CHAPTER 4

Biopolitical Resistance in Palestine
Suicide Bombing and the Fanonian Specter

Introduction

In this chapter, I move from questions about intellectual freedom and the Question of Palestine to the material reality of Palestinian resistance against occupation, humiliation, and dispossession. I attempt to join intellectual resistance, as it manifests itself in the context of the struggle for Palestinian liberation, to a most unsettling form of physical resistance: suicide bombing. Palestinian suicide bombing represents the last form of resistance, as futile as it is, against colonization. It is in some sense a rejection of deliberation, dialogue, intellectualism, and debate. After all the rationalizations that have been provided by media pundits and academic intellectuals for why Israel’s occupation must continue in the face of Palestinian extremism and violence, the suicide bomber rejects intellectuality and polite evasion as grotesque in such extreme circumstances. The act of suicide bombing itself becomes a form of self-defense for oneself and one’s community.

In the wake of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Franz Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth, we continue to be haunted by the Fanonian specter, the ghost of continuing anticolonial resistance in historical Palestine, as well as the global struggle to obtain justice for the Middle East’s wretched of the earth. The Fanonian specter returns to us in the form of Middle Eastern resistance, most graphically and insistently in the form of Palestinian resistance. As the theorist of colonial psychopathology, Fanon diagnosed how the violence
within the colonizer-colonized relationship is channeled into subtle
expressions of domination and resistance in day-to-day activities.
This chapter specifically addresses how Palestinian resistance mani-
fects itself in the act of suicide bombing—here suicide bombing rep-
resents a type of violence continually seeking a point of articulation
for its expression. In other words, the suicide bomber seeks to make
his or her life a work of art, a final exertion of agency in an ongoing
war against colonizing populations.2 As Ghassan Hage points out,
“The PSBs [Palestinian suicide bombers] disrupt the ability of the
colonizers to consolidate a ‘normal peaceful life’ inside the colonial
settler state of Israel” (68).

Although Fanon does not discuss suicide bombing as a form of
anticolonial resistance in his Wretched of the Earth and other texts,
we might be able to argue that the forms of aggression and resis-
tance in the pursuit of liberation that Fanon explores could find a
modern manifestation in the act of suicide bombing.3 Fanon’s most
lasting legacy revolves around his seeming advocacy of violence in
the context of colonial struggle in which the colonial act itself is met
by the resistance of the colonized. This colonial scene is shaped by
a certain psychoaffectivity, a plethora of emotions and hateful feel-
ings that the colonized direct toward the colonizers; the colonized
are powerless to express these feelings or to find an adequate means
of expression for them. Over time, these feelings produce despair,
helplessness, and alienation, resulting in “a person who [has] been
dispossessed of his own subjectivity, alienated from himself, and
made into a tool of destruction” (Halkin). Are the “muscular dreams”
of the colonial subject, which are mentioned in “On Violence,” the
first chapter in The Wretched of the Earth (Fanon 15), manifestations
of the longing to physically confront the colonizer and defeat him?
Might one posit that, over time, these dreams become so psycho-
logically overwhelming that the colonized subject seeks to give life to
these dreams, ultimately deciding to commit his or her life to a death
mission against the colonizers who have oppressed the colonized sub-
ject’s community?