson, 2005), new 'security policies'<sup>xxii</sup> need irrational, unmoral and non-self-determined, religiously radicalised, oppressed or psychologically pathologised 'Others' in order to maintain their legitimacy. Today, I believe, it is the idea and discursive production of '*the* suicide bomber' that perfectly embodies what is subsumed under these labels.<sup>xxiii</sup> But the presumed irrationality, insanity, immorality and otherness of 'suicide bombing' will sooner or later refer us back to the presumed rationality and naturalness of wars on terror, of the logic of the legitimate use of physical violence by nation states and international bodies, and of the masculinist, racist, and occidentalist nature of International (power) Relations as such. As I wanted to analyse, 'suicide bombing' as an object of knowledge is intersectionally constituted through the main categories of race, religion, gender, sexuality, time and geopolitical space. It seems to me that it is this intersectional complexity of an occidentalist '*selfing*' (along with orientalist '*othering*') that constantly shapes the academic object of research called 'suicide bombing' as a privileged significant within the a globally effective securitisation dispositive that has been installed physically, discursively, and even mentally during the last

decade. This practice of epistemic violence is not an isolated intellectual phenomenon to be sophisticatedly reflected upon when 'the rest of the work' is done. Academic work on terrorism and political violence is a field of intellectual productivity that is closely linked to neo-colonial politics of militarisation which again are present along with neoliberal capitalisation and globalisation, and it therefore contributes not only to epistemic, but also in structural and finally even in physical violence – as it has always done.

If we, as scholars, do not want to reproduce existing asymmetrical power relations through an occidentalist basis of our understanding of International Relations, we should be aware of how occidentalism works through hegemonic dispositives and discourses. And we should critically examine in what ways we contribute to them. Such an endeavour will not only necessitate a shift of paradigms within various disciplines of research. It will have to engage with the disciplines' histories, since the specific order of modern knowledge production in academic disciplines have developed along with colonialism and imperialism, and it will have to critically assess the disciplines' prospective future. Power and knowledge have always constituted each other. Academic work has to become conscious of the dialectic 'nature' of power and knowledge in order to better reflect on the problems and challenges we face today, trying to understand, analyse, explain and maybe some day even help prevent political violence in all its forms and articulations. To be clear: nobody stands outside of the geopolitical dimension of the power of knowledge and the knowledge of power, even when we might not feel we are at what we consider its centres. We can only try to become more sensitive to this problem and integrate it in what we write and teach. Let me conclude with

a short fictive dialogue between scholars that are about to become aware of their challenging responsibility and its possible limits:

Bill: If we stick with relational power, how can we break through the impasse of relations that Self and Other find themselves in today?

Lina: Suspend judgement.

Bill and Mark (*simultaneously*): What do you mean?

Lina: Each party needs to suspend judgement long enough to consider other strategies or methods of seeing the Self and Other. Otherwise, they could not work together to realise possibilities for action and transformation.

Mark: This requires another way of understanding the world –

Lina: Yes.

Mark: – as well as being in the world.

Lina: Yes.

Mark: So we're talking about an alternative ontology and epistemology in addition to method.

Lina: We have to. One is not sustainable politically or logically without the other.

Bill: Are you questioning the entire foundation of Western culture, politics, economics, and science? (*Mark can hardly contain himself. This is exciting stuff!*)

Lina: No. We question its narcissism. [...]

(Agathangelou/Ling, 2005: 839-40)

Does questioning narcissism include questioning the constitutive set of power relations as we face them today? And if so, what would that mean for

theorising contemporary phenomena of violence in relation to its epistemological premises in terms of knowledge and power? If we do, we will have to look for alternative ways of understanding the world – as well as of being in the world; including the academic fields of terrorism research and International Relations.

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<sup>i</sup> I want to thank Maya Eichler for commenting and Lisa Hunt for proofreading the outline of the talk I was supposed to give at the conference *World Orders and Global Governance: New Perspectives and Challenges* at Manchester University in January 2007. A special thanks goes to Karolina Krasuska for an extraordinarily intense linguistic, epistemological, truly transdisciplinary and finally political discussion of the paper prepared for Political Perspectives, and finally to Helmut Krieger for critically accompanying the entire process of thinking, writing, speaking and *doing academia*. I also appreciated the editors' and the two anonymous reviewers' comments that helped me clarify my argument.

<sup>ii</sup> This paper gives some insight into the theoretical-epistemological approach underlying my PhD project on Suicide Terrorism as an Object of Hegemonic Knowledge Production within the Context of Global Power Relations (working title). Its main purpose is to challenge the hegemonic 'Western' basis of knowledge on 'suicide bombing', which is re/produced in academic writings on the issue. I would like to explore the so-called 'phenomenon of suicide bombing' as a boundary object within occidental practices of orientalism in the setting of hegemonic global power relations. The material analysed consists of pieces of academic work that can be considered as constituting the mainstream of IR research on the topic (textual fragments from books and journals, book covers, figures, models). I would like to elaborate an approach of discourse research referring to the work of Siegfried Jäger (Jäger, 1999), Norman Fairclough and Lilie Chouliaraki (Chouliaraki/Fairclough, 1999) and Reiner Keller (Keller, 2005). Questioning the presumed naturalness of 'Western' academic knowledge on what is understood by 'suicide bombing', To introduce a critical application of discourse research, including visual material, I further intend to move towards an analysis of the dispositive (Jäger, 1999; Caborn, 2007; Link, 2007) in which these specific academic debates are embedded. The dissertation will be written in German, both at Vienna University (Political Science) and Humboldt University, Berlin (Gender Studies).

<sup>iii</sup> Some of them can be found in the list of references, but I want to indicate one recent book that follows a very similar approach and combines feminist, intersectional and postcolonial critique impressively: (En)Gendering the War on Terror. War Stories and Camouflaged Politics, edited by Krista Hunt and Kim Rygiel, published in 2006.

<sup>iv</sup> I will refer to 'suicide bombing' instead of 'suicide terrorism' because I want to keep the space open for discussion about the (non) legitimacy of political violence.

<sup>v</sup> I use the term occidentalism in two ways. First, in Coronil's sense as a style of representation, and second, understood as a concept that should be further developed in order to analyse occidental mechanisms, I use the term critical occidentalism. Here, I refer to the work especially of Gabriele Dietze and Antje Hornscheidt (forthcoming). For further publications and references see the conference *Kritischer Okzidentalismus. Eine geschlechterkritische Intervention in die Herstellung des Eigenen am Anderen*, to be held at Humboldt University, Berlin, June 21 to 23, 2007: <http://www.okzidentalismus-konferenz.de>, Accessed May 22 2007.

<sup>vi</sup> Coronil does not use inverted commas when speaking of the West and Others.

<sup>vii</sup> I am aware of the fact that I cannot entirely escape that dynamic; in my approach, I might put mainstream terrorism research as my Other and thereby reassure my own position (subject) in a certain distance to what is the object of my research.

<sup>viii</sup> The German term 'visuelle Abbreviatur' by Peter Oliver Loew perfectly expresses what I intend to say and what McGee might mean with his 'ideograph'.

<sup>ix</sup> Of course, my reading of the material will be one among many interpretations. Still, I would like to argue that looking at it with intersectionally informed gender lenses is a productive way of reflecting on epistemic violence within academic knowledge production.

<sup>x</sup> For a critical feminist/gender approach to the Palestinian example see also Brunner, 2005 or Hasso, 2005.

<sup>xi</sup> The quotation is written in capital letters because it is the title of one chapter of the book.

<sup>xii</sup> In my project, this is still a site of construction, and for now, I cannot be more precise on this point.

<sup>xiii</sup> Laura Kristen Handler has approached the problem in her MSc thesis on images of suicide bombings available on the internet and comes to a similar conclusion (Handler, 2004, 13).

<sup>xiv</sup> For the most striking example see Israeli, 2003.

<sup>xv</sup> I will come back to this surprising detail in the last part of the paper.

<sup>xvi</sup> Here again, the quotation is the title of a chapter in an article and therefore written in capital letters.

<sup>xvii</sup> As mentioned before, my reading is be one among many interpretations and is aimed at making the point with respect to the main question of epistemic violence within global power relations.

<sup>xviii</sup> For the German debate see Münkler, 2002.

<sup>xix</sup> The work of Bernard Lewis, first published in 1967 and today available in recent editions, seems to constitute the basis for the extensive quotations on the Assassins (Lewis, 2002).

Otherness'.<sup>xx</sup> The typical Palestinian scarf, traditionally black and white.

<sup>xxi</sup> In the context of discourse analysis, the question is not who personally speaks, but from which position. Mia Bloom for instance might have not completely agreed with the publisher's illustration of her book; even the final title does not necessarily correspond with the author's suggestion.

<sup>xxii</sup> For a closer discussion on feminist security theory and critique see Blanchard, 2003 or Tickner, 2004, for instance.

<sup>xxiii</sup> This does not at all indicate that suicide bombing and political violence are no daily realities. What I want to stress – contrary to most approaches within terrorism research – is the discursive dimension of creating an unambiguously connoted 'Western Self' as opposed to the current 'incarnation of Otherness'.

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**Appendix A**

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# DYING TO KILL

THE ALLURE OF SUICIDE TERROR

**Mia Bloom**