The Making of a Human Bomb

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE

NASSER ABUFARHA

The Making of a Human Bomb

THE CULTURES AND PRACTICE OF VIOLENCE SERIES

Series Editors:

Neil L. Whitehead, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Jo Ellen Fair, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Leigh Payne, University of Wisconsin, Madison

The study of violence has often focused on the political and economic conditions under which violence is generated, the suffering of victims, and the psychology of its interpersonal dynamics. Less familiar are the role of perpetrators, their motivations, and the social conditions under which they are able to operate. In the context of postcolonial state building and more latterly the collapse and implosion of society, community violence, state repression, and the phenomena of judicial inquiries in the aftermath of civil conflict, there is a need to better comprehend the role of those who actually do the work of violence—torturers, assassins, and terrorists—as much as the role of those who suffer its consequences.

When atrocity and murder take place, they feed the world of the iconic imagination that transcends reality and its rational articulation; but in doing so imagination can bring further violent realities into being. This series encourages authors who build on traditional disciplines and break out of their constraints and boundaries, incorporating media and performance studies and literary and cultural studies as much as anthropology, sociology, and history.

NASSER ABUFARHA

The Making of a Human Bomb

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE

Duke University Press
Durham and London
2009

© 2009 Duke University Press
All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ♾
Designed by C. H. Westmoreland
Typeset in Quadraat by Achorn International
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data appear on
the last printed page of this book.

TO MY FATHER,

Ahmed Abdelhadi Abufarha

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

CHAPTER ONE Introduction 1

CHAPTER TWO Histories and Historicities in Palestine 25

CHAPTER THREE State Expansion and the Violence of "Peace Making" in Palestine 62

CHAPTER FOUR The Carrier 97

CHAPTER FIVE Dying to Live 134

CHAPTER SIX The Strategies and Politics of Martyrdom in Palestine 187

CHAPTER SEVEN Conclusion 222

Appendix 241

Notes 243

Bibliography 257

Index 267

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the consistent support of a number of people. In particular, I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to the ongoing intellectual engagement of my advisor, Professor Neil Whitehead, with the theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of violence over the course of my doctoral studies, including his own extensive and enlightening scholarship on the subject. I also express my deep appreciation to Professor Larry Nesper, Professor Sharon Hutchinson, and Professor Flagg Miller from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, for careful reading, comments, and discussions which sharpened my analysis and provided me with multiple ways of thinking about the various aspects of my project. I also thank my committee members from outside the Department of Anthropology, Professor Lieh Payne from the Department of Political Science and Professor Heinz Klug from the Law School, for providing me with valuable insights from other disciplines which broadened the scope of my analysis.

Embarking on a project to write a book on this sensitive and complex topic has been both a challenging and a rewarding experience. I extend my thanks to my family in Palestine who hosted me and supported me during my fieldwork, to the numerous people I interviewed, and to those who assisted me in arranging interviews and obtaining data critical to my work. I would also like to express my great appreciation for the patience and support I received from my family as I conducted fieldwork overseas and spent long hours immersed in research and writing. My special thanks to my partner for her constant engagement with my work and critiques of my writing, and to my children for their enormous tolerance of long periods of work and for providing joyous breaks from the intensity of my research.

I also thank my friends in Madison, who helped me and supported me on multiple fronts and provided me with relentless encouragement. Furthermore, I wish to express my appreciation to Fair Trade Coffee House on State Street, Mother Fool's Coffee House on Willy Street, Company of Thieves Café on Johnson Street, and the Multicultural Student Center at the University of Wisconsin and their staff for providing me with a perfect environment in which to think through and write most of the pages of this book.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I returned to Palestine on 1 October 2003 to conduct my field research after being away from the region for over four years. It was my first trip to Palestine after the outbreak of Al-Aqsa Intifada. I had for the first time experienced having to cross so many roadblocks and checkpoints. For the first time I experienced traveling in a taxi through gravel and dirt roads in the mountains and the fields, going around checkpoints and roadblocks. It was the first time that I arrived in my village from a major trip through the eastern village side road instead of the main road from the south. Jenin, my local town, and my village Al-Jalama, five kilometers apart, were isolated from each other. I had been on the road all day and arrived at dark. When I first arrived at home, one of my mother's first few comments to me—she is in her late seventies—was *shufet chaif akhathu et-tariq minna* (See how they took the road from us!!). She was referring to the Israeli blockades of movement and confinement of the village: all roads are "officially" blocked with mounds of soil, large concrete blocks, or deep ditches, while Israeli tanks and hummers roam, track, and chase blockade "violators," passers-by who are constantly trying to reopen the road or, by monitoring Israeli army movements, circumvent a roadblock so that they can go about their daily activities of farming, shopping, going to school, going to the doctor, or going to work. My mother's comment was striking to me at the moment. However, little did I know at the time that it would become profound and central to my research on the subject of suicide bombings. As I discovered, suicide bombings create cultural conceptions of accessibility and represent the breaking down of barriers, thus mediating issues of confinement, isolation, and fragmentation on the one hand and freedom and unity on the other.

I conducted my research on political violence in Palestine as carried out by Palestinian groups against Israeli targets. What are known in the West as suicide bombings are referred to by Palestinians as *'amaliyyat istishhadiyya* (operations of martyrdom). Even though I examine suicide bombings in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, my research provides a template for analyzing similar forms of violence in other political and ethnic conflicts, be they regional or global. This research seeks to present an understanding of the violence through historical and cultural lenses and demonstrates that violence can only be entirely understood against a backdrop of specific histories and cultures. The analyses that I apply here to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will provide a template that can also be applied in other contexts, but the conclusions may differ.

My research explores three areas with respect to the martyrdom operations in Palestine that scholars on the subject of violence agree to be areas of theoretical importance: the cultural poetics of political violence in Palestine; the nature of state violence (by Israel) and the mimetic violence carried out by resistance groups; and the relevance of globalization, modernity, and the consequent resurgence of traditions in shaping this form of violence (Whitehead 2004). To that end I interviewed members of Palestinian resistance factions who set up suicide-bombing operations and other political activists who give political context to the act of suicide bombing, to get an understanding of the groups' political and military strategies in carrying out martyrdom operations. I talked with families of participants in these operations and looked into the participants' life histories to assess the logic of the suicide, martyrdom, or sacrifice missions. I also reviewed myriad ways of representing martyrdom violence and interviewed a number of cultural performers (songwriters, painters, dancers, etc.), producers of the poetics of resistance who shape the broader Palestinian cultural discourse within which the act of the martyr is given meaning. In addition, my research is situated in an ethnographic representation of Palestinian life that sees the Palestinians' encounter with Israel as the cosmological and ontological basis of the present cultural order in Palestine (see the discussion of methodology later in this chapter).

By examining the Palestinian encounter with Israel and the generative cultural schemes produced by the encounter, the aesthetics of the performance of Palestinian "suicide bombing" missions, their cultural rep-

resentations, and the poetics that their performance and representations generate, I argue that the practice of sacrificing Palestinian bodies and applying violence against the "enemy" in the same act mediates cultural ideas of uprooting and rootedness, fragmentation and unity, confinement and freedom, domination and independence. These social processes are mediated through the cultural conceptions generated in the poetics of the performance that create unconfined life, unsegmented peoplehood, and unfragmented Palestine in the Palestinian cultural imaginary. This free and united life in the cultural imaginary is created in contrast to Palestinians' ontological conditions of fragmentation, confinement, displacement, and encapsulation. Similarly, these acts represent defiance to the international order and assert agency, self-reliance, control over life, and a long-sought independence against a backdrop of a history of political domination. These aesthetics create polarizations between the *ontological conditions* of encapsulation, fragmentation, physical confinement, displacement, and political domination and the *aspirations* of unity, freedom, and independence of Palestinians and their rootedness in Palestine. Through these cultural conceptions the participation in the sacrifice or martyrdom and the application of violence against Israeli publics become intelligible and meaningful acts and generate a process through which a system of motivation arises. The sacrifice creates the naturalized, free, pre-occupation Palestine; the violence against Israeli publics destabilizes the normalcy of the "enemy" in Palestine, challenging its presence and asserting Palestinian rootedness in contested places. Moreover, the participants' taking of their own lives in the performance asserts their independence and self-reliance. Within this discourse of sacrifice and martyrdom performed along mimetic violence, the death of the sacrificer is conceived as a form of life or a better life that makes death in sacrifice not something to be feared but rather an aspired form of living. In this view, death is about living, not dying. To die is to live through the iconic image of the martyr within the cultural poetics of the resistance and through the freedom and unity of Palestinian peoplehood and the land of Palestine that is created in the cultural imaginary.

These positive cultural conceptions associated with the performance of martyrdom in Palestine should not obscure the reality that these acts of martyrdom include acts of indiscriminate terror against Israeli publics

in civil spaces. That my research does not focus on these victims is in no way an attempt to hide these aspects of the martyrdom performances or to lessen their cruelty. However, my research is focused on the perpetrators and the ways in which the performance of violence is constructed, motivated, and mediated from the perpetrators' perspective. And in this regard the killing of Israeli civilians in particular and the illegitimacy of these acts of violence in the global political discourse carries some of those potential meanings. I explore these constructions and conceptions in the discussion of the meanings and strategies of martyrdom in the following chapters.

Collective and group violence has long existed in the human experience. However, in the last decade there has been an alarming increase in the use of violence as a medium for cultural assertion and social and political mediation in regional ethnic conflicts such as those in Bosnia and Rwanda. Most recently, there has been a frightening use of "suicide" bombings in Palestine, Iraq, Chechnya, Afghanistan, and even Europe and North America. My research project seeks to understand the *making* of the *human bomb* through ethnographic study of their historical, cultural, and political constructions in Palestine. If we seek to understand these violent practices, we must move beyond condemning them and questioning their legitimacy and examine the social and political processes that make them meaningful in their local settings. If we were to limit our discussion of this form of violence to issues of legitimacy, we would not even begin to understand its production, much less be any better equipped to deal with it. And if we continue to think of violence as fueled by the inherent hatred of its perpetrators, we will be blinded to the social processes through which violence is constructed, and the only policy options we will have for dealing with violence will involve applying similar or greater violence, thus validating the acts of the perpetrators and leaving us hostage to cycles of violence and counter-violence. A better understanding of violent practices is a must if we seek to develop more appropriate and effective responses to it. The widespread use of suicide bombings makes clear that this form of violence is becoming more meaningful to more people around the world. And with this increase in popularity, the military response becomes increasingly invalid and ineffective. Pure military responses seem only to have contributed to the intensification of suicide bombing thus far.

The frightening rise in the use of suicide bombings and strategies of martyrdom by different groups with local agendas in Palestine, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Chechnya, and Afghanistan, and others with global agendas in the United States, Britain, Spain, Indonesia, and Morocco, has prompted an array of new research that seeks to understand suicide bombings and to investigate and explore responses to them. Several recent academic articles and books on suicide bombing have been published. These works have focused variously on the intensity of suicide bombings and their widespread application in the global context (Atran 2004; Bergen 2002; Gambil 1998; Reuter 2004; Saez 2000; Victor 2003), political motivations (Bloom 2005; Hafez 2003; Pape 2005), and psychological and socioeconomic dimensions (Andoni 1997; Davice 2003; El-Sarraj 2002; Merrari 1990; Reich 1990). Anthropological and sociological contributions include Dorraj on "Martyrdom in the Iranian Political Culture" (1997) and Andriolo's "Murder by Suicide: Episodes from Muslim History" (2002). Even some economists offer explanations, as in "Suicide-Bombings as Inter-generational Investment" (Azam 2005). The emerging field also includes discussions of terrorism and suicide bombings from a philosophical perspective (Margalite 2002; Walzer 2004), as well as contributions by state strategists like Shaul Shay, head of the history department of the Israeli army (*The Shahids*, 2004, with a foreword by the director of Israeli military intelligence, Major General Ahron Farakash), as well as Khosrokhavar's *Suicide Bombers: Allah's New Martyrs* (2005), sponsored by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, there are contributions by Palestinian academics (Khashan 2003), and works that explore the origins and political goals of suicide bombing, its gender dimensions, its legitimacy, and responses to it.

However, the literature on the subject thus far is still a long way from providing a full understanding of the various manifestations of violence through suicide, its cultural constructions, its motivations, and its role in political and military strategy. My research strives to provide a holistic approach: to gain a solid anthropological understanding of this form of violence so that we can develop effective responses to it. There is a need to move the analyses beyond the actions themselves and their political underpinnings. Without expanding the analysis to social and cultural realms at the level of individuals, groups, local communities, society at large, regional communities, the society of the enemy state and its

support, global powers, and international observers, this form of violence cannot be entirely understood. A holistic approach, after Ferguson (2003), requires a lot of work to accomplish but is necessary if we are to do justice to the subject and provide comprehensive analyses that can afford us the tools to develop effective responses.

My research demonstrates that the political dimensions of these forms of violence cannot be separated from a broader cultural dynamic that underlies the motivation of groups and individual participants. Even the most careful political analyses of these forms of violence will fall short, precisely because martyrdom is mediated through cultural forms and local experiences. It is rather the cultural schemes as they are transformed across time—as well as the cultural representations of the performance of violence that illuminate the oppositions, analogies, and homologies integrated into the performance—that constitute a critical field of analysis. What are the political impact and cultural significance of engaging in violence through self-sacrifice and martyrdom? How are the acts of sacrifice and martyrdom constructed and culturally conceived? These are important questions in analyzing and understanding these forms of violence.

My background growing up in Palestine not only gives me a deep understanding and appreciation of the historical and cultural backdrop of this form of violence in the Palestinian context but also provides me with a level of comfort necessary to discuss sensitive issues with social and political actors. My research is first and foremost a project of providing an anthropological understanding of martyrdom and the violence of suicide bombings in Palestine by Palestinian groups and individuals. My position as a Palestinian ethnographer provides me with access to inside information for anthropological analysis. Second, growing up with the same experiences as the subjects of my research enables me to appreciate the cultural conceptions, histories, and ontological conditions to which my subjects refer when they articulate their thoughts. This position also gives me an insider lens with which to deconstruct the semiotics and poetics of the cultural representations associated with this particular form of violence.

On the other hand, being a Palestinian ethnographer, researching this highly sensitive topic, has presented challenges during my fieldwork and

research. Some of these challenges are related to the fieldwork itself, others to the presentation of the research outcomes. Throughout this project I found myself walking a fine line between being viewed by my research subjects as a security threat or in one way or another as potentially undermining the resistance, and being considered as legitimizing what is characterized as a terrorist act in the West. My research recognizes the fact that these acts of violence are already legitimate and culturally appropriate forms of resistance in Palestine. The idea behind my anthropological research into violence is neither to condone it, nor legitimize it, nor condemn it. My research is aimed at understanding violence from the perpetrator's perspective, to illuminate the social processes through which the violence became legitimate from the perpetrator's perspective and thus, potentially, to open doors and possibilities for an alternative mediation of the social processes that are now being mediated through acts of violence.

Martyrdom in Palestine

The 'amaliyyat istishhadiyya (martyrdom operations) practiced today in Palestine are a fairly recent development in the Palestinian resistance discourse that started in 1994. This form of political violence in Palestine was introduced by the Palestinian nationalist-Islamic group Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya–Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement–Hamas) as a form of protest against and opposition to the Oslo "peace process" of the 1990s. Later in 1995 the other Palestinian Islamic-nationalist group, Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami (Islamic Jihad movement), started carrying out such operations as well. These operations intensified after the beginning of the latest Palestinian uprising, Al-Aqsa Intifada, in the fall of 2000 and were adopted by other Palestinian groups, secular and leftist, such as Harakat al-Taharur al-Watani al-Filistini–Fatah (Palestinian National Liberation Movement–Fatah) and al-Jabha al-Shaa'biyya li Tahrir Filistin (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, or PFLP).

The practice of self-sacrifice by Palestinian fighters is however nothing new to the Palestinian resistance. Self-sacrifice has been the core strategy for generations of Palestinian resistance groups. The practice was glorified in the al-Karameh battle,[1] in which Palestinian *fida'iyeen* members of

the Palestinian resistance factions of the PLO scored a victory against the attacking Israeli army near the village Karameh in Jordan in 1969. Ever since the *fida'i* (the one who sacrifices self) became the icon of the Palestinian resistance, symbolizing bravery, honor, and sacrifice. After al-Karameh the Palestinian resistance throughout the 1970s rested on *'amaliyyat fida'iyya* (operations of self-sacrifice) as the main form of resistance. These operations were mainly cross-border operations from Jordan and Lebanon, in which most mission carriers engaged with their Israeli targets until their death.

Hamas first executed operations in the Israeli-inhabited towns of Afula and Khedara in the spring of 1994, in which the mission carrier strapped explosives to his or her body and then set them off. These operations were described as *'amaliyyat istishhadiyya* (martyrdom operations), or as *'amaliyyat fida'iyya* (self-sacrifice operations) by some of the local media. The *fida'i* (sacrificer) notion is more secular, the *istishhad* (martyrdom) notion more Islamic. Today istishhad is the most common term for acts of sacrifice in the Palestinian resistance and is used by Islamic, secular, and Marxist groups alike. Some of the regional media, however, like al-Jazeera, still refer to *istishhadi* operations as *'amaliyyat fida'iyya* (self-sacrifice operations).

The term *fida'i*, for the one who sacrifices self, is derived from *fida'*, which is paid in money or goods to free or rescue someone who became a prisoner of war or got in trouble with others. The term *fida'* is also used for the liberation of something or someone. For example, one would say: "*mata fida' al-watan*" (he died in sacrifice for the homeland). The notion of the *shahid* (martyr)[2] is also not new in Palestinian resistance discourse. The shahid is anyone who dies fighting in defense of the nation or the homeland. All the *fida'iyeen* who died in cross-border operations are considered *shuhada'* (martyrs). Also noncombatant victims of the *intifada*—ordinary people, women, and schoolchildren—are all considered *shuhada'*. The term *shahid* is used culturally to refer to anyone killed by the aggressor, whether a fighter or victim of aggression, whether a member of an Islamic, Christian, secular, or Marxist organization, whether targeted or untargeted. The term *istishhadi*, now used in particular for those who carry out the martyrdom operation or suicide bombing, is new and represents the equivalent of the *fida'i*: the one who performs the self-sacrifice.

The shahid (martyr) became the icon of the first intifada (1987–92).

The concept of the shahid, the victim who falls at the hands of oppressive occupation, was in line with the political dynamics of the time, when efforts were made to lobby the international community for support of Palestinians' quest for freedom. The first intifada primarily banked on the international community and global powers to place pressure on Israel to reverse its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and to address other issues of conflict with Israel such as the fate of Palestinian refugees. In contrast to the first intifada, which had as its main intended audience the international community, the second intifada that broke out in September 2000 after the collapse of the peace process was a response to the failure of the international community to bring about a meaningful political change in Israel's occupation of the Palestinians. Thus, in the second intifada the international community was to be disregarded. In the second intifada Palestinians directed their actions primarily at Israel, the Israeli publics, and world Zionism. The second intifada emphasized self-reliance, as Palestinians abandoned hope for the international community's meaningful involvement in the Palestinian question at an official level. The collapse of the "peace process," the intensification of the Palestinians' fragmentation, and the consolidation of Israeli containment and occupation policies that were the outcomes of these "peace" processes, along with the expansion of the war in the region by the United States and Britain and the politics of the New World Order, all represent a collapse of the world system to which Palestinians could potentially look for help. The aim in the second intifada was to disregard the international community and further challenge the established international order and its rules. The international order is understood by Palestinians as merely curbing Palestinian resistance while ignoring the restoration of Palestinian rights and paying only lip service to the Palestinian being violated by Israel. These political dynamics resulted in a reconceptualization of the resistance: Israel in Palestine was now challenged through direct engagement with Israel and Israelis, with the Palestinians relying on their own resources to achieve their political aspirations.

While the notion of the shahid (martyr) implies victimization, the *istishhadi* (martyrous one) is an active notion that emphasizes the heroism in the act of sacrifice. And since the istishhadi is active, the new term also makes the image of the istishhadi contain more life than the shahid does. The act of *istishhad* (dying in martyrdom) has developed not only

into a military and political strategy for groups and individuals but into a cultural act loaded with meanings. It is primarily those meanings that give the concept its political and military weight. In the second intifada a new discourse of *istishhadiyeen* (martyrous ones) has been articulated in ways that alleviate the intentionality of martyrdom as an act of heroism. In this new discourse of martyrdom Arab and Muslim solidarity is to be achieved through cultural references associated with the acts of martyrdom: the target audience lies within the Palestinian community and radiates outward toward Israel, Israeli publics, and Zionist supporters abroad. The international community is no longer a primary audience: its protest of violent actions that target civilians in defiance of international law is no longer a concern for the Palestinian resistance. To the contrary, part of the construction of martyrdom operations during the second intifada is to challenge this political international order.

The term *istishhadi* did not exist in the Arabic dictionary, nor does the concept of actively seeking martyrdom exist among traditional Islamic notions. The use of the term *istishhadiyeen* (plural, the ones who execute martyrdom operations) was introduced by Hamas and aims to attach religious meanings to the act of self-sacrifice, since Hamas conceives of Islam as the most solid ideology through which to achieve the goals of the Palestinian national struggle. The istishhadiyeen have captured the imagination of Palestinian youth and the general public in similar ways as the *fida'iyeen* of the 1960s and the 1970s. The istishhadi now carries new meanings and qualities above that of the shahid. The image of istishhadi is the icon of the Palestinian resistance, replacing the icon of the shahid of the first intifada and the notion of fida'i, which was the icon of the resistance in the 1960s and 1970s. These lexical differences and the rise of the discourse of the istishadiyeen in the resistance have created a new cultural space for the istishhadi in Palestine, one that occupies the highest, most noble ground, above that of the shahid. Hamas leaders have asserted as much. For example, one of the Izzideen al-Qassam Martyrs Brigades, Anwar, stated:[3] "The *istishhadi* is an advanced stage and above *shahada* because it comes with a desire and a persistence and a motivation with sincerity. The culture of *istishhad* has become domestic to the Palestinian people. It's become a natural thing, not strange. It has become a picture of the nationalist Islamic work. It has entered the Palestinian popular dictionary. The people see the *ist-*

ishhadi as he has gotten the highest degrees of nationalism and religion and sacrificed self and has gotten the biggest reward: paradise. Everyone who takes such a mission is considered a hero and maybe a neighborhood or a street or a square would be named after him." The process described here, of strapping oneself with explosives and blowing oneself up in a crowd of the "enemy," is referred to in Palestine as *al-'amal al-istishhadi* (the work of martyrdom), whether applied against military or civilian targets. It differs lexically as well as in its cultural contents and military and political impact from operations carried out by armed fighters against Israeli targets, military or civilian. The istishhadi operations represent a distinct kind of performance separate from conventional armed resistance in that they are mainly aimed at Israeli public life: buses, cafeterias, markets, nightclubs.

Operations of this sort have spread over most of the Israeli urban centers and reached rich and poor neighborhoods, including an operation in Tel Aviv only a couple of blocks from Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's residence and within one block of the Israeli Ministry of Defense. Those who carry out these operations are not necessarily members of political groups but rather volunteers who offer themselves to these groups. These operations in particular inflict an intense feeling of fear and horror on the Israelis, and while also instilling a sense of strength and assertion of identity among Palestinians. It is these operations of istishhad that are the subject of my inquiry.

Western scholars and media commentators generally refer to the istishhad operations as suicide bombings. President George W. Bush as well as British government officials are increasingly using "homicide bombing," a term introduced as part of the "Global War on Terror" and one that makes the act more obscure rather than accessible. The various terms used in the West tend to confuse our understanding of the acts by leading us to associate the acts with the terms' usual meanings. Hardly anyone in the western scholarly and media discourse would refer to "self-sacrifice operations" or "martyrdom operations," as is done in Palestine. The concept of "self-sacrifice" is at the core of the act of istishhad and it is totally missing from the English-language terms used by most commentators on the subject.

Over the past decade journalists and scholars have written extensively in an effort to explain the individual motivations and logic underlying

"suicide attacks." In this connection it is useful to recall Émile Durkheim's analysis of suicide in nineteenth-century Europe. Durkheim distinguished three kinds of suicide: egoistic, fatalistic, and altruistic (Durkheim 1951). Egoistic suicide occurs under conditions of psychological trauma and social isolation from which death is seen as an escape. Fatalistic suicide is committed by individuals who feel oppressively isolated from their social setting. Altruistic suicide, by contrast, occurs under conditions of high social integration and strong social bonds: the suicide is committed out of a sense of obligation toward the community. Durkheim's three kinds of suicide help us to understand where the act of martyrdom may or may not fit within the notion of suicide.

A recent anthropological inquiry by Dabbagh (2004) into suicide in Palestine finds that in spite of the severe conditions of the Israeli occupation, suicide as a way to escape conditions of social isolation and psychological trauma is still infrequent in comparison with western societies. Dabbagh conducted her research in the West Bank during the 1990s with the focus of her data collection on Ramallah and Jenin. Although the 1990s are a social period totally different from that which followed the outbreak of Al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, neither period demonstrates people in Palestine suffering from conditions of social isolation from their own communities. What they do suffer from is geographic isolation and fragmentation, which are normally compensated for by various forms of conceptual integration and assertions of unity of the land and unity of the people in the conceptual spheres, processes that I will explore in the coming chapters. The one kind of suicide that is relevant to this analysis is Durkheim's notion of altruistic suicide. The sense of duty and obligation toward the community or the nation is strong among most of the participants in martyrdom operations. However, that sense of duty and obligation is not limited to the community. Those who carry out martyrdom missions can be motivated with a sense of obligation toward the land, the homeland, the city or place to which they are strongly connected, the nation, the Divine, or previous and future generations. Hence even the notion of altruistic suicide does not fully describe the logic of the individual act.

Sacrifice, on the other hand, which was originally implicit in the Arabic-language discourse in Palestine, gets closer to communicating the individual psychology and cultural meanings of the act, as well as

how the act gets transformed from the individual level to the collective level through its poetics and cultural conceptions. Here Hubert's and Mauss's notion of "objects of sacrifice," which could be any addressed party, the land of Palestine, the Palestinian nation, or the Divine, is more appropriate to describe the act than *altruistic* suicide. The "objects of sacrifice" refer to "those kinds of things for whose sake the sacrifice takes place" (Hubert and Mauss 1964, 10). Hubert and Mauss give the name "sacrifier" to "the subject to whom the benefits of sacrifice thus accrue, or who undergoes its effects," which in the fida'i or the istishhadi in this context is the social person who benefits from the effects of the sacrifice. However, I apply the term *sacrificer* because the fida'i or the istishhadi is both the one who undergoes the sacrifice effects and acquires its benefits and at the same time the one whose body is the sacrificed object or the *victim* in the act of sacrifice. The istishhadi represents the "moral person" who bears the cost of sacrifice. Hubert and Mauss (1964) define sacrifice as a "religious act which, through concentration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned" (13). The concentration of the istishhadi body produces an assertion of the istishhadi social person. Through its cultural conception the concentration of the istishhadi becomes a sacrificial offering from the Palestinian people. Hence the Palestinian people gain the benefits of sacrifice and undergo its effects.

The act of the istishhadi brings about twofold results. The sacrificer gains moral qualities as the "person who accomplishes the sacrifice" and the land of Palestine gains sacred qualities as the "object of sacrifice." Both processes of attaching meaning call for the regeneration of the act. The more acts of sacrifice are committed, the more the istishhadi gains moral qualities and becomes idealized. At the same time, the more istishhadiyeen are sacrificed for the land, the more the land becomes sacred, requiring more sacrifice to save it or honor it. The *victim*, who is the istishhadi in the biological body, is the intermediary between the sacrificer (the istishhadi as the social person or in his or her identity) and those to whom the sacrifice is addressed, namely the land of Palestine, the Palestinian place (Jerusalem, Haifa, Bissan, Safad, etc.),[4] the Palestinian nation, the Divine, or a combination of these based on the individual actor's or viewer's construction. The exchange of blood constitutes a

"blood covenant" (Hubert and Mauss 1964) that fuses human life with the addressed party, the land, the place, or divine life on the one hand and an exchange between the sacrificed body parts and the land of Palestine on the other. Furthermore, the concentration of the *victim*, the biological body, in the act of sacrifice concentrates or asserts the identity of the actor or sacrificer—here the istishhadi in the social person—and by extension concentrates the sacrificer as the Palestinian people.

This concept of sacrifice informs the dynamics of martyrdom in Palestine today. Human sacrifice in many forms is an ancient tradition in the Middle East (Green 1975). The concept further informs the relations of individuals to the community at micro and macro levels. Sacrifice is also conceived as it was at the time of its origins in ancient mythology: as that which creates life. The cultural conception of sacrifice is a ritual sequence connected to patterns of creation and exchange. Lincoln (1991) explores these concepts among the Persians, Indo-Europeans, Scythians, and Celts and demonstrates how sacrifices are acts that accompany transformations from the microcosm to the macrocosm. The dismembered parts of the sacrificed victims create the universe. These conceptions are achieved through correlations of different parts of the universe, which are seen as having been created by corresponding pieces of sacrificed human bodies. Thus the act of sacrifice represents a "homologic relation" between the human body and the environment.

In the Palestinian context the sacrificed Palestinian bodies in Palestine correlate alternative shapes to one another in a homologic relation; the dismembered body parts *create* the new universe within which *Palestine* is *alive*. In the Palestinian cultural representations of these acts of sacrifice and martyrdom, the blood is water that nourishes the fields where streams would flow and birds would sing. The human flesh is soil where flowers bloom. These meanings are conceived through the poetics of the performance, the sensory meanings polarized between realities and aspirations. The polarizations generate poetics within which a fusion in the *new* generated *life* in the cultural imaginary is achieved. The performance of every ritual of sacrifice by Palestinian martyrs in the land of Palestine repeats this process of transforming microcosm to macrocosm, shifting substance from the sacrificed body of the martyr to the "alloformic" parts of Palestine, to sustain *Palestinian* life with Palestinian characteristics and guard against the disappearance of Palestinian signs

through reconfiguration. Thus the sacrifice creates a new ontology through metonymic re-constitutions. In the Palestinian context, the notion of *sacrifice* is a more appropriate way to describe the act of the human bomb than "suicide" in any of its forms, because it encompasses the transformations and exchanges that take place between the sacrificed human body, the *human bomb*, and the land of Palestine and the Palestinian people.

The martyrdom notion in the new formulation of istishhadiyeen, building on the concept of the fida'iyeen, communicates the same meanings of sacrifice, adding to them a new Islamic strategy within which the sacrifice is enacted. The fida'iyeen discourse of the 1960s and 1970s was formulated in a political dynamic similar to that of the istishhadiyeen discourse. It emerged in response to the Arab regimes' defeat in 1967 and the Israeli occupation of the remainder of Palestine. The fida'iyeen discourse was also one that asserted self-reliance, sacrifice, and heroism. The istishhadiyeen discourse builds on the history of the fida'iyeen, transforming it into a generation of resistance informed by local knowledge, traditions, and thought. The istishhadiyeen discourse emphasizes the Islamic characteristics of the resistance. Still, the istishhadiyeen discourse is fundamentally different from the fida'iyeen discourse, in that the istishhadiyeen take their life in their own hands while the fida'i fought and took on missions that most certainly would end their lives. The assertion of the Islamic characteristics in the acts of the resistance also comments on, and engages with, increasing globalization and its local effects. Nevertheless, the devotion to Islam or belief in the Divine is not a necessary condition for the construction of sacrifice to take place, even in this new discourse of martyrdom that emphasizes the Islamic character. The fusion of the human life with the land, the place, or the nation, or the assertion of agency in the absence of belief in the Divine, constitutes a logical individual motivation for performing the sacrifice ritual.

The sacrificial notion sits well with the theoretical understanding of the violence applied and performed in the act. The istishhadi mission contains two acts of violence. One is applied against the performer's biological body and the second against a set of victims from the community of the "enemy." The application of Whitehead's concept of violence as a "cultural performance" (2002) and Riches's definition of violence as

a "communicative vehicle" (1986) would help us understand that the violence included in the act of sacrifice is a cultural performance that expresses and communicates cultural ideas, mediates social processes, and at the same time communicates with the "enemy." The dual violence included in the act makes its performance suitable to the political strategies of the moment, directed inward at Palestinian society and outward at Israeli society. It focuses the political and cultural ideas expressed through acts of resistance to the Palestinian and Israeli societies who are the new audience of the Palestinian resistance. Through the bodily practice of sacrificing Palestinians' bodies in the land of Palestine, Palestinians are recreating the ontologically fragmented Palestine and segmented Palestinians; as the sacrifice is performed. The violence disturbs the normalcy of the cultural order in Palestine (Israeli society) that replaced the Palestinian order, created the current ontology, and represents the primary obstacle to the physical unity of Palestine and the connectedness of the Palestinian people. The intentionality of taking one's own life through an act of sacrifice in the mission of martyrdom asserts an agency and an independence that articulate Palestinian identity and peoplehood in the face of an ontological order imposed by Israel that denies recognition and entitlements to the Palestinians and subjects them to social fragmentation. Thus beyond the dynamic of the encounter with the "enemy," the act of the human bomb contains cultural assertions of identity and place, and rootedness of identities in places. The terms used to refer to the act are crucial to analysis, and the notion of sacrifice is the appropriate one with which to frame our analysis of the istishhadi operations.

Methodology

I started my field research by making ethnographic observations: listening to ordinary people's reactions to acts of martyrdom, reading commentaries, poetry, and obituaries about the acts published in local and regional media and on web sites. I examined materials produced by the organizing factions such as posters, videos, booklets, and statements claiming responsibility for martyrdom operations. I also interviewed some of the families of istishhadiyeen as well as active group members

early in the fieldwork. These initial readings, interviews, and observations in the field were a launching pad. Together, these initial research assessments along with the literature review that I had conducted before my travel to the field guided the rest of my research. The initial assessments gave me clues as to where the meanings are derived from and how people relate to acts of martyrdom, which enabled me to focus my questions in subsequent interviews and guide the lens through which I looked at various aspects of the act.

As I considered the literature on violence and reflected on my initial field assessments, I noticed recurring themes and references in most materials produced about these operations to ideas about land and place, Israeli state violence, global systems and ideologies, and religion and religious duty. Because of the repeated assertion of these ideas I developed a research strategy to investigate the multiple dimensions of acts of martyrdom. These dimensions included the nature of Palestinians' encounter with Israel; the history of that encounter; Palestinian ideas about land and the symbolic representation of Palestinian identity; the historical context of the rise of the istishhadi represented in Palestinian iconography and the ways the istishhadi has risen within the resistance discourse; the cultural, political, and military dimensions of the istishhad in the Palestinian resistance; and the relevance of global ideas and powers, and their impacts and practices, to the formulation of istishhad as a form of resistance.

To explore these dimensions my research consisted of *multi-tiered* ethnography examining the act of the human bomb and ideas about the act in different cultural spheres and publics within Palestinian society. To assess the ways the act of the human bomb was formulated, popularized, and integrated into everyday social life in Palestine, the study encompassed seven areas: (1) the martyrdom operations performed by Palestinian groups; (2) the actors as groups and individuals; (3) the organizing groups' literature and cultural production; (4) Palestinian cultural representations of the encounter and resistance; (5) the local and regional communities' commentaries and literary productions concerning the martyrdom operations and their carriers; (6) the dynamics and history of the Palestinian encounter with the state of Israel; and (7) Palestinian rootedness in place and ideas about land.

With respect to operations performed by Palestinian groups I collected

data on 213 Palestinian operations carried out by Palestinian groups during al-Aqsa Intifada between 2001 and 2004. Among these 213 operations were 80 that are considered *'amaliyat istishhadiyya* (martyrdom operations), in which mission carriers exploded themselves along with their targets by using explosive belts or detonating a car while driving it. The other 133 operations were *'amaliyyat fida'iyya* (self-sacrifice operations) carried out by Palestinian fighters through armed attacks on Israeli targets, military and civilian, where the chances of surviving were close to zero or the carrier went on the mission with the express purpose of fighting until death. I have also studied 14 martyrdom operations executed by Hamas and Islamic Jihad against Israeli targets between 1994 and 2000. I studied data on Palestinian attacks on Israeli targets published by the Israeli Ministry of Defense as well as several books by Palestinians documenting the Palestinian istishhadiyeen. My analyses of the data on martyrdom operations performed by Palestinians against Israeli targets examined the individual actors, their geographic distribution, age, gender, education, and profession; the organizing groups; the aesthetics of the performance with regard to the place of application, targets, timing, and political dynamics of the time period; and the number of fatalities caused by the operation.

In studying the actors as groups and individuals, I considered the life histories of nine of the istishhadiyeen from the Jenin area. My inquiries into these life histories included interviewing their families (fathers, mothers, siblings), reviewing materials and booklets published about them by groups that sponsored their operations, as well as gathering information about them from activist interviews. On the organizational side, my inquiries included interviews with four kinds of agents involved in constructing the act: (1) the organizing leaders (leaders of the military wings of the factions that set up martyrdom operations); (2) the organizing members (general members of military wings that carried out the operations); (3) political leaders (leaders of political groups that sponsored the operations); and (4) political activists (the meaning makers of the act, or the mid-level activists that normally give meaning to martyrdom operations and were an interface between the militarized resistance and the wider community). These four types of players exist in all five of the active political groups, and my interviews included three of them: Hamas (Islamist), Fatah (secular), and the PFLP (Marxist).