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"Explosive Bodies, Bounded States: Abjection and Suicide Bombing"

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At the moment of the bombing, the bodies of suicide bombers are obliterated, as are the bodies of those nearest to the bomber. These bodies, once constituted as whole and autonomous vessels of subjects, become, in Adriana Cavarero's phrase, "heaps of meat" (2009: 98). This phrase is revealing of a consequence of suicide bombing: the separation of self and body so that only bodies are left behind, rendered inhuman by violence. The bombing and efforts at dealing with the aftermath of the bombing, such as through recovery and identification of bodies, provide a window into the production of bodies, subjects, and states. Suicide bombing,[1] theorized as an embodied practice shows bodies to be *unnatural* and only ever partially and impurely differentiated from one another and the political conditions of their existence. As such, suicide bombing calls our attention to the ways sovereignty produces the *body politic* and political bodies.

In recent years, the number of women participating in suicide bombings has dramatically increased.[2] The issue of female suicide bombers has spawned a great deal of media attention and commentary as well as a sudden expansion in academic books and articles. Scholars have asked what the seeming rash of female suicide bombers over the last decade or so can tell us about the conflicts and the organizations behind this practice, as well as what this implies about women's political agency. These are important questions for feminists, gender theorists, and scholars of security studies to ask. However, the focus on motivations of suicide bombers, whether the bombers are sexed male or female, leaves untheorized the role of the *body* in this practice.

In this article, I argue that suicide bombing is not only a destructive act of killing oneself in order to kill others, but also can be understood as a productive act as well. It does this by obliterating the borders of the body, borders that are produced by social and political forces. The bodies produced in this moment as lifeless flesh, as corpses, are a source of horror and disgust. They are what feminist psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva calls 'abject,' and are linked to discourses of the female body as leaky and uncontained. By gathering the bodily remains of suicide

bombers and victims, the practices of the organization ZAKA in Israel[3] participate in a sovereign practice of reconstituting both bodies and *body politic*. Efforts at reconstructing bodies and the state also necessarily entail the performances of sexual difference, seen in the representation of female suicide bombers as wives and mothers. Suicide bombing thus becomes a site that reveals how power molds, shapes, and constitutes the borders of the body and the state simultaneously. Abjection, as an account of the lived experience of the body, provides an understanding of the power projected and revealed in the practice of suicide bombing, exposing the mutual constitution between bodies and states.

I begin by theorizing sovereignty as a practice that produces an orderly, internal space and an outside space of danger and disorder; this practice of sovereignty is bound up in what is considered to be a 'metaphor' of the *body politic* but what is in fact the mutual constitution of bodies and states. I then argue that these sovereign practices of state-making are also gendered practices of body-making. Having argued about the constitutive relationship between sovereignty and abjection, I turn to the suicide bomber as a figure of abjection that challenges the sovereignty of both states and bodies. Female suicide bombers, whose bodies are already viewed as abject, bear a troubling relationship to the state in this interpretation. When we look at efforts to reinstate sovereignty by reconstructing the bodies of suicide bombers and their victims (as shown by the example of the work of ZAKA in Israel), the haunting abject renders such practices of sovereignty incomplete. The gendering of female suicide bombers likewise reflects the need to reinstate a gender order challenged by the disruption of women's bodies in the public sphere.

ABJECTION AND THE STATE

The practice of suicide bombing breaks down borders. It shatters the boundaries between the inside and outside of human bodies, between human bodies in using a body to kill others, and (in certain contexts) state borders. This practice is emblematic of waning state sovereignty and poses a threat to state sovereignty itself. To understand how suicide bombing could be a threat to sovereign, it is necessary to theorize sovereignty not as an attribute but as a practice of power that has productive effects. "Sovereignty does not simply unify or repress its subjects, but is rather both generated by and generative of these subjects" (Brown 2010: 52). Sovereignty is the

practice of demarcating a separate space of law from unlaw and disorder. This space of law in the modern world order is the space of the sovereign state. Sovereignty is the practice by which the inside and outside are distinguished, borders are drawn, and territory is demarcated. Sovereignty as a practice "should be understood as the discursive/cultural *means* by which a 'natural' state is produced as established as 'prediscursive'" (Weber 1998: 92). That is, sovereignty produces the ordered territory of the state as naturally distinguished from the chaotic outside. The spatial aspect of sovereignty is represented as boundedness. Sovereignty requires a space that is well defined and ordered, that has come into existence though interactions with the land. Lest it be forgotten, Lefebvre reminds us that sovereign spaces are produced by violence. "Sovereignty implies 'space' and what is more it implies space against which violence, whether latent or overt, is directed—a space established and constituted by violence. Every state is born of violence, and state power endures only by virtue of violence directed toward space" (1992: 280).

Sovereignty, then, is a performance differentiates wild, ungovernable land from peace and order; it is only under the sign of sovereignty that a chaotic outside is distinguished from an orderly inside. This hierarchy in space is familiar to International Relations theorists as the demarcation between the law and order of the inside and danger, disorder and unlaw outside of sovereignty's bounds (Walker 1993; Campbell 2000 [1992]). Sovereignty expresses unity and agency, the ability to self-govern and act autonomously. The ability to act autonomously outside of the territory of the sovereign is dependent upon the subordination of powers internally that could fragment the *body politic*. In this framework, security discourses have produced violence as an intrusion upon the nation-state from an 'other' located outside of state boundaries, rather than stemming from the instability of bodies themselves. The division between the inside and outside, between domestic peace and external anarchy and danger is produced by abjection.

Abjection describes the formation of subjects through the creation of individuated bodies and spaces. By expelling the abject, the self creates the boundary between the abject and itself—the expulsion of the abject is a necessary step in the formation of the self. In the process of self-formation, "I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*," (Kristeva 1982: 3). The abject represents a part of the self that must be rejected in order to *become* a self. It is thus threatening to the self, and regarded

with disgust. The abject, though expelled, remains an essential part of the self, lingering or haunting the unconscious and rendering it permanently vulnerable to disruptions. This act is never complete, it is always a process requiring maintenance, for, as Iris Marion Young writes, "any border ambiguity may become for the subject a threat to its own borders" (1990: 145).

The abject is founded on an attempted rejection of corporeality, stemming from the separation of the self from unity with the maternal body. The abject is commonly associated with waste products and bodily fluids that leave the body through openings or wounds (Kristeva 1982: 52). Abjection does not refer to corpses or bodily fluids per se, but rather, that which does not obey borders and challenges the existence of such borders. Abjection works symbolically to expose the psychic, social, and political work necessary to preserve the illusion of whole bodies with unbroken surfaces, bodies that are made to appear whole on the basis of expelling the abject. The abject is what must be expelled maintain the "self's clean and proper body" (Kristeva 1982: 75). As Elizabeth Grosz writes, "the abject demonstrates the impossibility of clear-cut borders, lines of demarcation, division between the clean and the unclean, the proper and the improper, order and disorder" (1990: 89). The abject threatens the borders between inside and outside that must be maintained for the subject to remain a self-contained individual. Theorizing sovereignty as a practice that maintains the abject at a distance allows us to see the connections between suicide bombing, the borders of the state and nation and the role of gender discourses in constituting both.

Sovereign Bodies

Feminists have argued that the state, as a particular "institutionalization of power relations" (Connell 1990: 520) relies upon, and reproduces, gendered relations of power in at least three ways. First, sovereignty and the sovereign state are conceived in masculine terms, as revealed by the representations of the state as a masculine body. Second, the space of the state is gendered in that it relies upon forms of authority in scientific knowledge to create dichotomies between body and mind, culture and nature, men and women, and public and private that exclude women from the public life of the state. Third, the sovereign state functions as a 'protection racket' in which women's bodies are objects to be protected by men, protection that comes at a

steep cost. Theorizing sovereignty as a practice bound up with the production of a unified, bounded territory and simultaneously with the production of unified, bounded bodies allows us to look at the practice of suicide bombing as practice that not only disrupts the sovereign state but also allows us to examine the politics of 'reconstructing' bodies.

The space that sovereignty produces is often analogized as a body. The analogy of the state as human body has a long history (Campbell 2000 [1992]: 75-77). *How* this body is represented has productive effects; as Judith Butler writes, "there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body" (1993: 10). Most famously represented by the figure of Hobbes's Leviathan, with the land and people as a body and the sovereign as the head, the state as 'body politic' is a representation that produces both state and human body as containers. The Leviathan as 'artificial man' provides us with a compelling formulation of the articulation between state and bodies linked by the threat of violence. Sovereign power, in the artificial man of the Leviathan, is constituted precisely to protect the 'natural man.' The use of the term 'body politic', as well as bodily metaphors for the state is not without political consequences for understanding the meaning of both the state and the body.

The use of the phrase 'body politic' to refer to a political community is usually described as a metaphor, a literary devise, but it is also more. Applying a Foucauldian perspective on the productive power of discourse, the representation of the state as a body also produces both the state and bodies as particular objects.[4] The constitution of the state and constitution of the body are mutually entailed. Analyzing scientific discourses of the immune system in the 1980s, Donna Haraway argues that at this particular historical juncture, the body was constituted in terms of national security discourses of invasion, defense, and invulnerability (Haraway 1991: 211). In early modern state-formation, scientific discourses argued women's and men's bodies were not on continuum of difference, but are opposites. Women could thus be defined in terms of weakness, emotion, and impulse, in contrast to the masculine virtues of reason and force that governed the state apparatus (Towns 2010: 69-75; Peterson 1992). The body, as the site of impulses, must be kept in its proper (subordinate) place in the hierarchy, beneath reason, just as the state must maintain proper hierarchies to remain healthy (Cavarero 2002: 102-103). The constitution of women's bodies as 'other' in contrast to the norms of men's is central to the

constitution of the modern state, as it allowed for the demarcation of public/private spheres of activity and the exclusion of women from public life on account of their association with the body and its deficiencies, compared to the affiliation of men with the mind and rationality; subjects supposedly free from the volatility of bodies (Pateman 1988; Young 1990; Peterson 1992; Gatens 1996). The representation of the political community as a human, able-bodied male also reifies the opposition between culture and nature, as it presents the 'culture' of the state as a perfection of nature, as the 'artificial man' simulates and supersedes the 'natural man' (Grosz 1995: 106).

In early modern history sovereignty was invested in the body of the king: although the king's mortal body may die, the sovereign state as the immortal body of king is permanent, it cannot die. Kantorowitz's (1957) invocation of "the King's Two Bodies" illustrates the duality of the body/state relationship, as modern sovereignty is constituted as an artificial body that transcends the individual or collective embodiment of the mortal body. While, in one sense, the sovereign is embodied as the 'natural' body that is born, lives and dies in the head of state, the sovereign's more important body is immortal, transcendent and cannot die: it has overcome the weakness and vulnerability haunting all bodies. This second body is the state, the sovereign. The sovereign's immaterial body must be made present through its actions on the bodies of others (Foucault 1979: 49).

Sovereignty produces the state as a unified, singular entity: the body politic has one body and speaks with a single voice (Gatens 1996: 23). The body politic is represented as a generic, individual body, but of course there is no such thing. Rather, among other markers of difference, bodies are always sexed. Feminists have argued that this body politic is not only constituted by the exclusion of women, but also relies on masculine representations of bodies. The analogy of the state as a body, in which both bodies and the state are characterized by sharply delineated borders between inside and outside and between different like units (other states, other bodies), is a representation of bodies (and thus states) as masculine, and fully-grown without the inevitable decline of aging(Cavarero 2002: 114). The representation of the state as unitary, in which one sovereign speaks on behalf of the state, and the social contract is constituted by the voices of men (Gatens 1996; Pateman 1988) is an erasure of sexual difference, and uses the masculine to

represent the human. As one cultural critic notes, "the most important meanings that can be attached to the idea of the masculine body are unity and permanence" (Easthope 1990: 53). These meanings are essentially the same as the meaning given to the sovereign state. How bodies are represented in dominant discourses relates to the constitution of the modern political community.

The production of the state as a self-contained and bounded body reproduces sovereignty as a masculine practice. The representation of the state as a kind of container is sometimes considered a natural or inevitable metaphor. Lakoff (1987) asserts that because we live in bodies that are containers, we experience everything as inside a container or outside of it. Because of our embodied experience, the 'container' model of the state has an essential basis in our bodily life. However, the actual experience of embodiment for all people is not of self-contained bodies demarcated from the world by the boundaries of the skin. Experiencing one's body as a container is more common to men than to women (Battersby 1999). The modern, self-contained, bounded body that is seen as the normative body is culturally associated with white, heterosexual, able-bodied men rather than women, racial 'others', sexual minorities or disabled persons. Women's bodies have not so much been constructed as absence, or lack, but as leaking or fluid, through a mode of seepage or liquidity (Shildrick, 1997; Grosz 1994: 203). As such, women's bodies have been figured as *abject* in their instability and refusal to obey borders. These non-normative bodies are seen as particularly vulnerable and as such, not suitable for full status as a sovereign subjects.

However, the body politic is also figured in feminine terms (Campbell 2000 [1992]: 79; Brown 1988: 109). Breaches of a state's territory are often thought of in sexualized terms such as violation or rape, as in "the Rape of Kuwait" (Farmanfarmaian 1998) or the "rape of Palestine" (Massad 1995). Such metaphors link danger and sexual deviancy to others outside the state, often reproducing racial stereotypes, and position the state as demasculinized. It is a woman's body thought capable of being violated, not a man's. As a body that is no longer whole and contained, the 'masculinity' of the state is in question and must be shored up. The state has been made symbolically into a woman: violated, aggrieved and vulnerable, in need of protection and vengeance by her masculine protectors. The state as 'protection racket' in which the masculine

state (and its male leaders) protects a feminized population describes the gendered dynamics of sovereignty. There is an unequal power relationship between the protector and the protected, with the security of the protected bought by their subordination to the protectors (Young, 2003: 226-227). The bodies of the feminized people 'protected' by practices of national security are a political liability for those whose bodies are seen to be vulnerable, weak, and inadequate. Violations of a state's territory do more than redraw the boundaries of sovereignty that "produces, represents, or writes the state" (Weber 1995: 125); they produce that state as a feminine body.

While the body of the sovereign state is represented in masculine terms, the territory of the state is seen as feminine. This difference can be accounted for by understanding sovereignty as a performance that writes that writes the borders of the state, a practice which is necessary for the state to exist as a bounded entity as such. Sovereignty transforms the wild, ungovernable territory into an ordered space with inviolable borders. Sovereignty produces this entity through abjection, just as the unified, self-contained body of the person is produced through abjection. As such, sovereignty is a masculine practice of domination, as well as supplementation and transformation of a feminine space of danger. Practices of sovereignty are ultimately violent practices of demarcation in contrast to suicide bombing, which is a violent practice of abjection or blurring the boundaries that sovereignty would instill. The suicide bomber, especially the female suicide bomber, poses a distinct threat to the sovereign order.

Suicide Bombers as Abject

By obliterating the borders between the inside and outside of the body, and between individual bodies, the suicide bomber not only harms bodies, but destroys the sovereign processes that bind bodies into bounded individuals in the first place. At the same time, the suicide bomber poses a threat to the sovereign power of the state by bringing violence into the heart of its territory and making a lie out of the sovereign's role of protecting its citizens. The presence of the abject reminds us of the precariousness of bodies and subjectivity, and their indebtedness to one another in ways that collapse the distinction between self and body, nature and culture, life and death. Because of the role of sovereignty in transforming wild,

uncontrollable land and bodies into ostensibly ordered and demarcated unities, the suicide bomber reveals the mutually constituting relationship between states and bodies, a relationship rife with gendered implications. The symbolic threat posed by the suicide bomber to the order of 'clean and proper' bodies and states is suggested by the abject as the sacrificed, but haunting, specter of corporeality and femininity.

Suicide bombing is not only an act that collapses the inside and outside of the body's surfaces, but does so in order to cause the same damage to other bodies. More so than other forms of violence, suicide bombing is a particularly intimate form of killing that brings the bodies of victims and perpetrators together in death, injuring and killing in such a way that collapses the inside and outside of bodies, resulting in a gory spectacle. This evokes not only the corporeality that haunts the subject, but also points to the fluid boundaries between bodies. In deploying a means of violence that shatters the body's (illusory) wholeness, literally reducing it to corpses and fluid bits, the violence of the suicide bomber transforms the self into the abject while transforming his or her victims into symbols of the abject as well. Gayatri Spivak writes of suicide bombing, "Suicidal resistance is a message inscribed on the body when no other means will get through. It is both execution and mourning, for both self and other. For you die with me for the same cause, no matter which side you are on" (2004: 95). The suicide bomber not only pulverizes the boundaries of the self-contained body, but breaches the boundaries that separate bodies from one another, and that separates political identities from one another. It is an act not only of destruction, but of *contamination*. Its message is not only that absolute security of the body's integrity is impossible but also, that the integrity of the social and political order that sovereignty attempts is impossible. It is the violent eruption of the abject, of a feminine symbolic, that has been disqualified in the sovereign state which values the impermeability of its borders and the absolute safety of its citizens above all else.

The body of the suicide bomber defies the modern, masculine conception of the body that's wholeness and integrity is so taken for granted that it can be transcended. The figure of the suicide bomber suggests a non-normative bodily morphology that calls into question the perceived naturalness of the normative body. Suicide bombing also reverses conception of the body in which the inside is mysterious, hidden, and the outside, the skin, is what is presented to

the world. The skin is a container for the inside and for the subject, which is located therein. The body of the suicide bomber is an unnatural body, a body that is leaky and contaminating body, a body not bordered by the skin but a body that is deterritorialized, not ordered by sovereignty, and only appearing stable and fixed in essence and identity by practices of sovereignty.

The suicide bomber also becomes an abject figure by blurring the boundaries between nature and culture, biology and technology. The suicide bomber as such exists at the point of concealment of a bomb on, in, or about the body of the bomber. The body of the suicide bomber is not a 'natural' body, but rather an amalgam of flesh and metal, biology and technology: it is a cyborg body that refuses the distinction between nature and culture (Haraway, 1991). The bomb carried by the suicide bomber is a form of technology concealed in 'natural' body. The 'natural' body and the clothing worn by the bomber conceal the bomb. Clothing, as a cultural layer worn on the body that signifies a particular identity—of gender, of status, of religious or culture—is meant to conceal the 'true' identity of the bomber. The suicide bomber must disrupt the presumed coherence between signifiers of identity and embodiment to carry out his or her mission. Bombers must 'pass' in order to elude security measures and hide their intentions as well as their bombs. Bombers have dressed as Orthodox Jews, and women have pretended to be pregnant, for example, in order to escape close scrutiny and better conceal bombs. The bombs become part of the bodies bimbers, not only at the moment of detonation, but in an act of incorporation into the bomber's bodily presentation, a presentation necessary for the mission to be carried out. The statement in a video recording from Reem Al Rayashi captures the blurring of the boundaries between body and technology: "I have always dreamed of transforming myself into deadly shrapnel against the Zionists…and my joy will be complete when the parts of my body will fly in all directions" (quoted in Cavarero 2009: 97). In this way, the bomb plays a different role than a gun, a knife, or a grenade, which extends and enhances the destructive capabilities of the body. It is part of the body and the body is part of the weapon. The body itself is the weapon, it is not only the wielder of technology (Oliver 2007: 32).

The explosion of the bomb brings to light that which is hidden—not only the true intentions of the bomber, but what is hidden in bodies as well. In the gory scene of a bombing, the insides of bodies, once hidden by skin, are on full display. In its use of the body as a

projectile, the suicide bomber becomes a monstrous figure of ambiguity between nature and culture, and in its unreason, between animal and human. Recently, suicide bombers have taken the concept of the 'human bomb' a step further, and have placed bombs inside human bodies, both corpses and live bombers (Cavarero 2009: 96; Gardner 2009). From the amalgamation with the metal and other bomb components, to the moment of detonation, the suicide bomber is a body in transformation, a becoming-body rather than a permanent fixture. As such, the suicide bomber evokes the bodily horror of inevitable bodily disintegration and death, even for those who are not directly threatened by this form of violence. The threat of suicide bombers as monstrous bodies, apart from the obvious ability to harm, lies in its capacity to contaminate, to spread dis-order and the disintegration of identity.

Some might argue that to theorize the body of the suicide bomber as an abject, monstrous body is to denigrate this form of political violence as especially heinous compared to other forms of warfare that have similar, or worse, dangers for civilians (see Asad 2007). Such an argument, however, would require us to accept the logic of abjection; that what is abjected is bad, filthy, unnatural and the like. We couldn't see abjection as a possible strategy, or, more to the point, as something that not only makes social and political boundaries visible but also something that moves to erase these boundaries. Accepting the logic of abjection means that the presence of the abject is seen as *only* something that is repulsive, not as something that challenges the boundaries of the clean and proper itself. The politics of abjection take on a particular cast when the figure of the suicide bomber as a female body is considered.

When the Bomber is a Woman

Scholars and the media alike are fascinated with female suicide bombers who disrupt the image of women as maternal life-givers rather than life-takers. In recent decades, women have been increasingly involved in suicide bombings, with the vast majority of suicide bombings perpetrated by women taking place after the year 2000. Women's participation in suicide missions has been of particular interest to feminists and gender theorists in International Relations because it appears to upset traditional gender roles in which women are victims, rather than perpetrators, of political violence (see Bloom 2005 and 2011; Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007;

O'Rourke 2008; Oliver 2007 and 2008). Women who are suicide bombers challenge the myth of women as 'beautiful souls' (Elshtain 1995[1987]): innocents who need to be shielded from the harsh realities of the world by masculine protectors. In what follows, I detour from this framing to focus on the politics of the sexed embodiment of the suicide bomber. I argue that what is interesting about the phenomenon of women as suicide bombers is not that women necessarily have different motivations for suicide terrorism, but that the symbolic politics differ when the suicide terrorist is embodied as a woman. As women are constituted by a different relationship to corporeality than men in western culture, the suicide attack perpetrated by a woman represents a somewhat different politics that is not reducible to questions of agency or exploitation. In short, rather than the motivations of women who carry out suicide bombing, this section focuses on the performative effects of the disintegration and reformulation of female bodies.

The association of suicide bombers with abjection is amplified in the presence of a female suicide bomber. The women's body, already associated with the abject, is made into a corpse, the "utmost of abjection" (Kristeva 1982: 4) as it makes others into corpses as well. The female suicide bomber does more than breach the boundaries between inside and outside of the body, she simultaneously disrupts and reinforces constructions of gender and women's embodiment by situating the polluting, contaminating bodies of women, in a public setting. Female suicide bombers challenge the exclusion of women's bodies from the public sphere and from war-fighting in particular, yet by using their bodies as weapons, the construction of women's bodies as alluring but threatening is reproduced.

While bodily fluids in general are seen as abject and contaminating, men's and women's bodily fluids are not seen as contaminating in the same way or to the same extent. In Kristeva's writings, the abjection toward the signs of sexual difference—specifically, menstrual blood—is distinguished from the abjection typified by bodily waste, the corpse. While excrement evokes a threat stemming from outside the self, "menstrual blood… stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social and sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate, and through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference" (Kristeva 1982: 71). The threat of abjection that menstrual blood poses may perhaps best be thought of as related to the emphasis on women's reproductive capacities as the locus of

sexual difference. For Kristeva, menstrual blood invokes the maternal body as the ultimate threat to individual autonomy. This emphasis is not, as Grosz reminds us, natural or inevitable, as many zones of the body could be taken to represent the essential difference between the sexes (Grosz 1994: 196). Menstrual blood, as the mark of reproductive maturity, comes to signify not only sexual difference but also the female body as constituted by seepage and leakiness more broadly. By their association with signs of the abject, women's bodies have been discursively produced as bodies of fear and contempt. Women's bodies have been produced as fluid, as "seepage," and as formless and amorphous, posing a threat of engulfment (Grosz 1994: 203). Their bodies are associated with monstrosity, in their potentiality for pregnancy and its rapid morphological changes, in the troubling of the body as closed, autonomous, and secure in its boundaries, a normative image of what the body should be that is consistent with representations of the male body (Shildrick 2002).

The presence of women in the public sphere, let alone seemingly violating gendered roles of women's passivity and victimhood, does more than upset the supposed unity of the body (which women are never fully identified with). It also exposes women's bodies in their most 'monstrous' form, the terrifying formlessness that haunts the self. The figure of the female suicide bomber reproduces the production of women's bodies as abject, but provides a challenge to the exclusion of women from the public sphere and from committing acts of political violence.

Because of their association with abjection—a sense of fluidity and instability that is both captivating and repulsive—women's bodies themselves are threatening to the orderly space of sovereignty. Kelly Oliver argues that women's association with abjection makes them particularly effective as suicide bombers:

> Within popular discourse, women's bodies, menstrual blood, and female sexuality can be used as tactic of war because of the potency of their association with the danger of nature, of Mother Nature, if you will. Akin to a natural toxin or intoxicant, women's sex makes a powerful weapon because, within our cultural imaginary, it is by nature dangerous (2007: 31).

Female suicide bombers are thus like Hollywood's *femme fatales*, using cultural narratives of their sexuality to hide destructive intentions, such going unveiled to avoid suspicion. Women's bodies, already constituted as abject, are used as weapons to further blur the lines between individual bodies, and between the borders of state and community. The deployment of

women's bodies as suicide bombers could be viewed as a parody of women's bodies as abject. In rejecting Kristeva's interpretation of abjection as rooted in a pre-political concept of the maternal body, Butler argues that abjection and maternal bodies are, in brief, cultural rather than natural phenomena (1990). Butler's concept of performativity describes the construction of gendered norms and gendered subjects through re-iterated performances, thus leaving open the possibility of subversion and resistance through parodies, that is, performances that that blatantly show that what should be natural is indeed constructed by exaggeration and caricature. Because women's bodies are not naturally fluid, leaky or abject, performances which heighten or intensify performances of abjection could work to undermine such naturalized discourses of women's embodiment. Yet, a parody is not enough to challenge representations of women's bodies or the sovereign body politic. Whatever emancipatory potential there may be for women or for re-thinking the body politic in the practice of suicide bombing, especially by women, must been investigated in the space between action and signification of that action.

In the violence of the bombing, the bomber's body is stripped of its political subjectivity, including its gender status through its transformation to a "heap of meat". In the wake of this fearful physical and symbolic disintegration, steps must be taken to re-construct the borders of the body and the state/community, as well as the gender order, in order to secure the self from the threatening presence of the abject.

(RE)CONSTITUTION OF BODIES/STATES

In the destruction of bodies in a way that seems meant to bring about the greatest possible damage, bodies are separated from political subjectivity, and thus, made abject. The mangled corpses that are left behind after a suicide bomber are no longer "clean and proper" bodies (Kristeva 1982: 72). They must be remade and reordered to re-enter the body politic and restore order and sovereignty. Bodies can be 'remade' in a number of ways: here, I focus on the work of ZAKA in Israel and the gendering of female suicide bombers.

The abject threatens not only the borders of the body, but the borders of the social and symbolic order that are maintained by rituals of purification (Douglas 1966). In cases of suicide bombing this ritual purification is undertaken in relation to the treatment of the bodies of the suicide bomber and his or her victims. The public nature of a suicide bombing makes the abject

bodies of the bomber and his or her victims into a spectacle that exposes not only the instability of bodily integrity but the instability of the sovereign political order as well. As a public spectacle, it evokes the logic of sovereign power, in which sacrifice is necessary to constitute the political order (see Foucault 1979). The recovery and burial of the bodies is a ritual that imbues the bodies with subjectivity through another form of sacrifice: the rituals undertaken to cleanse society of pollution and return order. The work of ZAKA in Israel (and recently, around the world) is a particularly striking example of the effort deployed to maintain the semblance of subject/body/state coherence.[5] ZAKA is an organization made of mainly Haredi, or ultra-Orthodox Jews. The name "ZAKA" is the Hebrew acronym for "Disaster Victim Identification" but founders and members often prefer to call their organization "*Chesed shel Emet*" or "True Kindness" which refers to the contaminating work of handing dead bodies, requiring ritual purification (Stadler 2009, 143). ZAKA was formed in the mid-1990s by volunteers to assist in the rescue of victims of bombings and to manage bodies of victims in accordance with Jewish law. The bodies of the suicide bombers are also treated with respect, despite whatever misgivings volunteers may have. Body parts of suicide bombers that can be identified are given to the army to give back to the families of the bombers, if possible. As one ZAKA volunteer explained, "It is written in the Torah that each one should be buried properly in a Jewish cemetery…. but it is not important if it is Jew or a Gentile, more specifically, it is written that all men have been created in God's image, even if he is the suicide bomber… By the very fact that he is a human being, all his organs should be gathered and buried, and this is exactly what ZAKA does" (Stadler 2006, 846). ZAKA's work (which takes place alongside that of Israeli officials) to reconstitute bodies as whole and contained in the aftermath of a suicide bomber or other violent tragedy can be seen as not only an attempt to re-establish the borders of the body, but as a practice of sovereignty to establish the borders of state and community.

The severed flesh left in the wake of suicide bomb renders such bodies unidentifiable under the regimes of religion, nationality, gender or race. Stripped of their production as certain types of political subjects, the parts of bodies that cannot be identified with any particular subjectivity are buried according to Jewish traditions. Given the nature of suicide attacks, many times it is difficult if not impossible to distinguish between the bodies of the perpetrator and the bodies of the victims. Frequently, the bodies of both the bomber and some of the victims are so

mutilated as to be indistinguishable, despite the training of members of ZAKA in the latest forensic technologies. In such cases, unidentified pieces are buried in a common grave according to Jewish tradition.   One volunteer explains, "Although they are dead, we still honor every part of the body, every piece of flesh has to be brought to burial. Flesh we can't identify we bury together. Pieces of flesh are put in bags and the bags are buried in a special grave in the local cemetery" (BBC 2002). After death, the bodies of victim and perpetrator alike are re-inscribed with political and religious meaning through the care given to treat each body fragment as Jewish.[6]

While the act of suicide bombing is an act of sovereign power that mutilates and destroys bodies, the practice of collecting all body fragments and fluids is an example of power *producing* the body by turning objects only identifiable from a medical or anatomical viewpoint into remnants of a human subject. These actions are an attempt to (re)produce the body fragments as belonging to properly human subjects with a national and religious identity, an act which can never be completed, as these bodies cannot be made whole again, nor can they be entirely separated from that of the suicide bomber. Bodies cannot materially be made whole (and of course cannot be brought back to life), but they can be made symbolically whole again, made into human subjects by identification and burial practices.

ZAKA's politics in signifying bodies as Jewish is tied to the practices of burial in Israeli society more broadly, and is of particular relevance to handling of deceased IDF soldiers. While the bodies of victims of suicide bombing are collected to ensure the treatment of all flesh as human and divine, the bodies of soldiers are given even more care to ensure their representation of the nation and as generalizable 'sons' belonging to all of Israel, not only as Jews or as members of particular families (Weiss 2002). The soldiers, as masculine (or masculinized) protectors of the nation are given the most effort to look 'perfect' and whole in death. The bodies of soldiers, like the bodies of victims of terrorism, are imbued with symbolic meaning. This is not, in itself, particularly surprising as the memorialization of soldiers killed in war as a sacrifice to the nation is a common practice of states. What is interesting, however, is the relationship between the practices of handling the bodies of IDF soldiers and the bodies of victims of suicide attacks. At the Israeli National Institute of Forensic medicine (which handles all autopsies of unnatural deaths), a "skin bank" is available for the bodies of soldiers that may need them (from

the bodies of non-soldiers), but no tissue from soldiers may be contributed to these banks. Their bodies are also 'perfected' in that they are treated specially to look whole (Weiss 2002: 59-60). This, 'perfect' or 'whole' body is of course, an unobtainable ideal—dead and mangled bodies cannot be brought back to life, nor can 'actual' bodies ever manifest true perfection. The practice of attempting to reassemble, to make 'perfect' is a means of attempting to cleanse the contamination of the corpse, the impure abject that can never be gotten rid of, either in the perfectly constituted body or the perfectly constituted state, the abject is a reminder of inescapable contamination at its founding.

The reassembly of shattered bodies is a performative way of reassembling the cohesion of the world—not only of the subject, but of the community and sovereign state as well. As Kristeva writes, "the body must bear no trace of its debt to nature: it must be clean and proper in order to be fully symbolic" (982: 102). The body fragments collected and identified by ZAKA are a synecdoche for the community and nation, and the reassembly of them is an effort to remake the sovereignty of the state. The building of fences and border walls around state boundaries fulfills a similar function. Just as efforts to reconstruct bodies is destined to be incomplete, so too is the state's efforts to performatively establish its sovereignty by building walls around its territory. Even proponents of such walls admit they are not effective at stopping smuggling, terrorism, or illegal immigration. Wendy Brown recently argued that building walls such as the U.S. Mexico border fence and the Israeli 'security fence'/ apartheid wall is a sign not of resurgent state sovereignty, but rather of the loss of certain sovereign functions and the desire for performances of sovereignty. Walls fulfill a kind of psychic need for containment rather than an actual purpose of deterring outsiders (Brown 2010). Efforts at reconstructing the bodies of victims of suicide bombing or other political violence do even more to show the precariousness and ultimate illusory nature of sovereign unity, whether in states or in bodies.

The practice of memorializing suicide bombers as honored martyrs is common in the Palestinian context as well as in other context, such as the struggle LTTE against the state in Sri Lanka, although the specific practice of handling remains by ZAKA appears to be unique. However, in contrast to the way in which remains are handled by ZAKA and the Israeli Forensic Institute, the remains of the 9/11 hijackers seem to be treated in such a way to ensure that they

remain unpurified and un-subjectified, still "heaps of meat". The remains of the hijackers that have been identified are separated and sequestered in evidence lockers in undisclosed locations in New York and Virginia. To date, the remains of 13 of the 19 hijackers have been identified by DNA, although the FBI has refused to say which have been identified (Winter 2009). Furthermore, the task of completely sorting out the hijackers from the victims has been deemed impossible because of how small, damaged, and scattered the body fragments are. No official determination has been made about what to do with the remains, which have not been requested by any of the hijacker's families or governments (Conant 2009). The practices of identifying and burying the remains has resulted in the subjectification of the remains of the victims, but lacks ZAKA's efforts at treating all remains as human. These un- reconstituted bodies remain "heaps of meat," lying in limbo as something other than human. While these abjected bodies remain unsignified, a great deal of effort has gone into interpreting and narrativizing other bodies: the bodies of female suicide bombers.

Gendering the Bomber

As discussed above, the body of the suicide bomber is, in the moments after detonation, a body whose constitution in the symbolic order has been disrupted by the collapsing of the borders between inside and outside, making the body abject. Representing a radical separation between subjectivity and body, the suicide bomber and his or her victim(s) must be re-signified as part of an ongoing process of representations that constitutes not only religious or national subject, but sexed and gendered bodies in a particular gendered order as well. When the bodies of female suicide bombers are involved, the reconstruction effort involves the representation of their bodies and their actions after death. Sometimes this signification happens in advance of the bombing and is undertaken by the bombers themselves. In their testimonies, the women describe their actions in terms of seizing the reigns of political militancy. As female suicide bomber Ayat al-Akhras said in her video testimony, "I've chosen to say with my body what Arab leaders have failed to say." Akhras continued: "I say to Arab leaders, stop sleeping. Stop failing to fulfill your duty. Shame on the Arab armies who are sitting and watching the girls of Palestine fighting while they are asleep" (Hasso 2005: 29). By killing and dying for their nation, in one sense these women challenge the gendered protector/protected dichotomy. However, at the same time, the

framing of their suicide mission as a wake-up call to male leaders reproduces gendered roles of politics and war: both are the proper realm of men. Thus while her actions transgress gender roles, Akhras's statement serves to represent her actions as feminine, and even an attempt to compel traditional gender roles in her words cajoling Palestinian male leadership. Her performance, both in words and deed, are actions that disrupt Israeli sovereignty while instantiating a Palestinian sovereignty that reproduces the familiar relationship between women's bodies and the state. Other representations of the female suicide bombers serve to constitute them as wives and mothers in a heterosexual symbolic system.

The female suicide bomber is frequently represented as a bride. The female suicide bombers of the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP) were glorified as "Brides of the South," (O'Rourke 2008: 695) and Palestinian female suicide bombers have been referred to as "Bride[s] of Palestine" (Naamen 2007) or as "Bride[s] of Heaven" (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 124). Called the "Bride of Blood," San'ah Muheidli, who drove her car into Israeli military convoy in southern Lebanon in 1985, told her mother in a videotaped message, "Be merry, to let your joy explode as if it were my wedding day" (Taheri 1987: 128). Female suicide bombers are also represented as mothers, submissive and self-sacrificing on behalf of the nation. In such cases, the bomber is seen as metaphorically procreating through her actions: as one commentator on the first Palestinian female suicide bomber Wafa Idris proclaimed, "She bore in her belly the fetus of a rare heroism, and gave birth by blowing herself up!" (quoted in Cunningham 2009: 568). In both of these, the violence of women is made sense of by placing it in gendered and heteronormative narratives. The body of the female suicide bomber is subjectified according to gender and heterosexual norms as wife and mother.

The female suicide bomber marked as 'pregnant' is figured as not only a mother-to-be marked by her gendered embodiment, but a particularly monstrous embodiment—a body that is not quite one, not quite two. The pregnant body is deformed from within, not from an external threat. The pregnant female body also problematizes the boundaries between self and other, becoming an improper, abject body (Shildrick 2002: 31). The female suicide bomber as 'pregnant' is an ambiguous figure, representing the heterogeneous space pre-existing the division between self and other, but also, through the act of giving birth, of expulsion of the other from

the self (the mother's body being expelled, abjected).   Demographic concerns over the Palestinian birth rate exceeding Israel's as well as the fear that a 'pregnant' woman could be concealing a bomb make the Palestinian pregnant body especially threatening.

The constitution of female suicide bombers as maternal subjects by public declarations after their deaths is made clear by the following statement published about Wafa Idris, noting her beauty, purity and connection to the genealogy of the nation, "what is more beautiful than the transformation of a person from a chunk of flesh and blood to illuminated purity and a spirit that cuts across generations?" (quoted in Cunningham 2009: 568).   The discourse of the female suicide bomber after her death takes a body that is abject, stripped of subjectivity, and remakes it into a maternal, reproductive figure, akin to the "mother of the nation," that characterizes women in nationalist discourses (Yuval-Davis 1997: 23). Her body is thus (re)produced as a sexed body under the regime of heteronormativity, 'purifying' it from any contamination of gender roles, and reinstating the regime of masculine sovereignty. The gendering of the bodies of female suicide bombers as well as the construction of the bodies of the victims of suicide bombers as Jewish in Israel demonstrate the work that takes place both before and after the bomb to inscribe bodies with political subjectivity, as members of a community that must be reconstructed. This work suggests that the project of constituting bodies is ongoing, both in terms of gender and in terms of the state.

The language of weddings and reproduction to describe female suicide bombers transposes the role of women in nationalist discourses. While women are usually represented as the soil of the nation (that is, raped by invaders) or as reproducers of sons to fight for the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997; Massad 1995), female suicide bombers are represented as performing a similar role through their violence: birthing a nation by both dying and killing. Violence that might be taken as an act of resistance to sovereign boundary-making, as well as a kind of sovereign act in itself, is inscribed within a gendered order that codes women's political agency in terms of maternity. Such a reconstruction of female suicide bombers has ambiguous effects; women's political agency is recognized, yet only through gendered and heterosexual narratives. While such narratives are a way of 'keeping women in their place' as wives and mothers, the

public and political nature of this violence and the way it disrupts national borders, boundaries of the body and gender roles suggest a more tenuous and uneasy relationship between the state's sovereign power and its ability to produce stable borders and bounded bodies. Female suicide bombers are figures of anxiety because their bodies, already abject in the sovereign order, violate borders of bodies and states, but whose bodies show sovereignty as precarious and inadequate to instilling permanent order.

Conclusion

In this article, I argued that the practice of suicide bombing, especially when practiced by a feminine body, challenges presumptions of the body as a bounded, unitary space and suggests a view of the body as a permeable, leaking, flowing space. The suicide bomber, and the practices of (re)constituting the body of the bomber suggests bodies are both politically constituted, as well as *constituting* in the symbolic politics of abjection. At the same time, this re-thinking of the body necessitates a rethinking of the terms of the state and sovereignty that are implied by the metaphor of the body politic. The gendered body politic is rendered ambiguous in light of the suicide bomber generally, and even more so in the case of the female suicide bomber.

Furthermore, by reading suicide bombing as a practice, we are perhaps more inclined to view states and bodies as 'bodies without organs' which are not unitary, confined to a particular space, nor with a fixed structure (see Rasmussen and Brown 2005: 479). The practice of suicide bombing challenges us to think of bounded bodies and bounded states as only ever political performances that can be reinforced, but never completed. The feminist critique of bodies understood as unitary and bounded challenges us to rethink the body politic if bodies, and states, are only precariously and incompletely constituted by practices of sovereignty. Suicide bombing and practices of (re)constituting bodies show the role of bodies in the making and remaking of states.

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[1] The language used to describe this phenomenon is inherently political. Some scholars feel 'suicide bombing' is too narrow a term to address the range of tactics that require the death of their perpetrators, and use the term 'suicide missions'. Others use the terms 'suicide terrorism,' 'suicide killer' or 'homicide bomber.' These latter three are considered to be biased against the various groups who use these techniques. Some groups have referred to such acts as 'martyrdom operations,' a term which seems euphemize the actions. In light of these controversies, I use the more familiar terminology of 'suicide bombing' because I intend the more narrow meaning of the term for the purposes of this paper and precisely because of its familiarity. It is my intention to take this widely discussed phenomenon and delve into an undertheorized aspect of it; the bodily politics of the suicide bomber.

[2] The Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism's database lists 125 total attacks by women in the years 1981 to 2011, covering all applicable conflicts. While this can give us a rough idea of the relative frequency of women versus men as suicide bombers, the high number of attacks in which the gender is unknown in this database suggests the numbers of women suicide bombers is almost certainly under counted. Their data indicate 17 out of 198 in Israel/Palestinian territories/Lebanon were perpetrated by women, 29 out of 107 total attacks in Sri Lanka were perpetrated by women, as were 20 out of 60 attacks in Russia by Chechen separatists (CPOST 2011). These data also do not take into account bombings that were thwarted: while there may have been 17 successful suicide bombings by women in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, up to 96 women have attempted to complete a suicide mission (Bloom 200: 128). Bloom estimates that 40% of suicide bombers affiliated with the PKK in Turkey, around 43% of participants in suicide attacks by the LTTE in Sri Lanka were women, and around a third of the al-Qaeda-in-Iraq bombings were perpetrated by women (2011:141, 214).

[3] ZAKA is a voluntary organization in whose members assist in rescue and identification work following acts of terrorism, road accidents and other disasters.

[4] For a similar argument regarding the state-as-person debate, see (Schiff 2008).

[5] ZAKA's work is not confined to Israel/Palestine, as in recent years they have used their expertise at forensic identification after the South Asian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the 2008 Mumbai bombings and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Nor, of course, are suicide bombings in general or by women specifically limited to Israel/Palestine: it is the conjunction of suicide bombings plus the work of ZAKA that makes this a valuable 'case' for thinking about bodies, borders and orders.

[6] Of course, in the context of Israel/Palestine, not all victims are Jewish; approximately 25% of Israelis are Arab or members of another minority group. Furthermore, as the group founded and largely made up of Haredim, or 'ultra-Orthodox' Jews, ZAKA's relation to the Israeli state is complicated. Haredim typically reject Zionism and the legitimacy of the state; however, ZAKA's humanitarian work and work on behalf of the victims of terrorism and other disasters has been acknowledged and accepted by the state, which coordinates efforts with ZAKA. In addition, the effort to signify bodies as Jewish in the context of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict has the effect of signifying bodies as belonging to a national as well as religious identity because of the promotion of Israel as a Jewish state.