

Suicide and Agency

Anthropological Perspectives on Self-Destruction,
Personhood, and Power

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Chapter 7

Dying to Live in Palestine: Steadfastness, Pollution and Embodied Space

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What crime did I commit to make you destroy me?
I will never cease embracing you.
And I will never release you.

Mahmoud Darwish, "He Embraces His Murderer," 1986, 17,

A human dying to kill horrifies. The perceived and conceived—the mental and emotional—impacts of suicide attacks, in particular on the Western imagination, are far greater than other forms of violence. The deliberate utilization of one's own life as a tool of destruction is viewed by many as a specifically abhorrent form of violence: an "inhuman aberration that cannot—or must not—be understood," as described by Jacqueline Rose (2004: 21). Indeed, even writing on suicide violence necessitates, as we have done in this chapter, clear caveats and disclaimers that thinking and theorizing on forms of mechanical violence, such as drone strikes or cluster bombs, simply do not require. But why does the destruction of buildings, flesh, bones and soil caused by a weapon, which was formally a body, produce more horror than a weapon that was a machine?

In this chapter we outline how a ballistic body has a greater social impact than a ballistic missile, as bodies—and the risk of mixing blood and body parts—carry potent political, social, and spatial messages that are distinct. As Judith Butler argues: "The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well" (2006: 26). We place the occupied body at the center of this chapter because of this duality—simultaneously vulnerable to violence and a potential agent of violence. The transformation of a body into a weapon, and the literal dismemberment beyond recognition, could render the body forgotten, eradicated and with it the agency it may or may not have had. The body that is transformed into a weapon, however, does not lose its bodily existence, even if it loses its form.

This is a theoretical piece that tries to problematize the role of the occupied body as a corporeal entity and its relationship with the physical space in which it is situated as both central to this "act." And we engage with the occupied body in its multiple forms focusing at times on the physical body, where blood, flesh and bones

are tangible but can carry symbolic meaning, and at other times on the political and cultural body, the “invariably public dimension” that Butler underscores (2006: 26).

Through tracing the occupied body at an extreme moment of violence, we argue that suicide attacks within the Palestinian-Israeli context can be understood beyond the binaries of an act of futile self-destruction or a heroic act of resistance. We view them as an act located in the space in-between resistance and submission. Moreover, this chapter contributes to theoretical understandings of embodied space and pollution. Specifically, we detail the ability of the body to pollute, symbolically and materially, and to communicate beyond its integral unit. We argue that the potency of suicide attacks, with no obvious military target, can be better understood through an interrogation of blood and body parts and how they intersect with space and culture.

Multiple scientific attempts to frame suicide bombers to a fixed (il)logic (e.g. Bloom 2005; Hoffman 2003; Kramer 1990; Merari 1990; Post 1990; Shay 2004), and to a particular group, ethnicity or religious belief have failed (Gambetta 2005; Reuter 2004; Soibelman 2004). Robert Pape studied all 187 “suicide terrorist attacks” worldwide from 1980–2001 and concluded that, “although only a tiny number of people become suicide terrorists, they come from a broad cross section of lifestyles, and it may be impossible to pick them out in advance” (2003: 2). Scholarly literature on suicide attacks has privileged psychological and security approaches, which often try to render the suicide attacker a non-person, one that is manipulated, and not the political agent of his or her own life, resulting in an explanatory vacuum of this phenomenon. As Rose argues, studies that try to locate what kind of people suicide bombers are will not find an answer: “Suicide bombers are not a species” (2004: 23). Such analytical limitations highlight the need for further methods of inquiry and we hope that this theoretically driven piece will encourage further debate, as well as deeper ethnographic research.

Anthropologists and geographers (e.g. Abufarha 2009; Assad 2007; Dabbagh 2010; Enns 2004; Hage 2003; Isin and Finn 2007; Long 2006) have engaged with suicide attacks and the forms of violence that this phenomenon creates. Yet, the simultaneous cultural, political and spatial meanings of suicide attacks have been understudied. The work of geographer Joanne Long (2006) is an important exception and is central to this exploration of suicide violence and agency. Long builds upon Julia Kristeva’s theory of “abjection,” that deals with the boundary between the inside and outside of the body and the anxieties which transgressions of that boundary produce (2006: 111), to examine the representation of Palestinian women by Israeli national security at extreme moments of vulnerability (pregnancy) and violence (when women carry out suicide attacks). Importantly, Long argues that the suicide bomber annihilates the border separating the inside from the outside, and the self from the other: “The dead and the survivors intermingle. Israeli merged with Palestinian” (2006: 120). Long, however, leaves many questions unanswered and while she gestures towards spaces that are created through suicide violence that go beyond the “binaristic Self/Other, sovereign/sacred, Israel/Palestine distinctions” (2006: 125),

these new possible spaces are not explored in detail. In this chapter we build on and extend Long's insights, focusing on how the body, body parts and fluids communicate beyond the living integral unit of the body to gain social and spatial significance, and how this creates particular links to comprehensions between agency and suicide violence.

We believe that this chapter has value in that it critically engages with different disciplines—namely anthropology, geography, public health and political science—generating original, if at times provocative, hypotheses based on textual analysis rather than formal fieldwork. Our work is situated in recent debates in anthropology on the definition of the field, the role of ethnography, and the need for more interdisciplinary work to adequately address contemporary global and trans-boundary issues, from environmental devastation, to violence, and hunger (Baba and Hill 2006: 197). We do not seek to engage with moral debates on the use of suicide violence, and recognize that anthropologists and geographers trying to find a reason or rationale behind suicide attacks, are likely to be accused of taking an apologist stance. As Hage notes, “There is a clear political risk in trying to explain suicide bombings” (2003: 67). Rather we use anthropology and geography to explore the potential multiple meanings and reactions of such violence at the individual and community level within both Palestinian and Israeli society. To understand how the body intersects with politics the next section examines the relevance of the concepts of biopower and necropower in exploring the social, material and symbolic importance of the body in suicide attacks.

Locating Suicide Violence: Neither Here nor There

Michel Foucault introduced the idea of biopower to articulate the dispositifs (or mechanisms) of power focused on life and the individual body. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, he traces the historical transformation of the power of the sovereign during the seventeenth century, from a power over death to a power over and “calculated management” of life (1978: 136–8). In elaborating this shift Foucault articulates two interrelated poles of development. The first of these poles is the development of the body as a machine creating an anatomo-politics of the human body. The second, formed later, was the species body, the body as the basis for the biological processes of births and mortality, the level of health and life expectancy (Foucault 1978: 139). The supervision and regulation of the species body is carried out through biopolitics. By the nineteenth century these two poles were deemed by Foucault to have combined to form the great technologies of power (Rabinow and Rose 2006: 196).

The body was understood by Foucault to be central to the concept of biopower and captive to the political field, shaped through power relations, marked by occupation and politics, and molded by a political economy. Through the Foucauldian lens of biopolitics and biopower, suicide is the ultimate transgression—it is a subversive act of agency. The suicide attacker has negated

the sovereign's biopolitical power. In our case, the Israeli sovereign is no longer able to supervise, shape or regulate the Palestinian subject; indeed, the power over life is inverted in a suicide attack. The power of death to subvert sovereign rule was fully articulated by Achille Mbembe (2003) through the concepts of necropolitics and necropower, or the politics and power of death. Necropolitics supplements the ideas of biopower and biopolitics, and in doing so Mbembe reconfigures contemporary understandings of the politics and power of death.

Mbembe argues that those that use their very existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations, far from being products of insanity, are "the nomos of the political space in which we still live" (2003: 14). Sovereignty, Mbembe claims, is the power to define who matters and who does not, and who is disposed of and who is not; the necropower of a suicide attack is in its resistance to a sovereign power and its inversion of it, death is now a transgression (2003: 27–38). In a suicide attack Mbembe argues resistance and self-destruction are synonymous, "The body duplicates itself and, in death, literally and metaphorically escapes the state of siege and occupation" (2003: 37). Death in Mbembe's formulation is no longer the opposite of life.

Abdul JanMohamed (2005) in his examination of the multiple lynchings of African Americans and Paul Gilroy's (1993) citation of the practice of individual and mass suicides by slaves cornered by slave catchers contribute to Mbembe's formulation of death as freedom. Notably Gilroy argues that the positive preference for death by the slave rather than continued servitude articulates a principle of negativity. This is opposed to the formal logic and rational calculation characteristic of modern western thinking and expressed in the Hegelian slave's preference for bondage rather than death (1993: 68). Death is now framed as simultaneously the space where power, freedom and negation intersect: death is formulated as agentic. Mbembe speaks directly to our context in Palestine-Israel by arguing that Palestinian necropolitics can be used to defeat a negative Israeli biopolitical mechanism of control: "For death is precisely that from and over which I have power. But it is also that space where freedom and negation operate" (2003: 39).

Understanding suicide attacks through the prism of necropolitics renders visible the potential agency within the act of a suicide attack: an act of dying to display life in Palestine. The Palestinian doctor Eyad el-Sarrag explains the complexity of the relationship between freedom and death: "Desperation is a very powerful force—it's not only negative. It propels people to action or solutions that previously would have been unthinkable" (cited in Enns 2004: no pagination). It is critical to comprehend here that desperation, the force of the occupation, does not result in submission to the dominant power but to new forms of agency. These new forms of agency, however, cannot be simply understood as resistance. Diego Gambetta has remarked that Palestinian suicide attacks are, "chillingly desolate affairs", with "no obvious intended positive effect for the organizers" (2005: 267). The apparent lack of strategic military utility in suicide attacks within the Palestinian-Israeli context also stresses the extent to which such acts are performative. Hage argues that "The suicide bombers become a sign that

Palestinians have not been broken. They are a sign of life ... Violence here has no function other than to symbolize the survival of a Palestinian will” (2003: 72).

Can then a suicide bomber be viewed as achieving freedom? It would appear that we have swung from Foucault’s formulation, in which biopolitics frames the body as passive to domination, to Mbembe in which the body can be used as a tool of resistance through its self-destruction: from the tragic martyr to the heroic martyr. Joanne Long stresses the agency of female suicide bombers noting that women are not “transformed” into a suicide bomber but “it is a woman’s *decision* to become a ‘suicide bomber’” (2006: 122). But Long cautions against thinking of such violence as “resistance” and rejects Kristeva’s assertion of the emancipatory potential of suicide violence (2006: 122). Following Diane Enns (2004), Long points towards the in-betweenness of suicide violence, with resistance on one hand and submission on the other. Both Long and Enns, however, fail to articulate or identify what this space in-between submission and resistance could be. The argument we forward is that suicide attacks could be analytically understood as being similar to *sumud*—an act of steadfastness; an idea that situates itself in-between the narratives of violent resistance and submission.

The concept of *sumud* arose from a Palestinian intellectual scene in the 1970s caught within the dialectic of oppression and resistance. Critical, to the meaning of *sumud* is to reclaim Palestinian dignity and perseverance in the face of the occupation. *Sumud* resists the occupation through patience and perseverance. Laleh Khalili outlines that: “A narrative of *sumud* recognizes and valorizes the teller’s (and by extension the nation’s) agency, ability, and capacity in dire circumstances, but it differs from the heroic narrative in that it does not aspire to super-human audacity, and consciously values daily survival rather than glorious battle” (2007: 101). The goal of *sumud*, with regard to spatial practices, is: “to stay put, to cling to our homes and land by all means available” (Shehadeh cited in Khalili 2007: 99).

Some could argue an analysis of suicide attacks through the concept of *sumud* is problematic from a temporal and normative perspective. Ostensibly *sumud* is understood to be about an ongoing and long-term struggle to remain on one’s land, and is the opposite of a suicide attack, which lasts only seconds. A suicide attack has been comprehended normatively as a letting go, and giving up—an absence of agency. We argue that this is not the case, and that anthropological and geographical concepts of the body and space—in particular embodied space and pollution—render visible the agency and steadfastness, within suicide attacks, in the Palestinian context.

Indeed, although *sumud* has often been described as a peaceful form of resistance, violence and the embodiment of violence can be linked to attempts by Palestinians to reclaim dignity and perseverance in the face of the occupation. For instance, Julie Peteet’s fieldwork with Palestinian male youth is illustrative of how practices associated with *sumud* have been linked to forms of violence. Peteet argues that Israeli beating and detentions are reframed as “rites of passage,” and what we understand to be a form of steadfastness, of manhood among Palestinian

male youth (1994: 32). She describes the Palestinian battered body, with its bruises and broken limbs as symbols of Palestinian powerlessness but, through Palestinian presentations of the broken and marked body, simultaneously of Palestinian determination to resist and struggle against such violence: “A representation [the broken and marked Palestinian body] created with the intent of humiliating has been reversed into one of honor, manhood, and moral superiority” (Petee 1994: 38). The body becomes both a site of domination and resistance, and a metonym for the Palestinian struggle. An extension of this analysis is that suicide attacks may be reframed analogously as “rites of passage,” or more specifically *sumud*, for the collective social body to oppose structural violence in everyday life, but in a manner that is also confined by this structural violence.

In locating the agency of suicide attacks through the concept of *sumud*, suicide attacks are not understood, as Mbembe argues, as the irrevocable intertwining of freedom and death or, as Foucault asserts, as the occupier achieving unchallenged domination of the occupied. The idea of *sumud* is one that gives agency to those subject to a system of control, discipline and violence by an occupying power, and simultaneously recognizes how the occupier can shape the agency of the occupied. Both Mbembe and Foucault overlook the fact that the space of negation is controlled not only by the negator but also the occupier. In the next section we attempt to lift the obfuscating narratives embedded in the response to suicide attacks of heroic martyrdom, on the one hand, and the embodiment of evil, on the other, and illuminate how suicide attacks produce a “presence of absence” (Darwish 2011 [2006]) through a discussion of the material and symbolic importance of the body, body parts and fluids, and its intersection with space. In building on the work of Long, we shift theoretical lenses principally from Julia Kristeva’s theory of “abjection” to Mary Douglas’ (1966) theory of “pollution.”

Pollution and Horror

Mary Douglas introduced the concept of pollution in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* to explain how social order is maintained: “Where there is dirt there is system” (1966: 36). Douglas explored dirt as a cultural construct, rather than a universalistic principal, and how dirt, or pollution, transgresses the social order and as a result becomes subject to punishment or ritual purification. As Douglas notes, “Reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death” (1966: 6). Subsequently, that which is given the status of dirt establishes boundaries and safeguards specific social structures. Douglas stresses, however, that only a semblance of social order is created through ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions. This only exaggerates distinctions between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against. Dirt and pollution can be mobilized, therefore, to disrupt

certain orders and systems: “We must, therefore, ask how dirt, which is normally destructive, sometimes becomes creative” (1966: 160).

Anthropologists have examined the role of bodily pollution as a tool in political protest in various contexts (e.g. Aretxaga 2003; Das 2007; Feldman 1991). From 1978 to 1981, Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) prisoners engaged in a Dirty Protest that involved defecating inside their cells, and smearing their feces on the walls. For women, this protest also involved menstrual blood. Commentators of this protest, including the media, international organizations, and government officials highlighted the incomprehensible and self-inflicted nature of this act (Aretxaga 2003). Alan Feldman (1991) and Begona Aretxaga (2003) examined the power of pollution in providing IRA prisoners an opportunity to reclaim the prison space and undermine or contest the control that prison guards previously had over that space and over their bodies. Although Feldman considers excreta as “detached weapons” (1991: 81), Aretxaga highlights that “far from being a detached weapon, the Dirty Protest entailed a deep personal involvement, a process that was tremendously painful psychologically and physically” (2003: 247).

Veena Das (2007) also draws on the concept of polluting one’s body and environment as a tool for political protest in her descriptions of the ethnic violence that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984. Das describes how women caught up in the ethnic conflict defiantly refused to return to “normality” and used their own filth as a sign of both mourning and protest (2007: 195). Utilizing their body to *show* injustice, women were able to disrupt the masculinized politics of the conflict through a “feminine” activity—mourning—and augment their political voice and agency. Das notes: “The gendered division of labor in the work of mourning through which private grief and public lamentations were conjoined opened up a space for political action” (2007: 193).

Recognizing the scholarship on the role of bodily pollution in political protest and Douglas’ legacy, we build on more recent anthropological conceptions of pollution and in particular on literature from urban studies. In these studies a “hybridity” of pollution is outlined that includes both material aspects and social or imaginary components (Dürr and Jaffe 2010). This concept of hybridity includes both the pollution of the social body (and ethnic identity), as well as the pollution of the built environment (literal debris and physical materials). Central to the idea is that there is a socio-cultural association between physical, material pollution and certain groups of people: “Concepts of pollution in cities are apparent in struggles over space and place, between groups differentiated on the basis of class, ethnicity or religion” (Dürr and Jaffe 2010: 5).

Indeed, the Israeli architect and scholar Eyal Weizman (2007) highlights how Jewish neighborhoods and settlements that have been built without permits and populated before sewage systems have been installed, pollute Palestinian space and reinforce the order of occupation. The topography of the West Bank, Weizman notes, guarantees that all raw sewage from hilltop settlements will pass down a valley next to a Palestinian town or village:

The accumulated dirt within the walled-off Palestinian area confirmed the hygienic phobia of Zionism. Blurring the literal with the metaphorical, the piles of dirt and sewage affirmed a common national-territorial imagination that sees the presence of Palestinians as a 'defiled' substance within the 'Israeli' landscape ... By inducing direct and raw sewage, Israel could go on demanding the further application of its hygienic practices of separation and segregation. (2007: 20)

We argue that the Israeli occupation—where the Palestinian culture, body and built environment intersect—frames the Palestinian as a pollutant on three levels, which are then used to reinforce Israeli rule: (i) “polluted spaces”, Palestinian space is regulated, violated and monitored by the Israeli military and in this process Palestinian inhabitation emerges as “unclean”—something noxious to be metaphorically, and literally, swept away, ordered, and sanitized (Graham 2004: 206); (ii) “demographic pollution”, the Jewish-Israeli space is threatened by the high rate of birth among the Palestinian population (Kanaaneh 2002: 23–81), in the land and space that these additional bodies occupy; and (iii) “pollution of intercourse” (Wacquant 2003: 321), with the bodies of an outcast—racially, ethnically, or religiously inferior—group which are seen as cancerous and unclean that literally and figuratively threaten the Israeli (social) body.

The Palestinian scholar Sari Hanafi (2004) argues that central to the Israeli colonial project is an attack on space, “spacio-cide” as he coins it. Hanafi notes that this is a process where the land is targeted “for the purpose of rendering inevitable the ‘voluntary’ transfer of the Palestinian population primarily by targeting the space on which the Palestinian people live” (Hanafi 2004: no pagination). If Palestinian space is under the perpetual threat of being “cleaned,” what tools do the Palestinians have to push back against such spacio-cide?

We propose that by conducting suicide attacks in public spaces Palestinians may be employing the polluting power of their bodies in an attempt to disrupt the space of occupation. We locate this suicide violence not as an act of resistance or submission but in-between, and therefore a form of steadfastness (*sumud*). To make such a claim, however, we turn to the idea articulated by Setha Low (2003) of embodied space(s). As Low notes, the work of Mary Douglas, as well as Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu, and their concern over body spaces are not focused on the body per se but rather are, “... more concerned with the body as a metaphor for social and cultural conceptualization than with the organism itself, and the effect of cultural influences on it and its operations” (2003: 12). Embodied space emphasizes the fundamental role of the *human body* in the definition and creation of space, the body is framed as part of a spatial and cultural analysis: “The space occupied by the body, and the perception and experience of that space, contracts and expands in relationship to a person’s emotions and state of mind, sense of self, social relations, and cultural predispositions” (Low 2003: 10). Low notes that “This integrated notion of embodied space addresses the metaphorical and material aspects of the body in space as well as body/space to communicate, transform and contest existing social structures” (2003: 16). In the context of

Palestine-Israel the ability to freely embody space is asymmetrical and we argue that Palestinians utilize both the material and metaphorical power of the body through suicide attacks. In addition, through this interrogation of suicide attacks we extend the theory of embodied space to not only include the integral unit of the body but also its fragments: bodily fluids and both live and dead body parts.

Without having conducted fieldwork we draw on ethnographic work from Israel on blood donations, as well as epidemiological studies on victims of suicide bombings and media accounts of organ donations. Through a hybrid concept of pollution, we argue, during an attack both the social body and the built environment are polluted by blood, bones and organs. This we suggest, is particularly disturbing, in the context of a racialized and spatialized conflict.

Blood

Blood has a fundamental role in the definition and creation of space and presence. This ability of blood to define and create an embodied space enables, we argue, the ballistic body to cause more horror than a ballistic missile. The potency of blood and bodily pollution and its use, is also highlighted by its non-use. Suicide attacks in the Israel-Palestine context have not occurred within communities. There has never been a recorded Palestinian-on-Palestinian suicide attack, to our knowledge, despite the large amount of planned and coordinated intra-Palestinian violence and killing.

Michel Foucault in noting the shift to biopolitics was tracing a move from the “symbolics of blood” to an “analytics of sexuality.” Foucault notes that this shift was not a clean break from one mode of power to another but occurred with “overlappings, interactions, and echoes” between the two (1978: 149). Foucault stresses that the two centuries of preoccupation with blood would haunt the administration of sexuality most notably with the rise of racism in the mid-nineteenth century. Anne Stoler, building on Foucault’s argument, notes:

Science and medicine may have fueled the re-emergence of the beliefs in blood, but so did nationalist discourse in which a folk theory of contamination based on cultural contagions, not biological taintings, distinguished true members of the body politic from those who were not. ... They were disseminated through an imperial logic in which cultural hybridities were seen as subversive and subversion was contagious. (1995: 52)

Famously Hanna Ardent broke away from the Zionist movement because of Herzl’s brand of Jewish nationalism that she argued mimicked European nation-building practices of anti-Semitic governments because it insisted on a politics of “blood and soil,” a racially homogenous population that renders minorities a problem (O’Brien 2007: 99).

In this section we highlight both the material and symbolic importance of blood and its ability to pollute through examining the 1996 “Blood Affair,” the

false rumors of an HIV positive suicide bomber and the treatment of the blood of “martyrs.” Palestinians through the utilization of bodily pollution, and specifically the polluting power of their blood, can disrupt Israeli plans of belonging and the politics of “blood and soil” both symbolically and materially.

In 1996, an investigative journalist uncovered that Magen David Adom, Red Star of David, the equivalent of the Red Cross/Crescent, routinely discarded blood donations by Ethiopian-Israelis. This was done, it was later explained by authorities, to prevent the contamination of the blood supply, including by HIV, due to the high rates of infectious disease among Ethiopian immigrants (Seeman 1999: 159). The literal discarding of Ethiopian-Jewish blood was understood by the Ethiopian-Jewish community as a rejection of their community within Israel and an act to remove them from the embodied space of the nation.

This incident became known as *Parashat ha-Dam* (The Blood Affair) as the discovery led to protests by the Ethiopian-Israeli community who protested that this decision to reject Ethiopian-Israeli blood donations was motivated by racial discrimination. “Thousands of Ethiopian Jews clashed with riot policemen outside the Prime Minister’s office,” *New York Times* reporter Schmemann (1996: no pagination) described. Among the banners in the protests one stated: “Our blood is as red as yours and we are just as Jewish as you are” (Schmemann 1996: no pagination). Don Seeman’s (1999) ethnographic work suggests that the violent clashes with the police that followed were the result of a more fundamental question on the purity of the Israeli social body and the ability, or rather inability, of Ethiopian Jews to claim membership to the state of Israel. The protest by Ethiopian-Jews resisted the rejection and subsequent order that, to them, classified their blood as expendable. A young Ethiopian Jew, Ziva Tedela, was quoted in the *New York Times* explaining: “When they tell me that since 1984 they’ve been spilling the blood, it feels like the army means nothing, that I’ll never be part of Israel, because my color is black and my blood is contaminated. It really hurts” (Schmemann 1996: no pagination).

Protestors carried placards in both English and Hebrew with messages including: “One People, One Blood” (Seeman 1999: 163). Ethiopian-Israelis complained that they were being treated like Palestinians, presumably deemed an excluded people, of divergent blood, and whose blood could be acceptably expelled from the Israeli order and embodied space. Don Seeman notes that: “One of the most popular slogans chanted at the demonstration was *lo nitan dameinu hefkar*, ‘We will not allow our blood to go ownerless (or to be abandoned)’” (1999: 164). This slogan, Seeman details, has several levels of meaning, including that Ethiopian-Israelis would “no longer tolerate being treated as if they were less than full and capable owners of their bodies” (1999: 164), and by extension re-claiming agency over their blood and body parts. Further, Seeman highlights how Ethiopian-Israelis were cognizant that the notion of “ownerless” blood is a “highly charged and over determined metaphor in Israel ... often deployed in nationalist rhetoric as evidence for the overwhelming moral imperative to establish and defend a majority Jewish nation-state” (Seeman 1999: 164). The concept of “ownerless” blood resonates with the ideas articulated

through embodied space and how both the material and metaphorical aspects of the body can communicate, transform and contest existing social spatial structures.

Recognizing that the fear of contaminated or impure blood is heightened in an existing ethnically charged environment, suicide bombers, we consider, may be employing the “polluting” power of their bodies. Jacqueline Rose suggests that the revulsion associated with suicide violence in Israel, may stem from the “unbearable intimacy shared in the final moments by the suicide bomber and her or his victims” (2004: 22) and we believe that this symbolic polluting of the dead, through the mixing of blood, may explain the horror. However there is also a literal mixing of blood that may explain some of the terror, especially for survivors. In 2002, unfounded rumors spread, that a 17-year-old Palestinian suicide bomber who blew himself near an Israeli border police patrol was HIV positive. Although the spokesman from Israel’s Health Ministry said that the blood tested negative the spark of this “new” biological warfare was ignited (Jacobsen, 2002).

Epidemiologic studies, mostly from Israel, have examined the potential for “human shrapnel” to carry infectious disease from a suicide bomber to the victim, specifically through pieces of bone that penetrate the skin of a victim during an attack. Eshkol and Katz looking at over 90 cases of victims found that although, “samples of bone from one suicide bomber tested positive for hepatitis B virus. None of the patients developed clinical signs of hepatitis B, human immunodeficiency virus or other severe infections during follow-up” (2005: 271). Yet, in their conclusion, the authors note: “The penetration of biologic material may transmit severe incurable infectious disease” (2005: 273). The discrepancy between the finding and conclusion suggests that the fear of contamination may be disproportionate to the risk, especially in relation to HIV given the low prevalence rates in the region, and may rather reflect the social anxiety described above. Medical anthropologists in other contexts have explored similar fears of disease. For example, Paul Farmer, in *AIDS and Accusation*, shows how the equation “Haitian = AIDS carrier” or Haitians as the “AIDS vectors” (2006: 212) emerged, and how the narrative that AIDS had come to the US from Haiti resonated in an already racially and ethnically tense environment. The framing of suicide bombers as potential vectors of disease dehumanizes suicide bombers and erases their political agency.

The potency for blood to become a socio-political tool is also articulated by the Palestinian’s treatment of “martyrs” blood. Blood here is not viewed as a pollutant but represents purity. Laleh Khalili notes in her book *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine* that upon martyrdom the body is considered “purified” and that the blood of the martyr is not polluting. Normative religious codes are broken. The washing of the deceased, an Islamic obligation, is not done in the case of a “martyr,” the unwashed body becoming a potent political symbol: “The vulnerability of the human body—emphasized by the abundance of blood—underlines the notion of heroic sacrifice” (Khalili 2007: 126). Importantly, ritual purification is not possible in a suicide attack. Murray argues: “Ritual cleansing of the deceased becomes impossible on two counts: not only are these bodies in pieces, but will be impossible to determine where one body ends and the other begins ... blood

has mixed with blood” (2006: 207). Palestinian and Israeli blood mix creating an embodied space that is neither Palestinian nor Israeli but hybrid.

The important symbolism of blood in traditional religious ideas is important to highlight and Mary Douglas notes, in part with reference to blood, that “religions often sacralise the very unclean things which have been rejected with abhorrence” (1966: 160). Due to the construction of different socio-cultural frames blood can be understood simultaneously as polluting and pure and is often at the center of both symbolic and material struggles to produce a specific social order. Blood we argue because of this very duality possesses a distinct social power to disrupt a certain order and a potency to produce horror. The duality of the body as aggressor and victim, vulnerable to violence and an agent of violence, is mirrored in the duality of blood as simultaneously polluting and pure. A suicide bomber may use a heroic narrative of martyrdom and purity, while the victims may view it as polluting, and this duality is able to create a reaction of extreme encroachment. Blood therefore is central to the horror produced in the utilization of the body as a weapon and why a human dying to kill horrifies. Blood both materially and symbolically can be used to tie a certain group together and demark a certain space, blood framed as sacred and pure can produce an ordered embodied space. Therefore, blood can also be utilized to disrupt an embodied space imagined as homogeneously pure. We argue this could be understood as steadfastness, or *sumud*, it is a clinging on in dire circumstances, in-between resistance and submission, an act that establishes a presence on the land without being able to claim it, a “presence of absence” (Darwish 2006). It is not only blood, however, that is able to extend itself beyond the integral unit of the body and produce horror. Human remains, we argue, are also able to live beyond the body and can be powerful political, social and spatial tools.

On Organs and Body Parts

Drawing on the insights of Alfred Gell (1998: 16), Laura Peers argues that human remains act as social agents, causing events to happen, sparking new forms of behavior and relationships (2009: 84). In anthropological accounts, discussions on the ability of body parts to live beyond the integral unit have often focused on human organs for transplant (e.g. Hamdy 2012; Lock 2002; Schepher-Hughes and Wacquant 2002). Recent anthropological research, however, has also begun to extend the debate on body parts beyond those that are medically useable. In Serbia, Maja Petrović-Šteger argues, human remains played an integral role in establishing continuities between the past and the present, and that these remains formed metonyms for the justification for conflict and negotiations of the post-conflict political order (2009: 47). The symbolic value placed on human remains is also articulated in Customary International Humanitarian Law, where Rule 113 on the treatment of the dead specifies that parties to the conflict must prevent the dead from being despoiled, and that mutilation of dead bodies is prohibited; similar stipulations are also found in many military manuals (Henckaerts and Doswald-Beck 2005: 409–11).

Laura Peers (2009) argues that in her examination of the treatment of dead enemies, in the context of Britain's colonial past, human remains are so wrapped up in social meaning that they not only act as extensions of persons but also as powerful social agents (79). Peers illuminates the importance of indigenous human remains to British colonial rule, the creation of a British identity and how Britain was able to explain the world to itself (2009: 86–8). The bodies and body parts of indigenous peoples played a crucial role in constructing a certain order and embodied space. Claims to bodies of the dead by tribal peoples in North America and the Pacific have been part of broader attempts to lay the colonial past to rest (Peers 2009: 85). Identifying and recovering human remains across different spatial and temporal experiences have been deemed a fundamental part of the healing process for communities during and after conflict. Petrović-Šteger explains in the Serbian context that, “The dead body was key in mobilizing this nexus of relations between power, land title and historical entitlement” (2009: 51). Significantly, therefore, embodied space can address not only the material and metaphorical aspects of the integral body but also bodily fluids and (dead and live) body parts.

Organs and body parts have inhabited a prominent place in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The donation of organs by Palestinians to Israelis, and vice versa, has attracted significant media attention because it is particularly rare (a Palestinian friend once noted that such cross-group organ transplants were illegal) and evokes emotional responses. One of the most prominent examples of the exchange of human organs across Palestinian and Israeli communities is the case of 12-year-old Ahmed Khatib, who was shot in the head by an Israeli soldier. Ahmed's parents decided that they would donate his organs for transplant. Ahmed's heart, lungs, kidneys and liver were donated to Jewish Israelis, Arab Israelis and Bedouin Arabs. While the move was not met with universal support from the Palestinian community, the leader of the al-Aqsa brigade, a coalition of Palestinian nationalist militias, is quoted in the British newspaper *The Guardian* as stating: “This kind of action is a form of resistance. Six Israelis have a part of a Palestinian in them and we don't think those people would come to kill a Palestinian person” (McGreal 2005: no pagination). In framing this act as “resistance,” the heart, lungs, kidneys and liver of Ahmed became political tools, and gained symbolic meaning.

In addition to body parts living beyond the body, dead body parts have also attracted significant attention in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary-General of the Lebanese armed political party Hezbollah, on one of his first speeches following the July 2006 war claimed to have the body parts of Israelis, “I am not talking about insignificant bodily remains. I tell the Israelis we have heads, hands, legs of your soldiers. We also have a nearly intact cadaver from the head down to the pelvis” (BBC 2008: no pagination). The possession of Israeli body parts by Hezbollah, and the detailing of specific body parts is, we believe, used to invoke fear on the side of the Israelis and a sense of power amongst the group's own supporters. Indeed, the possession of Israeli body parts by Hezbollah has disturbed the Israeli body politic to such an extent that in July 2008 Israel

exchanged the body parts of its soldiers held by Hezbollah for five living Lebanese (Bar'el, Khoury, Edelman, et al. 2008: no pagination). This deal included the release of Samir Kuntar, who is accused by Israel of brutally murdering an Israeli child and her father. This is not the only exchange of live prisoners for body parts in this context or globally. The most significant organization, however, that has been engaged with blood and (living and dead) body parts is ZAKA. The next section provides a detailed account of this organization to articulate the importance of the Israeli reaction to understanding the polluting power of suicide attacks and also the importance of blood and body parts to producing embodied space.

ZAKA

ZAKA, a Hebrew acronym for the “Identification of Victims of Disaster,” is an organization devoted to recovering “each and every body fragment” after a suicide attack and is the only organization authorized by the Israeli police to handle the recovery and identification of body parts (Stadler 2006, 2012). The organization was established in 1995 by ultra-Orthodox Jews (*Haredi*) in direct response to a suicide attack in 1989 when, as noted on their website,¹ “yeshiva student Yehuda Meshi Zahav and his colleagues were startled into reality by a thunderous boom, followed by an eerie silence and scores of bloodcurdling screams ... ‘It was chilling and horrifying chaos,’ recalls Meshi Zahav [the current ZAKA chairman]” (Zaka 2014). ZAKA is significant for the *Haredi* community as this is one of the few civic activities through which this group engages with the secular state. ZAKA responds to suicide attacks with detailed adherence to religious laws and customs by a sect that interprets death, dead bodies and burial in light of religious beliefs relating to purity, pollution and the sacred (Stradler 2012: 223). “*Chesed Shel Emet* (true virtue) refers to the act of honoring the dead. In Judaism, this is considered the highest form of altruism, for the dead have no way of repaying the kindness,” ZAKA’s website details.

It is of note, as Stadler explains, that according to Jewish tradition the dead must be buried as soon as possible for two reasons: “the first, the notion of preserving the dignity of the deceased (*kvod ha'met*); and the belief that corpses can ritually pollute their environment and render it Halakhically uninhabitable” (2012: 220). Paradoxically, in adhering to religious laws as strictly as ZAKA does results in a breaking of these same laws, as different codes confront one and another. A ZAKA volunteer explains to Stadler that violating the Sabaath, for example, through the collection of pieces of human flesh is a source of pride and an exclusive public act of highest devotion. “According to Jewish law, pieces of human flesh contaminate the Land of Israel, and people who are involved with these remains, particularly those who touch them, are immediately obliged to undergo purification rituals and endure onerous fasts,” Stadler concludes (2012: 224).

1 ZAKA. 2014. ZAKA. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.zaka.us/>. [Accessed 07 December 2014].

The perceived need by Israeli secular society for such an organization as ZAKA, and its exponential growth and involvement of a usually secluded community in a highly public role, articulates the powerful metaphor that blood, organs and splintered bodies have become in this conflict and the desire to “purify” space. Importantly, Stadler’s fieldwork on ZAKA underscores this: “Corpses, blood and pieces of human flesh are perceived as contaminating the land of Israel and the people” (2006: 848) and he understands ZAKA to be “quasi-defenders of the social order” through restoring the body’s integrity by “collecting and matching body parts, organs and blood” (2012: 225). Stadler does not examine or question, however, why the social order is being disrupted, or the possible agency of the Palestinian suicide bomber and intentional or strategic use of the occupied body, bodily fluids and body parts.

Blood and body parts are particularly powerful as pollutants both materially and symbolically because of the bio-political technologies of “incessant purification” of the bio-political state (Stoler 1995: 69) and their importance in traditional religious ideas that continue to organize and infuse modern secular life (Alexander 2003; Douglas and Wildavsky 1982; Snyder 2014). The location of fragments of the body can be a loaded political issue and the possession of body parts a tool of political agency. The bodily remains left by a suicide attack in the Israel-Palestine conflict have prompted socio-political action to reestablish authority and order over the social pollutant, to “purify” the “polluted” embodied space. In this chapter we have tried to highlight that the blood and flesh of the suicide bomber do not just “pollute” the enemy body, but also stain the soil and disrupt the purity of the land through the polluting power of death. Following a suicide attack Palestinian and Israeli body, space and culture mix, it is neither a space of control and discipline nor a space of freedom and resistance.

Conclusion

Historically nation-states have been formed as entities that administered the life force of their populations and ideas about national heritage, culture and history were infused with notions of blood and genealogy (Wade 2007: 6). Dürr and Jaffe claim that the nation-state is envisioned “organically” and is prone to, and must be protected against, pollution, in which deportation and genocide—in the most extreme cases—are posed as solutions to cultural pollution (2010: 6–7). Religious and cultural homogeneity is critical to Israeli nation building and schemata of who and what belongs where. Suicide attacks, through their polluting power, we have argued, can be understood as an attempt to disrupt the embodied space of the occupation and it is this power to pollute that produces the horror of a human dying to kill. The Palestinian through utilizing the “polluting” potential ascribed by the Israeli sovereign inverts this power but not without consequences.

In reframing suicide attacks as an act of pollution and similar to *sumud*, we can render visible the temporal, spatial and agentic implications of such an attack.

Palestinian agency cannot be considered free from the occupation even in the utilization of agency against the sovereign power. Instead the resistance of the Palestinian suicide attacks should be understood as simultaneously acting within and on the occupation. In this context a suicide attack is not seen as resistance or submission but *sumud*. As the fictional character Said, in the film *Paradise Now*, states: “The occupation defines the resistance” (Abu-Assad 2006). Throughout *Paradise Now* the use of the body and life as a weapon is debated. Said and Jamal the two protagonists—who both desire to be suicide bombers—assert throughout the film the desire to overcome occupation and fight for equality, justice and freedom in the undertaking of a suicide attack. Said argues in justifying his impending suicide attack: “Our bodies are all we have left to fight with against the never ending occupation.” However, Suha—the central female character in the film—claims that suicide attacks facilitate the continuation of the occupation and that such acts are indeed the occupation defining the resistance: “That’s no sacrifice. That’s revenge. If you kill, there’s no difference between victim and occupier.”

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