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The Making of a State in Waiting: The Lives of Fatah Political Prisoners, 1967 to 1985

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The Making of a State in Waiting:

The Lives of Fatah Political Prisoners, 1967 to 1985



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“I do not regret the prison life that sucked my youth inside of it, that had me spending my glorious age inside the cells. I did what I thought was right in gaining and accomplishing my goal: to return, to be a resistor. If I succeed, if I do not succeed, I will still count it as resistance, and this resistance will never end for me. So no, I do not regret anything.”¹

Introduction

In the fall of 2012, I met Sami al Jundi whose book, *The Hour of Sunlight*, is well known amongst those involved in Palestine studies, or even just living and working in the Jerusalem area. A highly readable co-authored autobiography, the book tells the story of his life, much of which was defined by his experience as a political prisoner. Sami is the classic example of the ex-prisoner I find intriguing: someone who had entered an Israeli security prison with very little formal education and came out highly educated, both culturally and politically. While we sat at the since shuttered Gate Café, Sami’s hangout just inside Damascus Gate, I told him about my project and he sized me up suspiciously. I recounted to him that I had first become interested in life inside Israeli prisons intended for those labeled “security prisoners” the previous year when Israel had reversed the policy of prisoner access to undergraduate and graduate degrees through the Open University. I told him how surprised I was that this access had existed at all. After all, why would the Israeli government allow individuals who had been deemed national security threats to study subjects like Zionist thought, the subject of at least one in-prison

¹ Yacoub Odeh, interview with author, September 2015.

doctoral dissertation in the early 2000s?² I also told him about how reading his book had made me realize that the educational programming long preceded the Open University's degree offerings³: by the time of his imprisonment in the 1980s, prisoners underwent rigorous academic training, divided into stages with defined objectives and accompanying reading lists. I expressed to Sami that I wanted to better understand how the education these men received helped shape their role in political life after their sentences ended. What is so intriguing about this period in Palestinian history is that many of today's political players are those very same individuals who were trained behind prison gates. These individuals cut their political teeth inside Israeli prisons.

I became aware that the conversation was not moving beyond the surface. As I had experienced with the handful of other ex-prisoners with whom I had already spoken, neither my well-rehearsed pitch about my academic interests, nor my assertions about the way I was planning to use the material, were persuading Sami to share details that had not appeared in his book. Through these initial interviews, I learned a very important lesson: academic credentials alone cannot advance research of this kind. As it turned out, the years I had spent in the West Bank and the connections I have forged across communities mattered much more. Among the many cultural complexities researchers encounter in the West Bank and Jerusalem, human trust is one of the most difficult to navigate; it is either based on an individual's intuition or rooted in a trusted source's personal recommendation. I gained access to interview subjects only after many months

² This is the focus of Jabril Rajoub's doctoral dissertation. Rajoub has been the Deputy Secretary of the Fatah Committee since 2009 and is currently the Minister of Sport. He also teaches at Al Quds University.

³ After Oslo, the Open University of Israel allowed for prisoners to complete academic degrees. Ynet reported in 2009 that by that time 250 political prisoners were part of this program. [Ynet news, "100 Palestinian Prisoners Complete Academic Studies in Jail," Ronny Shaked, August 4, 2009.]

of cultivating existing contacts and forging new ones, but especially by having reputable colleagues and friends vouch for me.

Since 2012, I have conducted dozens of interviews with ex-prisoners from the West Bank and Jerusalem. Through these conversations I have begun to untangle the complicated world of the political prisoner, both during time inside the prison, but also post-release. These interviews, especially with key figures who will be introduced later in this chapter, combined with political manifestos and other written sources salvaged from the prisons and archived in the Abu Jihad Prisoner's Museum in the West Bank, serve as the basis for my examination of a political prisoner movement.

Why study Palestinian Prisoners?

Since 1967, close to one million Palestinians have been arrested as security prisoners by the Israeli army or the Israeli police.⁴ This roughly breaks down to 20% of the population of the Territories and 40% of males.⁵ These extraordinary numbers mean that every single Palestinian living within the historic borders, and many beyond, has an arrest story of someone with whom they are close – a family member, a friend, or a neighbor. Although the typical “security” prisoner is the young man between 18 – 30, as opposed to women, children, or men over 50, arrest is certainly neither gender nor age blind.

⁴ The terminology used to refer to such prisoners is as loaded as anything in the region. The Israeli government and the prison administration refer to them as security prisoners, while Palestinians self-define as political prisoners. The prisoner is a marker, for the Israelis of maintaining control, and for the Palestinians as markers of resistance. Throughout this project I use both terms depending on the context.

⁵ Addameer, the Ramallah-based Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, tracks these figures. Their website continuously updates the number of individuals held by the Israelis, including the total number as well as a breakdown of women, children, and administrative detainees held without trial. The Territories refers to the areas taken by Israel during the 1967 war. Although some consider 1948 an occupation as well, the internationally recognized borders are those that existed between 1948 and 1967.

Arrest, incarceration and detention of Palestinians by the Israelis is carefully tracked by West Bank and Jerusalem-based organizations. The well-known Ramallah-based group, Addameer, is the most active in the field of monitoring the situation of political prisoners.⁶ As their May 2016 homepage graphic (below) illustrates, Israel held 7,000 political prisoners at the time of writing, of which only a small number were female, but a much more significant number were under 18 years of age.

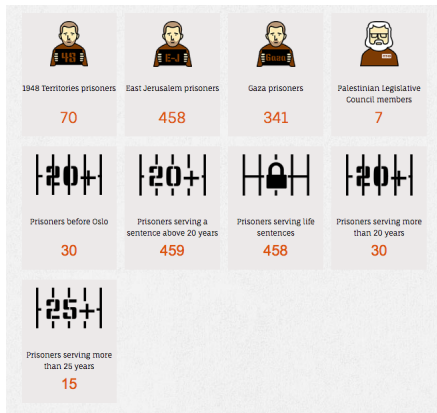


A further breakdown from the same day shows even more startling numbers. Of the number of Palestinians detained for what the Israelis call security violations and the Palestinians refer to as political acts, seven members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) are included. This body, a kind of legislature of the Palestinian Authority, is housed in Ramallah and continues to meet in spite of political challenges dating to 2006.⁸ While the number of incarcerated, cited as seven as of May 2016, may seem low, it is significant when compared with the total membership of around 130. So, too, the fact that 30 prisoners remain incarcerated from the pre-Oslo agreements, which included mass release, is also striking.

⁶ The Palestinian organization based in Israel, Adalah, and the Israeli NGO, B'Tselem, also carefully monitor the numbers. I will cite from reports from all three organizations throughout this project.

⁷ Infographics like this one are regularly updated on <http://www.addameer.org/>. This data is from May 2016. The Council for European Palestinian relations set the number at 6,800 rather than 7,000.

⁸ The split between Fatah and Hamas has hindered the PLC's lawmaking.



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The Palestinian political prisoner has become a signpost of the Palestinian resistance movement. Both within and beyond the Occupied Territories, universal symbols evoke notions of revolution, political resistance, and liberation movements: Che Guevara's face is among the most prominent examples, but the Palestinian flag and the black and white checkered scarf, the *keffiyeh*, trail closely behind. While these symbols carry significant weight in the Territories, the political prisoner also resonates powerfully within the Palestinian community, with common images showing the prisoner behind bars or on hunger strike,¹⁰ featured in local newspapers and adorning placards at political protests. I first comprehended the power of the Prisoner as symbol of political resistance at a 2012 event celebrating the release of two long-held men and one young woman. The event took place in a sizable hall in Ramallah and was attended by a coterie of Palestinian Authority ministers, including Issa Qaraqai, the Minister of Prisoner Affairs. With well-laid banquet tables seating over a dozen people, the affair featured a selection of *mezze* and brightly colored drinks, encouraging attendees to linger for the event's duration. There was a scheduled program of speakers, punctuated by nationalist songs, performed

⁹ <http://www.addameer.org/>. This data is from May 2016.

¹⁰ I will address political prisoner imagery in detail in chapter five.

live; each of the songs explicitly addressed the struggle of political prisoners. For over two hours the energy was high, alternating between joy over the reuniting of families and rage against the occupation, and the volume was almost deafening. Events like these happen with a degree of regularity, whenever well-connected or long-serving prisoners are released. They are performative, intended to highlight the enormity of Palestinian suffering at the hands of Israeli prison authorities, but also celebratory in that they showcase prisoners' strength and ability to survive the torture and trauma of prison.

Thus, the political prisoner is inextricably linked to the Occupation and ongoing resistance to it. In fact, Palestinian prisoners are windows into understanding the way in which the Occupation functions. They are also important to teasing out how both individuals and communities resisted aspects and structures of Israeli control. As former prisoner, now writer, Walid Daka eloquently puts it: "in order to understand the general picture of Palestinian reality, it is worthwhile to study the life of the Palestinian prisoner, as a parable of the lives of civilians in the Territories."¹¹ In part, the significance attached to the prisoner as lens emerges from the fact that the history of the political prisoner spans the entire history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, it dates back to well before the 1967 Occupation. One can look at the period immediately following the 1948 establishment of the state and gauge the perceived power of detention: by early 1949, approximately 70,000 Palestinian civilians had been expelled from major towns such as Lydda and Ramle, while one quarter of the male population was being held in prisoner of

¹¹ Walid Daka, "Consciousness Molded or the Re-identification of Torture," in *Threat: Palestinian Political Prisoners in Israel*, edited by Abeer Baker and Anat Matar, (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 235.

war camps.¹² During this period there were many unrecognized detention sites, in which the number remain unknown. What is certain is that prisoner testimony points to at least 17 of these sites.¹³

Contending with the prisoner as representational icon, this project attempts to reconstruct the experience of Palestinian prisoners affiliated with the Fatah movement inside Israeli prisons between 1967 and 1985. Focusing on these two decades, I will use prisoners as lenses for tracing the evolution of a new kind of resistance movement inside the political prison that was inextricably linked to resistance writ large.¹⁴ To understand these linkages, this project examines the experience in Israeli prisons located in the West Bank and within the 1948 borders, focusing on prisoners affiliated with the Fatah movement of the Palestinian resistance. A striking feature of this era is the highly counterintuitive process by which strictly monitored and circumscribed spaces for punishment came to produce a transparent internal national movement. Although the prison movement institutionalized a set of state-like structures similar in appearance to those of the top-down, authoritarian Fatah movement-in-exile, the emergent complex political programs and committees behaved quite differently. The prisons present a remarkably complex portrait of locally spun resistance.

Challenges of the Sources

¹² Salman Abu Sitta and Terry Rempel, "The ICRC and the Detention of Palestinian Civilians in Israel's 1948 POW/Labor Camps," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, no. 4 (Summer 2014): 11-38.

¹³ Salman Abu Sitta and Terry Rempel, 17.

¹⁴ The explicit link with the outside is beyond the scope of the dissertation, as per my proposal committee. It will be dealt with more explicitly in the book.

A common assertion amongst Palestinians is that one cannot tell stories about the past with any kind of academic distance when the lines between past and present are so blurry. This manner of thinking certainly prevails when it comes to creating a history of political prisoners: because imprisonment is an ongoing tool of the Occupation, Palestinians do not perceive the topic as part of a historical narrative, but as contemporarily relevant and politically charged. As Lila Abu-Lughod recently wrote, “Palestinian memory is, at its heart, political.”¹⁵ Thus, written accounts by historians are rare, with the existing literature consisting of a handful of difficult to locate Arabic language prisoner memoirs, individually framed with a chronological bent; they privilege personal narrative over historical argument in an attempt to bare what many would claim as the ultimate truth.¹⁶ Those that I have located are published in Arabic by small presses in the West Bank or Jordan by individuals whose reputations already precede them. Individuals like Marwan Barghouti and Abu Ali Shaheen are two such writers; they seek to tell their story and to glorify their experiences. In the case of Barghouti, still imprisoned to this day, his book makes a subtle case for his post-prison political career, highlighting how his prison experience makes him the ideal resistor and future leader. Such texts lend themselves to the Palestinian tradition of memorializing events through individuals’ stories, successes and challenges, rather than using information gleaned from these experiences as a lens for understanding Palestinian politics and resistance, or to

¹⁵ Ahmad Sa’adi and Lila Abu-Lughod, eds. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 8.

¹⁶ Scholarship on political prisoners is limited. Esmail Nashif’s book, *Palestinian Political Prisoners: Identity and Community*, does deal with part of this period from a sociological perspective. His interest lies in the cultivation of a prisoner community, as I will explicate in a later section.

answer broader questions about the significance of the period of internment in Palestinian lives.

Not surprisingly, piecing together an historical timeline of Palestinian history in the wake of the 1967 Occupation necessitates a heavy reliance on individuals' oral narratives. Drawing on such stories to shape historical narratives has a substantive past amongst Palestinians; tales pass from one family member to the next, and are maintained by villages and told to each successive generation. The Ottoman, British and even Israeli periods of systematic control are preserved in the memories and the mouths of the average person. In particular, Palestinians orally memorialize historical watersheds, such as the events of the 1948 foundation of the Israeli state, popularly referred to as the *Nakba* (catastrophe in Arabic). As a recent collection has pointed out, in contemporary Palestinian history, "the *Nakba* is the point to which Palestinians return when they reach the age at which they want to sum up their lives."¹⁷ These memories from "ordinary Palestinians" are gathered and "made public in a variety of contexts that we draw our conclusions about the larger significance of the *Nakba*."¹⁸ We recognize that these memories have adjusted to each other, produced what one scholar calls a "canonization" of some stories and symbols."¹⁹ Still, oral sources offer real insight into how people felt about events, rather than just recounting a list of events. Such sources help us capture monotonous daily events, augmenting the sense that the bulk of history is hidden.²⁰ Oral histories allow Palestinians not only to preserve, but more significantly to recover and

¹⁷ Ahmad Sa'adi and Lila Abu-Lughod, 5.

¹⁸ Rafi Nets-Zehngut, "Palestinian Autobiographical Memory Regarding the 1948 Palestinian Exodus," *Political Psychology*, 32, no. 2 (2011) uses 1948 as a case study for examining the collective memory of conflict and to what degree Palestinian oral history can serve as a source of historical research.

¹⁹ The scholar, O. Hammer, is quoted in Ahmad Sa'adi and Lila Abu-Lughod, 7.

²⁰ Nets-Zehngut also talks about the notion of "hidden histories."

participate in, the past. Oral accounts and the history derived from them legitimizes the Palestinian experience.

Oral sources were my first research foray into this still nascent field, with formal interviews preceding archival work. This was necessary given that written Arabic sources related to political prisoners in the immediate aftermath of the *Naksa* are scarce.²¹ Initial interviews were conducted over an intensive four-month period in 2012, with subsequent conversations taking place as needed to fill in gaps after my permanent return to the region in the fall of 2013. Ex-prisoners were identified through various West Bank contacts, including, among others, Raymonda Tawil, Imad Abu-Kishek, Radi Jara'ai, and Abu El Haj, as well as through the subjects themselves, who often mentioned others with whom I should speak. As the number of interview subjects grew, I sought out those who had played a leading role inside the prisons with their committee work or position within the prison's Central Committee (a version of what existed for the formal Fatah leadership on the outside).²² I met with prisoners in a variety of locales, from office buildings and Ministries to coffee shops and hotel lobbies, the important thing being that the subject chose the location in which s/he would feel comfortable. Many requested anonymity and refused recording. Others, including the protagonists of this dissertation's story, were more eager to spin their tale and to have it be made public. There is no obvious correlation between an individual's current public profile and a desire for anonymity or vice versa. To take a few examples of those in this project's spotlight who allow me to use their names and current affiliations, one is high ranking in a branch of the Palestinian

²¹ Several prisoners mentioned that they were able to smuggle letters out as early as 1969, but these were personal letters transmitted via family members, and if they even survive would be in individuals' hands.

²² These structures will be discussed in great detail in Chapter Three.

Authority, another is retired from all public life, and a third is a university professor who broke with Fatah and is now a leader in an one-state solution grassroots movement.²³ Each conversation with an individual ex-prisoner led to more questions, but also slowly gave shape to day-to-day living inside Israel's security prisons. So, too, interviews provide a basic framework in which to situate the archival material, most of which lacked dates and names, making contextualization challenging when documents are read in isolation. Through conversations with these former prisoners, I was able to piece together when certain pieces of writing circulated throughout the prison system, as well as to get a sense of general prisoner reception to the plans and structures put in place, neither of which the documents themselves can tell us.

Relying on oral sources in constructing narratives poses a plethora of challenges. First, verbal retellings assume that humans are capable of retaining vast amounts of information about their experiences and, moreover, in extraordinary detail. Of course, this raises questions about the relationship between memory, authenticity, and accuracy. Of course, generating a timeline is difficult many decades later, and thus establishing dates with relative precision requires a lot of cross-referencing of individual stories. Furthermore, when an individual reflects on any experience, including those over 30 years in the past, the researcher must question what the subject is privileging and what he is leaving out. In some cases, it was clear that prisoners were reluctant to talk about certain moments of their incarceration, as evidenced, for example, by how many sought to brush over the interrogation period and instead focusing on the positive energy family visits brought once they were convicted. Secondly, in the case of Palestinian prisoners,

²³ These individuals will be introduced by name later in this chapter.

constructing a narrative is made complicated by the fact that this history is not closed, that political imprisonment is publicly framed as an ongoing act of resistance that both reaches back 50 years and has a present and future. This is not the case, say, with histories of political imprisonment in South African and North of Ireland, respectively post-conflict and transitional states. For example, it was next to impossible to get the ex-prisoners to speak about their direct interactions with the Israeli administration inside the prisons. Instead, they would speak openly about general forms of resistance to those in charge, with a particular emphasis on the hunger strike.²⁴ The conversation about person-to-person interaction would often begin and end with a subject emphasizing that by the mid-1970s only those elected to represent the prisoners before the administration were authorized to have these conversations.²⁵ Most importantly, and a focus of this project that will be discussed later in greater detail, those who were imprisoned in the first two decades of the Occupation place a great deal of emphasis on a particular positive element of the experience: unity. Former prisoners have memorialized this period in their lives as one in which they strove in harmony with like-minded individuals towards a common goal; they rely on discourses of empowerment rather than those of victimization. Subjects would actively minimize conversations tending toward resistance within the ranks to the evolving leadership structures, as well as about the issue of spies and what became of them.²⁶ As one scholar of the First Intifada notes, “as they gain greater temporal distance

²⁴ Hunger Strikes are the subject of Chapter Two.

²⁵ This silence left a gap in my research, one that will have to be filled during further research for the book and possibly by drawing on Israeli sources. The only evidence that these interactions were frequent and sustained is from more recent research with those who later became leaders in the Unified Leadership of the First Intifada, who have discussed mid-to-late 1980s formal meetings between Israeli and prison representatives, with the intention of the former trying to persuade the latter to work closely with them. These conversations, however, are beyond the scope of this dissertation, which has an established end point of 1985.

²⁶ As will be discussed on Chapter Three, we know these breaks were present from the need for prisoners to form a security committee to handle such issues.

from their prison experiences, they are more inclined to gloss over memories that provide reminders of passivity; in doing so, they decenter the notion of the prison as primarily a space of suffering.”²⁷ Former prisoners “remember their role fondly, as a way to disempower the Israelis.” Hence a focus on aspects of the prison experience which can be positively reframed.²⁸ One can also account for this optimistic tone in terms of a kind of creeping nostalgia for a time in which the prisons were organized centers for educational, cultural, and political growth. Today’s prisons do not feature anything resembling unity; rather, prisoners are individuals and their release is campaigned for as such.²⁹ The contemporary focus on individuality extends deeper into prison hallways, with a complete collapse of all of the structures this dissertation’s subjects speak to with such eloquence. Ex-prisoners with whom I spoke thus remember their period of incarceration not only as the height of organization and unity, but also as the moment in history when the resistance movement was on fire, when it had potential to evoke substantive change for the Palestinian people.

While oral sources are used to understand both decades of the period in question, written sources are increasingly important from the late 1970s onward. At first, lawyers and family members smuggled in pens, and the prisoners wrote on paper from cigarette packets, found pieces of cardboard, or cooking margarine wrappers. Not until the second half of the seventies did prisoners win full access to paper and writing implements in most prisons, at which point they were provided with Israeli school exam booklets for

²⁷ John Collins, *Occupied by Memory: The Intifada Generation and the Palestinian State of Emergency* (New York: NYU Press: 2004), 125.

²⁸ Collins talks on p. 128 about how for his interview subjects, entering prison was like entering a “wider social universe,” in which education was open to them.

²⁹ I will address this explicitly in Chapter five.

sketching out their organization and educational system.³⁰ I draw heavily on clusters of these surviving notebooks in later chapters, as they offer fascinating glimpses into the ways in which prisoners spent their time. Interviews were critical to placing these documents on a historical timelines, and more so for understanding how these documents were drafted, as well as the reception they received. Another significant challenge in working with these sources has been the profound lack of cataloguing and systematization.³¹ What this meant in practice was a great deal of digging, as well as help from certain staff members through whose hands these documents passed during their own periods of imprisonment.³²

Locating Palestinian Resistance

Palestinian resistance evolved into an official movement well before the 1967 occupation, with the founding of the Arab Nationalists Movement (around 1951) and Fatah (1956) in Lebanon and Kuwait, respectively. Coming of age during Arab Nationalism's heyday, both groups appealed to the declining Palestinian trust in parties whose ideologies did not privilege the liberation of Palestine over Nasser's Pan-Arabism. In the wake of the 1967 war, and the failure of the Arab states to combat Israeli forces, Pan-Arabism was largely discredited and the Jordan-based Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) – consisting of Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of

³⁰ Acquisition of these materials will be discussed in Chapter Two.

³¹ When I first began this project, the notebooks were almost entirely un-cataloged. Since then, the museum has attempted systematization, numbering documents and tagging some with key words in a database. As of early 2016, the database remained unsearchable.

³² The largest known collection of these notebooks can be found at the Abu Jihad Museum for Prisoners' Movement Affairs on the al Quds University Campus. The story goes that these were salvaged from ruin after the Oslo Accords by Qadura Fares, member of the Palestinian Authority and current director of the Prisoners' Club in Ramallah. Others have said that some documents were taken by the Israelis and are housed at Hebrew University, but I have yet to find anybody on the Israeli side to corroborate this theory. A second and sizable collection is housed in the Nablus Public Library. At the Abu Jihad library, Radi Jara'ai was a critical guide to locating certain materials; he was involved in drafting many of the materials dating to the late 1970s while he was Asqalon.

Palestine (PFLP), and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) – became the focus of mass-based Palestinian nationalism, with its “statist ambition” and distinct Palestinianism.³³ Thus, during the late 1960s and through the 1970s, these Diaspora-born factions became the guiding force behind Palestinian resistance in the West Bank and Israel.

It is therefore not surprising that much of the literature on the Palestinian Resistance is focused on goings-on outside of Palestine’s historic borders. Indeed, many scholars agree that the Diaspora has been key to shaping Palestinian identity and its relationship to the conflict with Israel. As Helena Lindholm Schulz has noted, it was “in exile that the resistance was formulated, that the ideology of armed struggle and revolution was asserted as a strategy to overcome processes of victimization and to transcend the state of dispossession, denial, and statelessness.”³⁴ Indeed, as Helen Cobban argues, much of the PLO rhetoric of the 1960s and 1970s focused on “a hegemonic discourse of [the right of] return,” sometimes demonstrating a disconnect from the more practical challenges of the occupation in the West Bank.³⁵ Notable scholars Rosemary Sayigh, Julia Peteet, and Yezid Sayigh also emphasize that resistance gestated largely outside of Palestine in the 1960s, at universities in Europe amongst anti-colonial, Marxist types, and more significantly, amongst those educated at Arab universities.³⁶ Palestinians’ access to education in Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, and Amman

³³ Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 98.

³⁴ Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism: Between Revolution and Statehood* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 2.

³⁵ Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organization: People, Power and Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 228.

³⁶ See Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 1979), Julia Peteet, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), and Yezid Sayigh.

meant new networks were forged and a different leadership emerged. These leaders derived their power from “the manipulation of the tools and values of modern education,” rather than from traditional roots within Palestine’s notable-dominated society.³⁷

While the resistance was very much an outside movement, the 1967 Occupation managed to geographically reunite the Palestinian majority, making it easier for factions to penetrate society.³⁸ Up until this point, most Palestinians had remained outside formal affiliation with any resistance faction. By the beginning of the 1970s this shifted dramatically, as the popularity of guerilla fighters peaked alongside hundreds of successful attacks on Israel.³⁹ Scholars emphasize how the PLO, with Fatah at its helm, garnered support by undermining traditional power networks in two ways: first, the official narrative emphasized *fellahin* (peasant) culture, and the necessity of turning peasants into revolutionaries, a goal that was visually represented by Arafat’s adoption of the *keffiyeh* peasant scarf⁴⁰; secondly, the PLO systematically circumvented the long-standing notable class, and worked to cultivate a mid-level command within the Territories.⁴¹ As Hillel Frisch argues, the PLO had a vested interest in undermining and controlling OPT leaders for “fear that they may become an alternative leadership to the PLO.”⁴² Thus, their goal in penetrating Palestinian society, he argues, was to cultivate a “middle command” that would not attempt to define strategy, but would obey commands from the “Diaspora center” outside of the Territories, helping to propel political mobilization in the “territorial periphery.” According to Frisch, the prisons were a

³⁷ Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 239.

³⁸ Kimmerling and Migdal, 252.

³⁹ Yezid Sayigh, 147.

⁴⁰ See Rosemary Sayigh, 1979.

⁴¹ Hillel Frisch introduces the idea of a “middle command” in “The Palestinian Movement in the The Territories: The Middle Command,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 29 (April, 1993), 254-274.

⁴² Frisch, 256.

primary producer of this middle command. Of the 53 middle command leaders from the First Intifada he studied, 13 had been imprisoned for more than four years and another 24 for shorter periods.⁴³ PLO success with grooming detainees to be obedient leaders was due to their need for support from the outside organization, dependency that continued after release. More significant to this project is Frisch's suggestion that the prison experience is one of "prolonged indoctrination and organizational training;" this prepared the longest-serving prisoners for roles as Intifada committee leaders, and readied the younger generation to politicize universities and develop PLO-affiliated mass mobilizing organizations after their release.⁴⁴ Thus, according to Frisch, the resistance movement established a firm presence in the OPT during the 1970s, in particular via the prisons.⁴⁵

Other scholars, such as Glenn Robinson, Emile Sahliyeh, Mark Heller, and Moshe Ma'oz, agree with Frisch that by the late 1970s the traditional notable class had been marginalized in favor of new types of political mobilization and leaders.⁴⁶ Robinson dates the political shift to the 1976 municipal elections in the West Bank. At this time there was a noticeable swing away from the traditional rural-based leadership, who avoided open confrontation with the Occupation authorities and were pro-Jordanian, to a younger, better-educated generation of nationalist political activists, who were openly pro-PLO and vocally anti-occupation.⁴⁷ By the 1980s, pro-PLO leaders focused more of their

⁴³ Frisch, 257. In the conclusion, I will discuss this middle command during the First Intifada, as well as their displacement post-Oslo.

⁴⁴ Frisch, 259.

⁴⁵ In the conclusion I will briefly speak to the next stage of my research, which is focusing on members of the Unified Leadership who were politically and ideologically shaped inside prison.

⁴⁶ See Glenn Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), Emile Sahliyeh, *The PLO After the Lebanon War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), Emile Sahliyeh, *In Search of Leadership: West Bank Politics since 1967* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institute, 1988), and Mark Heller, "Politics and Social Change in the West Bank since 1967," in Joel Migdal, *Palestinian Society and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

⁴⁷ Robinson, 13; see also Moshe Ma'oz *Palestinian Leadership on the West Bank and Gaza* (London: Frank Cass, 1984).

energy promoting their cause outside of Palestine, and as a result had become increasingly disconnected from the general population.

It was clear to many of the younger generation that the Diaspora resistance movement could promote something akin to a nationalist project, but was incapable of actual nation building. To meet observed needs, popular organizing increased dramatically, originating from within the PLO resistance movement, but quickly extending beyond pure occupation concerns. As Salim Tamari shows, many Palestinians were frustrated by what they perceived as widespread passivity alongside political and financial dependence on outside powers. In response, they cultivated a populist ideology and established grassroots alternatives aimed at improving daily life.⁴⁸ PLO-affiliated organizations like the General Union for Palestinian Women, the General Union of Palestinian Teachers, and the General Union of Palestinian Doctors and Pharmacists, just to name a few, connected individuals and issued calls to action based on professional association and with a dual intention: to protect the social and monetary interests and to provide a forum for participation in the resistance within the context of social networks.⁴⁹ As a result resistance politics became two-tiered within the PLO-framework: popular organizations serviced society while politicians focused on international diplomacy and fighting the Occupation in the global arena.

Given that much of the official resistance movement took place on an international rather than a local stage, it is not surprising that the 1982 Lebanon War dealt

⁴⁸ See Salim Tamari, "The Palestinian Movement in Transition: Historical Reversals and the Uprising," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20:2 (Winter 1991), 57-70; see also Rex Brynen, ed. *Echoes of the Intifada: Regional Repercussions of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).

⁴⁹ See Joost Hiltermann, *Behind the Intifada: Labor and Women's Movements in the Territories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

the PLO a large blow. Located in Beirut since 1970, their expulsion from the country after the war led to a state crisis of sorts. Relocated to Tunis, psychologically and geographically far from the conflict itself, the resistance movement in its current framing was called into question. As Rashid Khalidi has pointed out, Arafat increasingly became a head of state in all but name, more powerful than many Arab rulers, while the PLO became a vigorous “para-state,” no longer simply a “humble revolutionary movement.”⁵⁰ It was outside of official politics where resistance truly thrived: within the confines of Israeli prisons for political prisoners, on university campuses, and amongst the various unions.

When it comes to understanding what constitutes resistance and how movements function, political prisoners can provide interesting insight. For starters, their charges, when known, can tell us something about the extent of a population’s anger and/or suffering, as well as the lengths individuals will go to achieve their goals of justice and freedom.⁵¹ So too, political prisoners complicate the notion of resistance, as they are usually seen as suffering behind bars, victims of a repressive regime, and thus completely removed from political action. Contrary to these expectations, the commitment of the Palestinian prisoner to resistance is augmented, with leaders going so far as to replicate and even grow the factions inside the prisons. Indeed, in the 1970s and 1980s, a number of Fatah-affiliated prisoners residing in these strictly monitored and circumscribed spaces of punishment re-appropriated the Diaspora movement’s political organizations by institutionalizing a transparent, highly organized structure on the inside. They resisted the

⁵⁰ Rashid Khalidi, *Under Siege: PLO Decision Making During the Lebanon War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 29.

⁵¹ Chapter One will examine arrest and interrogation, while chapters two through four will look at various forms of prisoner resistance.

occupation in several ways: by forcing the hand of the Israeli Prison Administration through hunger strikes and violence to grant improved conditions⁵²; by strengthening the resolve and political understanding of future foot soldiers for the movement upon their release; and, most significant to this project, by contributing to the cultivation of a locally-based resistance movement that had the potential to serve as a viable and productive alternative to the movement-in-exile.⁵³ Indeed, Palestinian prisoners confirm Yezid Sayigh's assertion that "National liberation has been the goal of many movements in the colonial and post-colonial eras of the 20th century, but the Palestinian case shows that the state-building dynamic does not come into operation only after independence. Rather, the search for state shapes the articulation of goals, formulation of strategies, choice of organizational structures, and conduct of internal politics through much of the preceding struggle."⁵⁴

Prisoners in the 1970s and into the 1980s conceived of themselves as tangentially connected to the outside resistance, and yet the prison environment enabled them to produce something radically different. Because Fatah was based in the Diaspora and only existed as highly secret cells inside the Green Line⁵⁵ and the Occupied Territories, an intimate view of the movement's political beliefs and resistance ideology can be discerned through the lens of the prison. For starters, prisoners replicated the basic structure of Fatah in the Diaspora, with members embracing the by-laws as a starting

⁵² This will be discussed in Chapter Two.

⁵³ Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, interviews conducted in 2016, intended to become the basis of the next version of this project, shows that this so-called viable alternative was rendered inconsequential – silenced – by the return of the PLO and its remaking at the Palestinian Authority at the time of the Oslo Accords.

⁵⁴ Yezid Sayigh, viii.

⁵⁵ The Green Line refers to the pre-1967 borders of Israel, as determined by the UN Partition Plan.

point for their own organization.⁵⁶ What is most interesting about the prison experience, however, is that party members no longer had to hide their affiliation; secret cells were undone behind prison walls and political strategies of various organizations were unveiled. By the late 1970s, unlike life on the outside, prisoners had moved away from connecting with one another primarily via familial networks. Instead they had created a kind of democratic political structure and civil society behind prison walls, participation in which was based on a set of qualifications they themselves defined during over the course of that decade. Furthermore, vibrant debate resulted in reams of political writings neatly inscribed in small school notebooks, allowing a rare look into the inner workings of what constituted resistance. This open dialogue led to the establishment of a complex political system, in which regular elections took place to staff the multiple layers of committee leadership.⁵⁷ An examination of political movements inside prisons thus reveals something startling: under certain circumstances resistance can result in a kind of institution building resembling nascent state structures.

Contextualizing Prisoner Resistance

One of the challenges of writing about Palestinian prisoners in relation to political resistance is the dearth of scholarly material. To date much of the available literature consists of analyses from a humanitarian perspective or memoiristic accounts published

⁵⁶ This is evident in the prisoners' handwritten political manifestos, and is also frequently discussed in interviews, as I will illustrate in detail in Chapter Three.

⁵⁷ Emphasized repeatedly by interviewees. In fact, every single interviewee has emphasized and elaborated on these elections and the democratic nature of the political "system."

by the ex-prisoners themselves.⁵⁸ It was not until recently that scholars began to take an interest in the subject of political imprisonment as yet another way into understanding the workings of the Israeli occupation.

Two texts published in 2004 include the prison as one site among many for examining specific groups of Palestinians living under occupation: children and refugees. John Collins's *Occupied by Memory: The Intifada Generation and the Palestinian State of Emergency* shows how individuals who were between the ages of 10 and 18 when the First Intifada began recollect their attempts to disempower the Israeli Occupation. Prison factors into his text in so far as his subjects remember their experience of internment as having entered a "wider social universe," in which education was open to them.⁵⁹ In *Confronting the Occupation*, anthropologist Maya Rosenfeld includes a short section on prisoners in her study tracing the UNRWA-inspired educational and professional achievements of Dheishehan refugees.⁶⁰ In regards to prisoners, she briefly argues that internal educational programming shifts a prisoner's emotional connection with the national struggle to one that is ideologically driven. Praising UNRWA's efforts to inspire change, Rosenfeld seeks to minimize the prevalence of Israeli power by highlighting Palestinian agency in social and education projects.

Few texts have honed in on the prison as a specific site of examination in its own right. One such work, anthropologist Esmail Nashif's *Palestinian Political Prisoners: Identity and Community*, employs a larger framework of analysis which foregrounds

⁵⁸ See for example Felicia Langer, *With my Own Eyes: Israel and the Territories, 1967-1973*; Christopher Giannou, Steiner Berge, and Oyvind Moller, *Conditions of Palestinian & Lebanese Prisoners Held by Israel: Testimonies*; Yehezkel Lein, Maya Johnston, *Absolute Prohibition: the Torture and Ill-Treatment of Palestinian Detainees*; and Ghassan Abdallah, *The Hell: Palestinian Prisoners in Israeli Jails*.

⁵⁹ Collins, 128.

⁶⁰ Maya Rosenfeld, *Confronting the Occupation: Work, Education and Political Activism of Palestinian Families in a Refugee Camp* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

Israel's subjugation of Palestinians. Notable for being the first study attempting a social history of Palestinian political prisoners between 1967 and 1993, Nashif reads everything through the lens of colonial encroachment on Palestinians. By analyzing prison poetry and prose, he looks at how prisoners built a community as a way to show their full engagement in the dynamics of domination and counter-domination accompanying a colonial prison situation. In particular, he draws on Foucault to argue that the Israelis used a variety of institutions and technologies of power to control political will, while the Palestinians instituted their own communal relations as a form of resistance.⁶¹ Thus, Nashif demonstrates how the prisons became a site of the Palestinian resistance movement.

Since the end of the Second Intifada, essays have boldly asserted the importance of studying the Palestinian prisoner as a way towards understanding something deeper about the experience of the Occupation. Ghazi-Walid Falah draws on his own experience of having been detained for his published scholarship. He illustrates how Israel uses the various spaces of the prison for the purposes of gathering information about those involved in the resistance movement; he refers to the prison system as “hyper-dynamic space” which is “highly confined and pressurized...to extract intelligence under the impress of limited legal time.”⁶² A 2011 collection of essays entitled *Threat: Palestinian Political Prisoners in Israel*, is most notable for introducing key areas in need of further research. With a range of contributors –lawyers, ex-prisoners, human rights professionals, activists, philosophers and anthropologists (including Rosenfeld and Nashif themselves)

⁶¹ Esmail Nashif, *Palestinian Political Prisoners: Identity and Community*, (London: Routledge, 2008), 40.

⁶² See Ghazi-Walid Falah, “Geography in Ominous Intersection with Interrogation and Torture: Reflections on Detention in Israel,” in *Third World Quarterly*, 29:4 (2008), 749-766. Falah describes in detail the spatial components of his detention and interrogation, as well as the corresponding surveillance and treatment.

– the slim volume of short essays points to many issues, including: Israel’s categorization of Palestinians as security rather than political prisoners (Alon Harel, Yael Berda), reasons for the contemporary downturn of the prisoners’ movement (Maya Rosenfeld), comparisons between prison policies in Northern Ireland and Israel (Alina Korn), legal questions surrounding administrative detention (Tamar Pelleg-Sryck, Sharon Weill), and treatment of political prisoners (Sigi Ben-Ari and Ana Barsella, Sahar Francis and Kathleen Gibson, and Ruchama Marton). The importance of this book lies primarily in its raising of many yet unanswered questions, as well as its extensive bibliographies of potential source material for further exploration.⁶³

Several essays emphasize the colonial prison as a key shaper of Palestinian identity. Caroline Rooney’s 2014 article argues that Israeli efforts to criminalize all Palestinian actions have had a profound impact on the formation of a collective consciousness. She looks at the experience of prisoners to help illustrate how that consciousness changed in the wake of the First Intifada. She argues that today’s prisoners are despondent and lack motivation, whereas those imprisoned in the 70s, 80s and early 90s demonstrated solidarity and forged deep community ties. So, too, Lena Meari’s 2014 article, “*Sumud*: A Palestinian Philosophy of Confrontation in Colonial Prisons,” shows how Israeli prisons permanently mark individuals. She argues that “brutal experience of the large number of Palestinians in Israeli colonial prisons and interrogation centers constitutes a crucial part of recent Palestinian political history, representing both a formative political moment for those involved and standing more widely as a key trope

⁶³ See, too, Avram Bornstein, “Military Occupation as Carceral Society: Prisons, Checkpoints, and Walls in the Israeli-Palestinian Struggle,” *Social Analysis* (61:2), June 2008, 106-130, which argues that prisons (as well as checkpoints and walls) is part and parcel of the Occupation architecture debilitating the Palestinian economy.

through which the Palestinian experience of Israeli colonization is understood. Further, the interrogation encounter epitomizes the colonial relation between the Israeli colonizer and the Palestinian.”⁶⁴ Scholars taking this approach emphasize the prison as colonial endeavors that impact identity formation.

On the other end of the political spectrum, some scholars approach Palestinian political prisoners through a lens that can be characterized as Orientalist. A 2010 study by Anat Berko, Edna Erez and Julie Globokar compares “Arab Israeli” women who were arrested as terrorists with women classified as criminals.⁶⁵ According to their analysis, those arrested for what Israel terms security violations were more traditional and conservative than the criminals. Primarily based on interviews, their article concludes that security prisoners viewed their prison experience as liberating, a fertile ground for stoking resistance, while many criminals embraced Islam and other traditional practices whilst on the inside.⁶⁶ So, too, some scholars argue that Israel upholds a system of de-radicalization via its prison system; they claim that humane treatment is intended to evoke positive change in the security violators.⁶⁷ Finally, others suggest that Palestinian political discourse is negatively shaped by the rhetoric and performance surrounding security prisoners.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Lena Meari, “Sumud: A Palestinian Philosophy of Confrontation in Colonial Prisons,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* (113:3), 2014, p. 548-549.

⁶⁵ Even the term “Arab-Israeli” is problematic. Those who identify with the resistance would refer to citizens of the Israeli state as Palestinian Israelis. See Anat Berko, Edna Erez, and Julie L. Globokar, “Gender, Crime and Terrorism: The Case of Arab/Palestinian Women in Israel,” *British Journal of Criminology* (50:4), July 2010, 670-689. Similarly, Berko and Erez collaborated on another study that took a similar approach entitled “Ordinary People and Death Work: Palestinian Suicide Bombers as Victimizers and Victims,” *Violence and Victims* (20:6), December 2005.

⁶⁶ The counter-narrative is presented by Nahla Abdo, *Captive Revolution: Palestinian Women's Anti-Colonial Struggle Within the Israeli Prison System* (London: Pluto Press), 2014.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Boaz Ganor and Ophir Falk, “De-Radicalization in Israel’s Prison System,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (36:2) 2013, 116-131.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Yonatan Mendel and Alexa Rose Steinberg, “The Museological Side of the Conflict: Israeli Exhibition of Terror and the Palestinian Museum of Prisoners,” *Museum and Society* (9:3) 2011, 190-213.

Initial analyses of the Palestinian prisoner movement privilege the Israeli state's hegemonic power over colonial prisons. I contend that scholars who employ a Foucauldian approach in examining the Palestinian prisoner experience will view resistance as merely a response to state coercion and surveillance. Seen in this monochromatic tone, one fails to grasp the complexities of the prisoner relationship to resistance: that it extended beyond the prison walls, that it was not simply formulated in simple reaction to Israeli technologies of power, that it represented an engagement with rethinking the movement-in-exile, and finally that the prisoner served as a symbol of resistance.

The limited available scholarly material on Palestinian political prisoners, as well as the absence of a solid narrative for either the day-to-day or the "movement," means basic questions remain unanswered in the literature to date. While Rosenfeld and Nashif both touch on the work of the various committees and the building of structures, they also suggest that both power and prisoner resistance are unidirectional, the former emanating from Israeli authorities toward the prisoners, and the latter merely a reaction to these exertions of control. My project will take a different approach, engaging more fully with facets of internal Palestinian politics: it will problematize the resistance narrative by asking how these places of punishment became sites of political change and progress by constructing state-like structures and the framework to support their building.

To move beyond existing scholarship, one can draw on the plethora of literature concerning colonial prison contexts. The literature on South and East Asia is useful in rethinking how to approach the Palestinian case. David Arnold, one of the first to

critically engage Foucault, examines the British colonial prison in India and suggests that his model does not neatly apply to non-European contexts. He argues that not only did the “prison often become a focus or symbol of wider defiance against the British,” contained within its walls “is unexplored subalternity,” which had been largely silenced by the sheer volumes of colonial archival materials.⁶⁹ From his perspective, historians should focus more on how the resistance *shaped* the prison system, rather than simply looking at how the prison system exerted provocative power over the colonized.

Disagreeing even more strongly with Foucault’s model for viewing colonial imprisonment, Peter Zinoman’s *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam*, argues that Vietnamese prisons were anything but manifestations of modernity and power. In fact, he argues that they were chaotic and undisciplined, and actually reflected the fragmented and decentralized nature of French colonialism. According to his analysis, not only did prisons fail to aid French civilizing efforts, they actually contributed to the colonialism’s decline by stoking the flames of resistance.⁷⁰ By tracing the emergence of social revolutionaries and the expansion of the Indochina Communist Party inside the prisons, he demonstrates the profound impact of the experience on Vietnamese nationalist discourse. Finally, and most strikingly, he argues that because prisoners were often sent to the far reaches of Vietnam to serve their time, they experienced a new sense of connectedness; they imagined themselves as part of a larger

⁶⁹ David Arnold, “The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge, and Penology in Nineteenth-Century India,” in *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986-1995*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 145.

⁷⁰ Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 37.

political community. Thus, the prison was an “institutional mainspring for the development in Indochina of a modern political identity.”⁷¹

Zinoman helps one consider shifts in Palestinian identity as it is connected to the resistance inside the prisons. Traditionally, kin-based networks and urban notables were central to the direction of political life.⁷² Being from the Nashashibi, Dajani, or Husseini families, for example, carried a certain cache and invited political participation in Ottoman and Mandate debates. In the 1970s, with the new political culture of social mobilization, family networks were in some cases replaced with lateral community ties. Nowhere is this more evident than in the prisons, where political detention enabled a breakdown of primordial ties, opening up a space in which new links could be forged through literacy, engagement with ideas and “public” discourse.⁷³ Over the course of two decades, prisoners slowly evolved a complex structural system which supplanted the traditional familial power hierarchy with other required qualifications: educational accomplishments, a demonstrated ability to carry out the important day-to-day missions, and to a far lesser degree, one’s role in the outside movement prior to prison.⁷⁴

Taking a slightly different approach from that of Zinoman, Clare Anderson and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied both argue that colonial power empowered imprisoned anti-colonialists. In the case of India, Anderson argues that the British penal regime “endowed prisoners with both a sense of shared grievance and a vehicle for the formation

⁷¹ Zinoman, 39.

⁷² See, for example, Muhammad Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

⁷³ The project will in some way draw on Mark Granovetter’s theory found in “The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited,” in *Sociological Theory* 1 (1983): 201-233.

⁷⁴ Much of this material is drawn from various interview subjects and will be used in the dissertation by quoting individuals who will permit me to use their names. Chapters three on political structures and Chapter Four on educational initiatives, also draw heavily on documents written by the prisoners themselves.

of their own social and religious categories.”⁷⁵ Thanks to a common enemy, prisoners were driven to negotiate cultural change and to use their imprisonment as “vehicles of social mobility.”⁷⁶ Likewise, Aljunied outlines how political prisons in colonial Malaya were “fertile grounds” for anti-colonialists to engage in new forms of collective action and to build a leadership hierarchy.⁷⁷ In both cases, the prison experience serves as a springboard beyond culturally and socially circumscribed roles.

Finally, literature about prisoners in apartheid South Africa is an appropriate point of comparison, for South Africa maintained a structural approach to imprisonment similar to that of Israel. In contrast with Palestinian prisoners, incarcerated black South Africans were granted political prisoner status; however, like Palestinians, they were neither granted the benefits nor status commensurate with that categorization. Furthermore, the prisoners’ socio-political organization presents avenues for comparison: 1) prisons for black political prisoners were both sites of resistance and political education and 2) South African prisoners participated in a vibrant movement that existed inside and outside their cells. Early South African accounts focused on the relationship of exchange between black resistance and political imprisonment. Historian Steve Mufson, for example, touched on the prison in his work on resistance movements, arguing that it was a “sort of graduate school for revolutionaries” where “released prisoners formed a peculiar sort of alumni association, schooled in concrete cells and taught by tenured faculty of lifetime maximum-security prisoners.”⁷⁸ Almost a decade later, Fran Buntman co-authored an

⁷⁵ Clare Anderson, *The Indian Uprising of 1857-1858: Prisons, Prisoners, and Rebellion* (London: Anthem Press, 2007), 28.

⁷⁶ Anderson, 178.

⁷⁷ Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, “The Prison and the Anti-Colonialist in British Malaya,” *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 25, no. 3 (September 2012), 300.

⁷⁸ Steve Mufson, *Fighting Years: Black Resistance and the Struggle for a new South Africa* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 65.

article comparing the role played by political imprisonment in South Africa with Taiwan. In it, she argues that the political order developed within South African prisons was “intended” to shape external resistance politics.⁷⁹ Her later book-length study, *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid*, expands on her earlier thesis by offering a narrative of the political imprisonment experience at the prison that *produced* important post-apartheid political players, including Nelson Mandela.⁸⁰ Focusing on the period between 1962 and 1991, she uses this key site to examine patterns of prisoner resistance and to show how political imprisonment played a vital role in shaping movements beyond prison gates. Additionally, Buntman employs Robben Island as a tool to reexamine theories of resistance, including how prisoners re-signified and re-appropriated the authorities’ power when it came to ordering life in prison, molding the prisoners’ educational experience and creating structural organization.⁸¹ Such literature concerning South Africa aids in framing narratives of the prison experience and its relationship to resistance movements.⁸²

Scholarship detailing colonial prison experiences is helpful in thinking about the situation of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jails. In each of the aforementioned examples, not only do the prisoners have a great deal of agency, they actually effect sweeping changes in the prisons themselves and/or within their local nationalist movement. This certainly complicates the image of the political prisoner suffering

⁷⁹ Fran Buntman and Yong-Ti Huang, “The Role of Political Imprisonment in Developing and Enhancing Political Leadership: A comparative Study of South Africa’s and Taiwan’s Democratization,” in *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 35, no 1 (2000), 52.

⁸⁰ Fran Buntman, *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁸¹ In “Prison and Democracy: Lessons Learned and Not Learned, from 1989-2009,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 22, no. 3 (2009), 403, Buntman offers a different way of contextualizing prisoners: she uses South Africa as a case study for her claim that prisons function as “social mirrors and metaphors,” revealing central policies, practices and electoral politics.

⁸² Literature on prison experiences in other colonial contexts might be helpful, including works on Ireland, such as anthropologist Allen Feldman’s work, *Formations of Violence: the Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* and historian Kieran McEvoy’s *Paramilitary Imprisonment in Northern Ireland: Resistance, Management, and Release*.

meekly at the mercy of the colonial power. While this narrative is focused on Palestinian political prisoners' activities of the 1970s and 1980s during confinement, chapter five and the conclusion will take up the notion that such efforts behind bars led to the prisoners becoming symbols of the revolution and resistance beyond prison walls.⁸³

Methodology: The Prisons and their Inhabitants

The Israeli prison system was built on existing structures, left over from the Ottomans, the British Mandate, the Jordanians and the Egyptians. Mandate structures and laws had the most profound impact, as they set the tone for strict control over the Palestinians.⁸⁴ Dating back to 1921, the British system was established as part of the Palestine Police Administration, under the command of the Inspector General of Police and Prisons. In 1946 the Department of Prison separated administratively from the Police, but the latter continued to actually run the prisons. It was not until early 1949 that the Israeli Prison Services (IPS) was established as a separate administrative unit organizationally linked to the Minister of Police. They inherited four buildings from their predecessors: the Acre Fortress, an old prison in the Russian Compound⁸⁵, a Turkish prison in Jaffa and the Haifa prison. Between 1949 and 1967, although the Arab minority faced arrest and conviction at a disproportionate rate, the numbers were still low in comparison with after the beginning of the Occupation. Almost half of these arrests were for violations of the Defense Emergency Regulations left in place after the departure of

⁸³ So, too, the conclusion will at an area in need of future research: that the prison experience set the stage for a new kind of engagement with Fatah and the PLO in the Diaspora.

⁸⁴ For example, as Rassem Khamaisi discusses in "Israeli Use of the British Mandate Planning Legacy as a Tool for the Control of Palestinians in the West Bank," *Planning Perspectives*, 12, no. 3 (1997), 321-340, the British introduced zoning laws that restricted land development in rural Palestine in the years leading up to 1948.

⁸⁵ Today this compound is used for detention and interrogation, not for sentenced prisoners.

the British, but only applied to Arabs.⁸⁶ After the 1967 war, the IPS acquired five new buildings, spaces that would be well utilized as the number of Palestinian arrests skyrocketed. In addition, they immediately opened five additional prisons in the Territories – Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Hebron, and Gaza – and in 1968, yet another, Asqalon. This spike from just four buildings to 15 is evidence of Israeli plans for controlling the nascent Palestinian National Movement.

Though this project references many of these architectural structures, Asqalon, Beer Saba', and Nafha are the most visible. All three prisons were operational by 1980 (Nafha being the last to open on May 2nd, 1980), and contained large numbers of prisoners serving long sentences. Asqalon and Beer Saba' are particularly interesting because they were the sites of inception for many of the structural developments.⁸⁷ As I will explain in later chapters, during the 1970s the prisoners in these two institutions wrote manifestos, constitutions and by-laws for Fatah that served as the basis for a similar style of prison organization across the West Bank and inside the 1948 borders. Nafha is also significant because it was opened for the express intention of isolating 100 individuals who were considered faction leaders inside the various prisons. Out of the dozens of interviews I conducted, many of the long-serving prisoners circulated through one of these prisons during the 1970s and 1980s.

The focus is limited to prisons inside Israel and the West Bank, excluding Gaza from the narrative. This choice is in part driven by practicalities: I have no access to Gazans who remain there. Beyond this, though, is the more substantive reason that

⁸⁶ Alina Korn, "Rates of Incarceration and Main Trends in Israeli Prisons," *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 3, no. 1 (February 2003), 36- 37.

⁸⁷ Interview subjects speak to this.

Gaza presents a very different portrait by being largely cut off from the Palestinian Authority, and ruled by Hamas rather than a Fatah-dominated structure. Furthermore, the individuals I work with remain in Fatah territory, even if they are no longer politically active. They are profoundly aware of the long and complex relationship between the resistance movement inside the '48 and the West Bank and the movement in exile prior to the Oslo Accords. The West Bank, abutting the crown jewel of Jerusalem, is the seat of government and thus offers a site for future analyses of the effects of prison-generated political structures and education.⁸⁸

Just as the spotlight primarily focuses on these three prisons, weaving the others in as interview subjects circulate through the system, certain ex-prisoners feature more heavily than others. When I began this project, I was narrowly interested in how prisoners educated themselves during their internment, especially by demanding access to formal exams and degree-granting programs. While education is the focus of Chapter Four, the project's scope has broadened to account for how a clear and structured political system, enabled by educational activities, unfolded inside the prison system amongst members of the Fatah faction. To accomplish this, I showcase three Fatah members repeatedly, with others peppered throughout the text to corroborate and deepen the story, but also to add flavor. The key players in this work were chosen because of their significance in building Fatah's prisoner movement in the 1970s and 1980s: Mahmoud Abu Bakr, Radi Jara'ai, Ibrahim Khrishi, and Yacoub Odeh. Abu Bakr self-identifies as the Occupation's first prisoner. A former officer in the Jordanian army, he was arrested shortly after the 1967 war and thus entered prison when there was no structure in place and conditions were

⁸⁸ I will touch on this in the conclusion.

atrocious. Now in his 80s, he remained politically active with Fatah for many years and even served as an advisor to Arafat for a period. Radi Jara'ai was one of the founders of the Fatah organization inside Beer Saba' in the 1970s. He and two of his students were captured in 1976 in Netanya, having joined the Fatah movement just two years earlier and received arms training in Beirut, carrying an explosive, which he admits they intended to use against civilians. He was heavily involved in writing Fatah's prisoner constitution. Today, Jara'ai remains only loosely identified with Fatah; not only does he not hold an official political position, he is also a leading voice in the one state movement. For his day job he teaches at al Quds University and works in the Abu Jihad Prisoner's Museum. Ibrahim Khrishi is a person of special interest: he held many important Fatah political positions inside the prison in the early 80s once the structure was established and remains an important leader as a key member of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Finally, Yacoub Odeh was sentenced to three life sentences plus 10 years in 1969 for his role in the Fatah movement after completing his university education. He was released in 1985 in a large prisoner exchange, having spent 17 years in Israeli custody. By focusing on these four Fatah ex-prisoners, whose sentences spanned the entire period in question, and weaving in stories of others, one can see the ways in which Fatah ex-prisoners were shaped by and also constructed their own version of an internal national movement by reimagining political organization and structure.

A Note on Terminology

Within this Occupation context, terminology is highly contested. Last year, after giving a research talk, the first question from the audience asked me about my use of IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) rather than IOF (Israeli Occupation Forces). Throughout this project, I refer to groups of individuals by the terms they themselves would employ. Thus, the Israeli army is the IDF rather than the IOF, and Palestinian prisoners are political prisoners rather than security prisoners.⁸⁹ I use the term security prisoners only when referring to how the prisoner was viewed by the Israeli public, the prison warden, or the military administration. Spatial terminology is important, too: the project examines prisons inside the Israeli State, referred to as “inside ‘48” or “inside the Green Line,” as well as within the West Bank or The Territories. Because Palestinians themselves employ these terms interchangeably in conversation and analysis, I employ similar flexible conventions.

⁸⁹ I use the term security prisoners only when seeking to allude to an Israeli perspective on the prisoners.

*“An unheard of physical resistance...
how can one explain their
incomprehensible stubbornness?”⁹⁰*

Chapter One

On Becoming and Being a Prisoner

Imprisonment is far from a discrete period in one's life. Rather, it is a permanently altering experience, with release signifying something apart from a clear ending or a final salute to a bad nightmare. Former convicts across language, class and economic boundaries would assert that an indelible mark is made by time spent in prison. Just as the prison experience extends beyond one's reentry into the light of day, so too it begins long before the convicted pass from the free world into an enclosed and closely monitored space intended to disempower and punish. This chapter traces the prisoner's encounter with the complex Israeli system of punishment for Palestinians, from detention or arrest to interrogation and trial. I will illustrate how much of the architecture of the Israeli prison system, both in legal and physical terms, represented a degree of continuity with the Ottoman, British, and Jordanian periods. The chapter will conclude with two sections on conditions inside these structures between 1967 and the mid-1980s. This initial exploration of the day-to-day living situation of prisoners is an important precursor to Chapter Two, which focuses on the hunger strike as a way to demand material and

⁹⁰ This is a quote by Jean Pierre Vittori, *Confessions d'un professionnel de la torture: La guerre d'Algerie*, p. 107. Although I later read parts of this book, this quote was first located in Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

physical improvements.⁹¹ The main thrust of this chapter is to portray how the experience of imprisonment is a key part of the Occupation's system of control. Through this tool, the Occupation permeates the lives of individuals and families. This takes us beyond the usual association of the Israeli army as the primary weapon of the Occupation.⁹² And yet, as the stories of interview subjects illustrate, not only did this experience not break them, it also provided a platform for personal and political development.

Before Prison Gates: The Suspect's Arrest

According to most reports, since 1967 around 800,000 Palestinians have been arrested and interrogated, with a large percentage of these individuals having been convicted and served time, while the rest suffered through the netherworld of Administrative Detention.⁹³ Indeed, from the onset of Occupation Palestinians have earned the unfortunate stigma of the highest per capita incarceration rate in the world.⁹⁴ As one Israeli scholar has pointed out, from the 1970s until the Oslo Accords, "the Israeli state made a tactical choice to use mass incarceration to crush political and militant resistance against the colonization of the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip."⁹⁵ What is most striking about Palestinian arrest and interrogation stories is how little they have changed since 1967. Both of these stages in the prison experience are driven in large part by the Israeli military establishment, which since the very beginning has demonstrated

⁹¹ Bodily suffering will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, which focuses on hunger strikes. Later chapters will show how material improvements were not permanent and irreversible, and alternately enabled a kind of carrot and stick approach by the administration.

⁹² This argument builds on one of the larger arguments in *Stolen Youth: The Politics of Israel's Detention of Palestinian Children*, Catherine Cook, Adam Hanieh, Adah Kay, London: Pluto Press, 2004.

⁹³ See, for example, Addameer, 2014.

⁹⁴ Lisa Hajjar, *Courting Conflict: The Israeli Military Court System in the West Bank and Gaza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 3.

⁹⁵ Avram Bornstein, "Palestinian Prison Ontologies," *Dialectical Anthropology*, 34:4, December 2010, 459-472, p. 462.

more disregard for than observance of international human rights standards. While the occasional scholar references arrest in the 1970s and early 1980s, the bulk of the literature highlights the mass roundups of the First Intifada.⁹⁶ As discussed in the Introduction to this project, privileging this period has been a natural move, given that it is seen as a watershed moment in Palestinian history. Shocking statistics from the beginning of the Intifada state that 20,000 – 30,000 were arrested annually, while approximately 15,000 were held in custody at any given moment.⁹⁷ Another reason that so much writing exists on the Intifada period is the availability of material produced by NGOs and research institutes. Throughout this project, I draw on many such documents published by HaMoked⁹⁸, B'Tselem⁹⁹, Adalah, Al Haq¹⁰⁰, and Addameer¹⁰¹, chosen because their findings and reports have garnered local and international respect, as well as the fact that they represent both “sides” of the Green Line: HaMoked, B'Tselem and Adalah are Israel-based organizations, while the latter two are Palestinian. Although the plethora of documentation coming out of such institutions dates either to the end of my project’s time frame (in the case of Al Haq) or after its cut off date (as with the other four

⁹⁶ For example, see Lisa Hajjar and Keith Hammond. Also, Esmail Nashif takes a sociological approach, grouping political prisoners during the late 1970s through the Intifada into several groups: the first are those who were radicalized in other Arab cities and whose political activity preceded the Occupation; the second are those who were imprisoned in the early 1970s, young men with only a high school education involved in very local activities; the third group of prisoners began entering the prisons in the mid-1970s with the mass arrests of faction members, a group that remained consistent until the First Intifada. This latter group was diverse in educational level and community involvement, including “students, union activists, professional, political leaders, and workers from various age groups and localities.” (Nashif, 13) His fourth group falls outside the scope of this project, consisting of Intifada political activists, but also the seemingly un-politicized, with an age range from 10 to over 70.

⁹⁷ See B'Tselem’s 1992 Report, as well as Human Rights Watch’s 1994 report.

⁹⁸ Established by an Israeli human rights activist in 1988 during the First Intifada. It was intended to support Palestinian who were “victims of violence,” including detainees, East Jerusalem residents, and others subjected to human rights violations. (see <http://www.hamoked.org/about.aspx>)

⁹⁹ B'Tselem was established in 1989 by a group of prominent Israelis with its established mission to “change Israeli policy in the The Territories and ensure that its government, which rules the The Territories, protects the human rights of residents there and complies with its obligations under international law.” [see http://www.btselem.org/about_btselem]

¹⁰⁰ Al Haq was founded in 1979 in Ramallah, from which point forward they systematically documented human rights and international law violations in the West Bank. The organization is made up of Palestinian and International legal experts. (see <http://www.alhaq.org/about-al-haq/about-al-haq>)

¹⁰¹ This organization was founded in 1992 in Ramallah and is a “Palestinian non-governmental, civil institution that works to support Palestinian political prisoners held in Israeli and Palestinian Prisons.” (see <http://www.addameer.org/about/our-work>)

organizations), the material remains an excellent resource for scholars seeking to tease out a narrative of Palestinian prisoners in the decade and a half after the beginning of the Occupation. Because these organizations collect testimonies and catalogue physical and emotional violations during interrogation and inside the prisons, they contain a wealth of information on the liberties Israel takes behind prison walls and inside the Territories more generally, as well as hundreds of oral testimonies of the experiences of those confronting arrest and questioning, all of which one can draw on to understand the continuing utter debasement to which prisoners are subjected.¹⁰² Thus, even though these reports date to the Intifada period, they are useful in that they help establish markers for what had *not* changed by the late 1980s, thus allowing us to read backwards, corroborating oral testimony. Thus, these documents are important to piecing together the narrative of the pre-conviction experience of prisoners between 1967 and the early 1980s.

During the period on which this project focuses, the primary reasons leading to individuals' arrests were broad, ranging from operations to others styles of political engagement. Then and now, Israel's foundational policy has been to block the development of any type of security threat. As one writer succinctly put it in 1970: "Who gets arrested? In conditions where absolute control is denied legitimate sanction and force is the principal means for securing compliance, *everybody* is suspect. Power distinguishes only between categories of suspects, between degrees of complicity."¹⁰³ Roughly speaking, from 1967 and into the 1970s, ranks of the imprisoned were dominated by individuals who attempted or carried out guerilla attacks, but also included those who had

¹⁰² According to the Human Rights Watch report on the Middle East (1994), many human rights organizations say that approximately 5,000 Palestinians were interrogated every year from 1988 to 1994. While these numbers are undoubtedly higher than the pre-Intifada period, it gives a sense of how improvements in the prisoner's situation was not linear and irreversible.

¹⁰³ Hisham Sharabi, "Palestine Guerrillas: their credibility and effectiveness," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1970, 14.

identified as – or were accused of being – *fedayeen*.¹⁰⁴ As the decade progressed, the Israeli lens for those who were considered a threat widened; nearly every young male was considered a security risk, and even non-military affiliation with Fatah, the PFLP, the DFLP or the Communist Party would land *shabab* in interrogation at the very least, or in prison if charges could be brought against them.¹⁰⁵ Under Israeli military orders, attending a demonstration or distributing political posters constituted security breaches.¹⁰⁶ As Hajjar points out, by the 1980s, “even children throwing stones at military patrols...were arrested and charged with felonies.”¹⁰⁷ With the rise of the Palestinian university system in the West Bank in the late 1970s, a great deal of student-driven popular activism spread throughout the Territories, which resulted in large numbers or arrests.¹⁰⁸ Mere reports of pro-PLO rhetoric amongst Palestinians at Israeli universities resulted in detention or arrest¹⁰⁹; the widespread belief amongst Israelis by the end of the 1970s was anyone supporting the PLO publicly was guilty of a serious crime.¹¹⁰ Faculty and administrators were also seen as possible instigators, and were thus subject to questioning or arrest at checkpoints if political books were found on their persons.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Arrest during the first years of the Occupation continued inside Jordanian territory, as Fatah was based there until 1970. After 1967, armed struggle dominated and anyone seen as supporting or being involved in this was detained.

¹⁰⁵ Ibrahim Khrishi, whose story will be told later, is an example of this: he was arrested for an operation that took place far from where he was residing at the time; he believes his arrest was predicated on his role as a respected student leader at Bir Zeit.

¹⁰⁶ The history of Israeli justifications for arrests is discussed in Addameer, “A report on the status of defense lawyers in Israeli military courts, (Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, April 2008), pg. 9.

¹⁰⁷ Hajjar 191.

¹⁰⁸ Interview subjects discuss this, including those who were arrested during their time at University for any kinds of activities that could be seen as politicized. In particular, Ibrahim Khrishi and Dr. Ghassan Khatib speak to this. Maya Rosenfeld also references this in *Threat: Palestinian Political Prisoners in Israel*, edited by Abeer Baker and Anat Matar (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 10.

¹⁰⁹ A news story from January 1979 is featured in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* regular news roundup from the Israeli press (translated from Hebrew to English). This article reportedly noted a “wave of indignation in Israeli public opinion” leading to the issuing of “confinement orders against six students” despite the fact that there was no solid proof or evidence. See *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 8:4, Summer 1979, 121-124, p. 121.

¹¹⁰ The *Journal of Palestine Studies* news roundup, p. 124, also quotes Israeli paper (in translation) *Yediot Aharonot* on January 22, 1979 as suggesting that all those who support the PLO publicly are guilty of a serious crime.

¹¹¹ Ghassan Khatib spoke about how students and faculty alike believed that carrying books through areas where checkpoints might be set up was as much of a risk as being near the epicenter of an operation. Keith Hammond also notes in his 2007 article that this had not changed, referencing a Dean at An-Najah who had been administratively detained five times en route to campus. See Keith Hammond, “Palestinian Universities and the Israeli Occupation,” *Policy Futures in Education*, 5:2, 2007, 264-270, p. 266.

Thus, universities were seen as a real threat to the Israeli grip on West Bank society, as sites for the stoking of nationalist fervor.¹¹²

Shoring up the Occupation's system of control, arrests also resulted from information provided by "collaborators" (*asafeer*), individuals who provided information to the Israeli security wing called the *Shabak* or *Shin Bet*. These individuals were often bribed to take on this role of reporting on their neighbors and friends, either to avoid their own arrest or for reasons such as ensuring the renewal of their Israeli work permit.¹¹³ As Yaakov Perry, the former director of the Shin Bet in the 1980s and early 1990s, notes: payments must be small since "sudden riches arouse suspicion" amongst one's neighbors.¹¹⁴ These collaborators tended to remain loyal to the Israelis once they had accepted a payment, and were thus critical to the system of detention, arrest and conviction.¹¹⁵

More unfortunate reasons for arrest included having a name similar to a politicized person, sharing a bloodline with a convicted terrorist, or simply being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Since the Occupation's inception, large-scale roundups of individuals have been common, as evidenced by news reports in the 1970s and 1980s, with 11 separate instances reported in the Israeli press during 1981 alone.¹¹⁶ Some scholars suggest that "arbitrary and mass arrests" were tools for addressing a particular

¹¹² Today, the IDF regularly rounds up students at Al Quds University, which has replaced Bir Zeit as the center of political action.

¹¹³ Today, Palestinians report that checkpoints are particularly dangerous places for them. At these sites, evidence might be "found" on an individual, allowing the soldier, or one of the frequently employed private security guards known for being particularly vicious, to force the individual to accept an on-the-spot plea bargain of sorts: in exchange for "freedom" from arrest, the individual, usually a young man, will help the Israelis.

¹¹⁴ This line from his autobiography, *Strike First*, published in Hebrew in 1999 is frequently quoted. See, for example, Gershon Gorenberg, "The Collaborator," in *The New York Times Magazine*, August 18, 2002 and Greg Myre and Jennifer Griffen, *This Burning Land: Lessons from the Front Lines of the Transformed Israel State*, 62.

¹¹⁵ If a collaborator decided he was done, his Israeli "handler" would threaten to expose him to his neighbors and family, which would translate into immediate death.

¹¹⁶ Al Haq translates Israeli press accounts of mass roundups. See, for example, their 1982 Report.

challenge: to “disrupt the plans and activities of the leaders and terminate”¹¹⁷ uprisings; others argue that mass imprisonment was one “technique that aimed to reinstate the colonial order and its power relations” in the post-1967 surge in resistance activities.¹¹⁸ Thus, the reasons why a Palestinian might see the inside of a jail cell during his life time are many, which explains the commonly cited statistic that one in three Palestinian men have been imprisoned at some point in their lives.

By the 1980s, the policy of mass arrest had a profound impact on prison demographics. Most notably, diversity was apparent, with individuals drawn from all sectors of society and geographic locations. The mixing of individuals who might not come into contact with one another in their day-to-day lives was a major contributing factor to prisoners moving away from connecting with each other based on familial or tribal networks, replacing these connections with relationships forged through the burgeoning complex political system.¹¹⁹ This diversity also enabled the cultivation of educational programs since the highly educated were mixed with individuals from marginalized communities, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Thus, the demographic shifts in part enabled the birth of prison structures, as well as a soaring of the general education level; a subtle, yet definitive, undermining of the colonial agenda.

In addition to tracing patterns of reasons for arrest, one can see consistency in the sites of arrest, with the most common site alluded to being the home. Arrest serves more than one function for the Israeli authorities: first, to remove a so-called threat from society; and second, to instill fear in the population by underscoring Israeli power and

¹¹⁷ Robert F. Hunter, *The Palestinian Uprising: A War by Other Means* (University of California Press, 1991), 106. Some argue that large-scale roundups are a post-Second Intifada invention, including Myre and Griffen.

¹¹⁸ Meari, 548. One should also note that since Oslo, roundups of hundreds of individuals often precede the reopening of negotiations.

¹¹⁹ The political system will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

control over spaces deemed private. As one scholar put it, “their homes were violated and their ability to sleep soundly permanently threatened.”¹²⁰ When Israelis show up, en masse, usually in the middle of the night to demand the handover of a family member, the image of the home as sanctuary is destabilized. The result of this action is that the suspect’s entire family becomes part of the arrest experience; they became part of the narrative of imprisonment as it unfolds. There is never an explanation of the reason for arrest since it is always a matter of state security. Furthermore, neither arrests nor the simultaneous house searches¹²¹ are accompanied by a warrant, nor are suspects read anything resembling their rights prior to being taken away. In some cases, the wanted family member is not even present when the soldiers come calling, although this does not lessen the aggression of the soldiers. As Ibrahim Khrishi recollected, when the military visited his family he was not even in the village, but living closer to Bir Zeit University where he was studying for his first degree. His story is consistent with the narrative of others arrested in the 1970s, 1980s and even today.¹²² He retells his family’s version of the story, that the military “invaded the house in a really unbelievable way:” the soldiers showed up after midnight, when everyone was sleeping and the house was completely dark, and that his family told him it was “very scary.” They demanded that his father hand him over, and when pressed for a reason, his family recounted that the response was

¹²⁰ Bornstein, 461. Heidi Morrison’s recent (not yet published) work also speaks to the effects of arrests and violence within the Palestinian home in the post-Second Intifada period.

¹²¹ Ex-prisoners note that these searches are often more of a ransacking, during which furniture is upturned and damaged, drawers emptied, and the state of the home left in utter disarray.

¹²² Similar stories of soldiers seeking a suspect and wreaking havoc in the house during the search is one that is told and retold. In 2012, when I picked up a former student of mine who was accompanying me to an interview, she told me the story of her brother’s arrest in the very early hours of the morning. Similar to those told by interview subjects recollecting the 1970s, she told me how the military destroyed their property and took her brother to an undisclosed location. They first went to their empty house in Beit Hanina and when nobody answered the door, blew it off with a grenade. They then visited the house in which they resided, going from room to room turning over furniture, emptying drawers, and looking for evidence of her brother’s political involvement. Also similar to the 1970s and 1980s, her brother was held in administrative detention for months, during which period his family was not able to communicate with him.

something to the effect of “we want him.” As others have also indicated, the military authorities are always clear that they need not give an explanation but merely state a demand that must be obeyed for security reasons. The soldiers gave the family 24 hours to convey Ibrahim’s person to them or else they would arrest all of his brothers. The tactic of threatening the entire family is what motivated Ibrahim to appear at the station the very next day, although he claims he did not know why they sought him. Others report that arrests occur at the hands of men in civilian clothes, albeit accompanied by border police and/or IDF soldiers.¹²³

Invoking anxiety and fear during and in the immediate aftermath of arrest seems to be a tactic directed not only at the suspect, but at the entire family. Once a suspect is in the hands of the authorities, Israeli law states “information regarding his arrest and place of incarceration should be immediately conveyed to a relative, unless the prisoner requests otherwise.”¹²⁴ As is evident in subjects’ testimony, as well as published material, this statute is rarely upheld. Not knowing where an individual is being held is yet another way in which arrest targets the entire family. Lawyer testimony to B’Tselem underscores the level of heightened tension a family undergoes. As one reports, “failure to notify harms the relatives of the prisoner as well, in that from the moment the imprisonment begins, they lose all contact with the prisoner. They must put themselves out and travel in order to locate the place of incarceration. They are unable to send a lawyer to care for the prisoners and they live under fear and by rumor.”¹²⁵ Indeed, the threat of arrest hangs over the heads of all Palestinians. Between 1967 and the mid-1980s, the Israeli state

¹²³ *London Times* Special Report, June 19, July 3, July 10, 1977.

¹²⁴ Order Concerning Security Regulations, Judea and Samaria, no. 378, 1970, Article 78 a/b.

¹²⁵ Advocate Avigdor Feldman, quoted in B’Tselem, *The Military Judicial System in the West Bank* (Jerusalem, November 1999), 16.

responded to every incident with punishment, including “total curfews extending for days, destructive searches, mass arrests.”¹²⁶ Arrests were the crowning victory of the Israelis, aiming not “only at apprehending the guilty, but also at crushing the will to resist.” The goal, one could argue, was to cultivate “an environment in which the cost of resistance would become increasingly prohibitive.”¹²⁷ Thus, arrest quickly became a specter within Israel.

The Interrogation: A Physical and Psychological Inquisition

From the moment of a suspect’s capture, he enters the dreaded world of the prison system, which operates “as an autonomous kingdom within the larger state,” vividly referred to as the “wild west of human rights in Israel” in a 1977 text.¹²⁸ The first stop for a suspect is a detention center for interrogation. These centers were highly secretive and “inaccessible” to all but the secret agents overseeing the process. What this means is that “the only sources of information are people who have been interrogated.”¹²⁹ This presents challenges for the researcher, as many subjects are unwilling to speak about this stage, even after more than one meeting in which some trust is built. As this section will illustrate, methods were often extremely punishing, both physically and mentally. The difficulty of accessing these stories is unsurprising given recent studies on Palestinians who have undergone torture. One scholar argues that individuals experience psychological symptoms similar to PTSD, including anxiety, hyperalertness,

¹²⁶ Sharabi, 14.

¹²⁷ Sharabi, 14.

¹²⁸ Prisoner Committee publication (Um al Fahm), 11.

¹²⁹ Hajjar, *Courting Conflict*, 69. Every prisoner admitted to prison is subject to a medical exam upon entry and on release. These exams are recorded by the Red Cross. Access to these documents, although prohibited to researchers, could tell us something about treatment during interrogation, as well as during imprisonment as described in “Israel and Torture, Special Report,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Summer 1977), 214.

concentration, and memory disturbances.¹³⁰ For female prisoners, shame is a major factor, derived from threats – or the reality – of rape or humiliation.¹³¹ Thus, many interview subjects were unwilling to revisit this experience, refusing to assign language to their traumatic memories.

In spite of the obstacles in the path of clarifying what goes on behind these closed doors, both Israelis administrators and Palestinian prisoners suggest that this period is critical to the incarceration process writ large, albeit for different reasons. From the Israeli perspective, the goal of interrogation “is to protect the very existence of society and the State against terrorist acts... to collect information about terrorists and their modes of organization and to thwart and prevent the perpetration of terrorist acts whilst they are still at a state of incubation.”¹³² Interrogation is key because “confessions represent the most common source of evidence (sometimes the only source) to charge and prosecute Palestinians.”¹³³ From 1970, the responsibilities of the military court system expanded significantly, which resulted in an increased “demand for forms of evidence that would hold up in court;” confessions were deemed enough for conviction. As mentioned earlier, the period of interrogation is prescribed, after which the suspect should appear before a military judge, although these rules were more frequently bent than not, with the interrogation sometimes lasting for months. These weeks grant a kind of unsupervised autonomy to the interrogators, during which time they employ a variety

¹³⁰ Raija-Leena Punamaki, “Experiences of Torture, Means of Coping, and Level of Symptoms among Palestinian Political Prisoners,” *JPS*, 17, no 4 (Summer 1988), 83.

¹³¹ Rabiha Diab speaks to this the fear of shaming her family during interviews. So, too, Punamaki, 88, mentions it.

¹³² State of Israel, “Commission of Inquiry into the Methods of Investigation of the General Security Services Regarding Hostile Terrorist Activity,” reprinted in *Israel Law Review*, 23, no. 2-3, (Spring-Summer 1989), 17. Hereafter I will refer to this as the “Landau Report.”

¹³³ Hajjar, *Courting Conflict*, 68.

of tactics intended to force confession and extract information. The result is unspeakable acts of violence against prisoners' bodies and minds.¹³⁴

Given that many ex-prisoners alluded to the period of interrogation in a manner similar to Yacoub Odeh's assessment, who says it is "the most important period" because "it affects a man's life in the future," it is worth dwelling on what the prisoners underwent. Due to ex-prisoner reticence, NGO reports help add to the limited accounts I was able to extract from individuals.¹³⁵ Indeed, an entire NGO industry has grown up around Israeli interrogation practices. The earliest formal reports date to the early 1980s, recording the experiences of those during the 1970s. B'Tselem "estimates that Shabak annually interrogated at least 1,500 Palestinians and used methods constituting torture against some 85% of them, that is at least 850 persons a year."¹³⁶

Unlike many of my interview subjects, Ibrahim Khrishi spoke very openly about his interrogation. During our second interview, he described the treatment in great detail, claiming to recall the period of questioning in a clear chronology. After he turned himself in at a military base in Tul Karam near his village, the soldiers hooded him and tied him up outside of the interrogation center, attaching him to "something on the ground they usually used to tie the horses."¹³⁷ According to his account, he stayed there for "around six hours," with his hands tied behind him, while passing soldiers kicked him or threw things on him. He describes this as a humiliating process," rather than as particularly physically painful; as treatment designed for pure humiliation rather than to extract

¹³⁴ For a discussion of how the Israelis intentionally altered the nature of torture during the Intifada period, see James Ron, "Varying Methods of State Violence," *International Organizations*, vol. 51, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 275-300. He argues that Israeli interrogation methods were shaped by "an underlying global mechanism" that forced the GSS to reconsider their methods and to "present a new, sanitized image of interrogations." (276-277).

¹³⁵ Ibrahim Khrishi, interview with the author, Palestinian Legislative Council, September 2012.

¹³⁶ <http://www.btselem.org/torture/background>.

¹³⁷ Ibrahim Khrishi, second interview.

information. They asked him no questions, which led him to believe that this was intended merely as the “preparation stage” for the interrogation; he believed the goal was to psychologically damage him enough to force a quick confession.¹³⁸ From this animal-like position, he was thrust into a van with others, blindfolded, and driven, for what he thinks was at least an hour, to an interrogation center.¹³⁹ From the transport vehicle, they shoved him into what he describes as “less than a cell,” where he just sat with his hands tied for early one hour. At every moment Khrishi is unsure: from the tiny room he is pulled into another room and left standing, trying to follow the Hebrew chatter of the guards. Without warning, he recounts, “something pushes me to the wall in a very strong movement and my head was in the wall. I didn’t see anything, I could just feel someone who is pushing me in a very strong way.”¹⁴⁰ He recalls that “I felt I was unconscious” and that they continued “kicking my body.” According to Khrishi, soldiers shouting in Hebrew accompanied every move the blinded prisoner was forced to make. By obscuring the suspect’s sight during such movements, the Israelis create a situation in which they dominate by crippling the prisoner’s sense of confidence, and also heightening the other senses so that the shouting had more of an impact. None of these actions are intended to get information; rather, says Khrishi, “this is only the start.”

Not surprisingly, by the time a guard actually questions the prisoner, he is exhausted, confused about his location and the hour of the day, and suffering from injuries. And yet, even at this point the actual interrogation did not begin. Rather, the guards tried to force a confession through accusations that the prisoner had performed the

¹³⁸ Interview subject “Wasef” (last name will remain unpublished) also spoke about this pre-interrogation abuse, referring to the beating as “a welcoming.”

¹³⁹ Khrishi later discovered from the other prisoners that he was in Jenin jail’s interrogation center.

¹⁴⁰ Ibrahim Khrishi, second interview.

action, and “blah, blah, blah,” recounted Khrishi. In Khrishi’s case, all of this took place while hooded, hands tied behind him, psychologically infringing on his defense mechanisms. Accompanying the verbal abuse, Khrishi says he was forced into a chair at some point, after which the interrogator sat above him on a table and pressed down hard on Khrishi’s legs, hitting him all the while. As he says, blindfolded and with one’s hands tied, “you are like a football in his hands.” He recalls being moved again, to another room, still blindfolded, but this time his hands were chained to a pipe in the wall. In this room, he says, “I could feel at the time that there is other people around me, and maybe only a few meters away.” Even before the actual interrogation had begun, the prisoner had spent hours blindfolded, with bound hands, completely at the will of the guards, and would surely have lost track of time, unsure if it was day or night. The face covering was only removed briefly to use the bathroom or take a meal.¹⁴¹

So, too, Yacoub Odeh recalled his interrogation in oft-minute detail. Unlike Khrishi, Odeh was interrogated at Moscobeyya in Jerusalem. He recounts that all of the mistreatment took place on the fourth floor, a remarkably specific memory given that his arrest was decades ago. His first actual encounter with the interrogators’ violent approach preceded his own experience: he describes seeing a “naked man hanging while being questioned and beaten” in a room he passed by with the guards.¹⁴² He also recalls the time of day: his first night, at nine o’clock, the “chief interrogator,” flanked by two others, told him that he will “be with me until five o’clock in the morning when his shift ends.” During this time he was subjected to repeated beatings “with meter length sticks,”

¹⁴¹ Wasef and interview subject Sami Jundi corroborated this.

¹⁴² Second interview with Yacoub Odeh.

including his head, while questions were fired at him. Unlike Khrishi, he does not reference multiple positions or locations, with the exception of his cell and the interrogation room. His memory privileges actions taken against his body. During our second conversation, he shows me scars on his hands, which he says are remnants from the time his questioners secured them with electric wires to stop him from flinching during beating. Finally, Odeh recalls the moment when he realized the extraordinarily damaging lengths to which the administrators would go in an attempt to obtain information, illustrating his point by referencing a girl he had known outside prison and who was detained just before him. He remembers that upon being escorted into the room where she was sitting only half-dressed, with the remainder of her clothing in a pile on the floor, her face registered zero recognition. He quickly realized this was due to the fact that his own face had been completely disfigured by a repeated refusal to give up information.

As interview subjects elucidate, the act of questioning was part of an elaborate, multi-person and multi-stage process. There was a kind of inexact, yet notable, pattern: first, the prisoner was kept in isolation for a week or two, then he would usually be moved into a room with other people, often including a collaborating “spy” to try to extract information, followed by a more cramped cell with a large number of people.¹⁴³ In the midst of these movements, prisoners would be brought regularly, but on no particular schedule, to the interrogation room to undergo questioning. This questioning was reportedly always accompanied by a combination of physical, psychological and verbal abuse. As interview subjects recount, the interrogators would ask the same question over

¹⁴³ Yacoub Odeh, Ibrahim Khrishi, and Radi Jara'ai speak to the presence of spies during the interrogation period.

and over again, often insisting that they already knew what had happened since people had revealed important information that affected the person undergoing questioning. A 1981 Al Haq report cites testimony by a 17-year-old similar to that of Khrishi and other interview subjects. He is quoted as saying:

I was taken into a special room... and three sacks were put on my head. I was ordered to stand on my legs and not move... I think I stood so for 20 hours. Afterwards... I was stripped naked and put under a cold shower. After a time... I was taken to the interrogation room. When I did not confess to 'inciting' ... I was put under the same shower, but this time someone poured cold water on me with a hose, in addition to the shower... when I again refused to confess, I was ordered to stand on my legs without moving for a full two days... I was beaten by the interrogators in all parts of my body. They beat me with their fists, kicked me, my head was repeatedly beaten against the wall. When I fell on the floor from exhaustion, not only was I beaten and kicked more, but one of the interrogators used to force my mouth open and put his shoe there for a long time, another used to force my mouth open then spit into it. During all that time, the interrogators also threatened that they would bring before me my mother and sister and rape them.¹⁴⁴

The sack over the head was intended to disorient the detainee. One interview subject reported to me that he wore this urine-soaked sack, while handcuffed, for a 15 full days, never knowing the time of day, which direction he was facing in the room, or who was around him.¹⁴⁵ Khrishi also noted the use of the urine-soaked sack, but interspersed with the treatment discussed earlier in this chapter.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Al Haq, "Human Rights Practices in the Territories during 1981," Washington (February 1982), 2. Lisa Hajjar also drew from reports in *Courting Conflict* and *Torture* of beatings, electric shock, death threats, position abuse, cold showers, sexual abuse, and denial of access to toilets.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Wasif (last name withheld).

¹⁴⁶ Khrishi interview.

The rooms containing spies working for the Israeli administration were particularly dangerous for the exhausted and traumatized detainee.¹⁴⁷ Spies, referred to as “birds” by the prisoners, appeared as sympathetic and attentive listeners, cozying up to the suspect, offering to lend their ears to the abused woes. According to prisoner testimony, these spies would try to convince the suspect that they could “take their case to an outside source that would be able to help them,” so long as they had all of the details.¹⁴⁸ Especially in the early years of the Occupation, before either the circulation of literature intended to offer advice and support or the establishment of an organized political structure inside the prisons, this tactic was successful.¹⁴⁹ A spy’s report was enough evidence of guilt for the Israelis; it would form the basis for additional ill treatment, punishment for a sustained period of refusal to cooperate and confess, as well as for a Hebrew-language confession the suspect was expected to sign.

The conditions of the interrogation centers were atrocious. Many interview subjects described *Moscobeya*, the Russian Compound, still located off of Jaffa Street in Jerusalem, as having tiny cells with no heat during the freezing cold winters. When they were put into cells with others, they were so densely packed one had to sleep with his head on his neighbor’s leg. Khrishi eloquently sums up these cells as not just small, but as a “catastrophe.”¹⁵⁰ Apart from the lack of adequate square footage, the cells were completely deficient in anything resembling even the remotest creature comfort. Khrishi remembers everything in the Jenin interrogation rooms as being “gross:” dank air enveloped them, with only a small window inside the door for the solider to open, made

¹⁴⁷ *The Philosophy of Confrontation Behind Bars* speaks at length about how to recognize and contend with these individuals.

¹⁴⁸ Quote from an interview with “Adam” (last name not permitted), interview with the author, September 2014.

¹⁴⁹ Here I allude to *The Philosophy of Confrontation Behind Bars*, which will be discussed on the following page.

¹⁵⁰ Ibrahim Khrishi, Second interview.

worse by the fact that they were not allowed to wash their bodies during this period; compounding the thick atmosphere was the near complete darkness, with only one very low wattage lamp per cell of approximately 150 by two meters that was shut down by seven o'clock each evening.

Taken together, such reports underscore the horrors of 1970s and 1980s interrogation practices, which sometimes resulted in a “conflict” for the suspect: either continue to undergo treatment akin to torture or confess to charges that were either untrue or would reveal political secrets and compromise future operations as well as the freedom of others.¹⁵¹ Thus, those involved in military actions or the broader resistance movement needed to be prepared for this reality. Acknowledgement of the treatment *fedayeen* and faction members were sure to encounter, combined with planning for how to grapple with it, resulted in the exertion of agency by the detained and their comrades. Over the first decade of the Occupation, political prisoners developed the concept of *sumud*, translated as refusal to cooperate, through their encounters with prison authorities. Anthropologist Lena Meari writes in detail about *sumud*, arguing that it involves not only an unwillingness to cede information, but also a refusal to “recognize the interrogators and the embodied order of power that structures the colonial relation.”¹⁵² Thus, she argues that it is an anti-colonial act, a revolutionary assertion; the prisoner actively chooses to

¹⁵¹ Yacoub Odeh spoke to this “conflict” most eloquently, although others also referenced the pressure they faced to confess in order to stop the torture.

¹⁵² Meari, 548. Her research shows that the concept of *sumud* dates back to first years of the Occupation. She cites an interview with a woman who underwent interrogation in 1969, and claims that the notion of steadfastness and refusal to cooperate was ever present in her mind.

resist the urge to give into pain in order to protect his faction, comrades, and the revolution writ large.¹⁵³

According to interview subjects, a kind of *sumud* was solidified in writing in the late 1970s and early 1980s in highly secretive documents circulated inside and outside of prison amongst members of all political groups. The factions produced these materials to prepare members for a possible future encounter with military authorities and/or *shabak*, particularly when it came to interrogation. According to ex-prisoners with whom I spoke, the most commonly read text was entitled *The Document on the Philosophy of Confrontation Behind Bars (Falsafat al-muwajaha wara' al-qudban)*, which was intended to emotionally prepare *fedayeen* for the day when they had to endure torture while not giving up anyone's name or information about the faction's future plans. Multiple copies are available at Abu Jihad library, each consisting of over 200 pages of small handwriting inscribed into notebooks. The text bears no author's name, pointing not only to its clandestine nature, but also to a collective Palestinian rhetoric and experience.¹⁵⁴ The writing suggests the influence of international revolutionaries, as well as inspiration by international revolutionary movements. Based on the collection of books gathered from the prisons, these influences likely included Che Guevera and Franz Fanon, among others.¹⁵⁵ As Odeh recounted, this document prepared individuals for the inevitable: sustained beating during interrogation "so you will confess and give them the information they want."¹⁵⁶ He adds that "of course we do not fall for this"¹⁵⁷ given that so

¹⁵³ Meari, 548.

¹⁵⁴ I will discuss the anonymity of texts in more detail in Chapter Three. Lena Meari claims that the initial draft was written by Mahmood Fanoon in 1978 in Nablus prison, although I have not been able to corroborate this.

¹⁵⁵ See the library shelves at the Abu Jihad archive.

¹⁵⁶ Yacoub Odeh, Second interview.

many prisoners had read *The Philosophy of Confrontation* and, after one period of imprisonment, had also engaged in conversations with others about *shabak's* techniques and how they should respond. By calling this approach a “philosophy,” the book suggests a kind of higher order resistance, one that asks prisoners to access their deepest recesses in resisting the urge to give in to physical, psychological, and mental exertions of pressure, in the interest of a greater cause: defeating the Occupation.¹⁵⁸ Interview subjects proudly spoke about their ability to endure physical and emotional torture for moral and ethical reasons connected to the resistance movement and their brothers, a main focus during the segments of interviews dealing with interrogation.¹⁵⁹ Through this positive framing of their experience, reports of open prisoner discussions about how to contend with this stage of arrest, as well as surviving writings addressing the challenges of interrogation and the dangers of giving in, Palestinians carved out a space of agency in a process that otherwise rendered them helpless and dependent on their oppressors.

It is clear that for many interview subjects the hesitancy to discuss certain details of the period of interrogation is rooted in an attempt to avoid the deeply rooted cultural issue of shame. These former prisoners want the message of their struggle with the military and prison authorities to be one of strength and accomplishment, rather than pain and suffering. As one psychology scholar eloquently put it, emphasizing “the just cause of the Palestinian struggle,” patriotism, loyalty toward their own people, as well as feelings of pride and defiance were all coping mechanisms during and after experiences

¹⁵⁷ Yacoub Odeh, Second interview.

¹⁵⁸ Nashif refers to this document as taking a philosophical approach to interrogation and torture, which inspires one to “generate the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive techniques and skills to confront the colonizer,” p. 105.

¹⁵⁹ Almost every interview subject with whom I spoke emphasized this. Rabiha Diab even spoke about her ability to not give in even when the interrogators threatened to harm her children. One of Maeri’s interviews in her article on *sumud* mentions a mother whose response to her child’s arrest was that “he has to practice *sumud*... it is unethical to confess against other people, leading to their arrest and to their suffering...” [Quoted in Maeri, 558].

of torture.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, widely accessible documentation offering common strategies for this difficult period is part and parcel of creating internal power relations amongst the prisoners and a kind of unified approach.

Telling the Truth: Israeli and Palestinian Accountability

Even when prisoners are willing to talk about the interrogation period, the difficulty of establishing what happened in these sessions is that only two people are present: the victim and the interrogator.¹⁶¹ Describing Israeli interrogation practices thus requires a cross-referencing of ex-prisoner narratives with published reports, many of which were based on testimony combined with attorney descriptions of physical injuries. In 1977, a startling three-part report by the Insight Team in *The Times of London* (hereafter referred to as the Insight Report) broke the story of Israeli use of torture against Palestinian political prisoners. According to the five-month investigation, regularly employed techniques “place Israel’s practice firmly in the realm of torture.”¹⁶² The most commonly reported mode of extraction is prolonged and repeated beatings. Other techniques include hooding or blindfolding prisoners, sleep/food/drink deprivation, freezing cold showers, beating on the soles of their feet (called *falaka*), hanging by one’s wrists for long periods of time, sexual molestation, electric shock (including to the testicles), and “at least one detention centre has (or had) a specially constructed

¹⁶⁰ Punamaki, 90.

¹⁶¹ Sometimes there is more than one interrogator present, but according to most reports, the majority of cases involve one on one questioning as a way to cultivate a false bond between interrogator and suspect.

¹⁶² This report was conducted by the *London Times* Insight Team and published June 19, 1977 [hereafter known as “The Insight Report”]. It was based on interviews over five months in 1976 with 44 Palestinians who claim mistreatment. I could not get access to the original report and thus have to rely on the press. The article was then submitted to the 32nd session of the United Nation by the Permanent Representative of the Sudan (accessible here: <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/FE3D603D74F5729B85256FE0006CC519>). It was also reprinted in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Summer 1977), 191-219.

‘cupboard,’ about two feet square and five feet high, with concrete spikes set in the floor.”¹⁶³ A particularly revolting story recounted in the report involved an interrogator who “swung” the detainee around the room by his hair until it all fell out. He then made him eat the hair and wash it down with salty water. A second interrogator followed this horror show by shoving a glass bottle up the detainee’s rectum. That same individual reported that the very next day he was hung by his wrists on a pulley and beaten continuously. This subject’s state was corroborated a report by Felicia Langer in which she notes that the injuries he had sustained made him unable to walk by himself, his face was yellowed, and broken ribs made it difficult for him to breathe. She claims “he did not know his age, place of birth, address, or whether he had children” and he “started trembling terribly” when asked if he had been tortured using electricity.¹⁶⁴ Israeli officials were asked about this particular case and although they denied torture, they were caught in a lie. The Israelis claimed that he had already served three years of an 11-year sentence when he requested medical treatment in Jordan. This medical treatment was for the wounds from the interrogation, into which he had just been taken, a fact proven by other recent medical records he created as a free man.

According to the report’s findings, torture is “systematic” and planned, and “it appears to be sanctioned at some level as deliberate policy.” As one psychologist has pointed out, it is “an integral part of the government’s security policy, thus the Israeli

¹⁶³ From “The Insight Report.” Amnesty International corroborates this in *Torture in the Eighties* (London: Pitman Press, 1984): “the frequency and consistency of these reports (my insertion: from lawyers, eyewitnesses, prisoners) indicate that some Palestinians from the OPT arrested for security reasons and interrogated by the Shin Bet Israeli intelligence services in a number of different detention centers, have been hooded, handcuffed, and forced to stand without moving for many hours at a time for several days, and have been exposed while naked to cold showers or cold air ventilators for long periods of time. detainees have also been deprived of food, sleep, and toilet and medical facilities, and have been subjected to abuse, insults, and threats against themselves and the female members of their families.”

¹⁶⁴ Langer was interviewed for and quoted in “The Insight Report.”

government officially sanctioned Shin Bet interrogators in the 1980s to use psychological pressure alongside “light violence” when interrogating those suspected of terrorist acts.¹⁶⁵ Targeting anyone suspected of a connection with the Palestinian resistance, the policy was aimed at punishing the suspect, “as well as acquiring information about Palestinian political and military organization, obtaining a confession as primary evidence against the accused, and warning and frightening others from further political activity.”¹⁶⁶ In the late 1970s, mistreatment was reported in the well-known interrogation centers of Nablus, Ramallah, Hebron and Moscobiyya. As Felicia Langer says in her description of Moscobiyya, “only a special kind of detainee is brought in there: the new victim.”¹⁶⁷ According to the Insight Report, there is also a “special military intelligence centre whose whereabouts are uncertain, but which testimony suggests is somewhere inside the vast military supply base at Sarafand, near Lod airport on the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road.”¹⁶⁸

Underscoring this notion that ill treatment was a kind of deliberate terrorism, a common form of torture extended beyond the detainee to his family. At some point increased physical pain would fail to yield further results. Indeed, research related to torture has shown that “more injury does not produce more pain, but it’s opposite,” thus suspects at some point shut down the physical.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, “desensitization is well documented,” and thus prisoners report that they lost all power of feeling when forced to perform tasks for too long.¹⁷⁰ To counter this, interrogators also played on suspects’ emotions. Odeh mentions a horrifying sight to which he was intentionally exposed: one

¹⁶⁵ Punamaki, 83.

¹⁶⁶ Punamaki, 85.

¹⁶⁷ Langer, *With My Own Eyes*, 9.

¹⁶⁸ From “The Insight Report.”

¹⁶⁹ See Rejali, *Torture and Democracy*.

¹⁷⁰ Rejali refers to an example of a Russian prisoner who claimed “I lost all power of feeling,” as referenced originally in F. Beck and W. Godin, *Russian Purge and the Extraction of Confession*, trans. Eric Mosbacher and David Porter (NY, Viking, 1951), 185.

of his handlers walked him by two of his female colleagues undergoing physical torture whilst naked.¹⁷¹ He also recalls seeing a friend of his being kicked so hard he say him “fly, yes, fly, in front of [him].” For example, interrogators would often threaten to destroy the family home or arrest his brothers if the detainee did not reveal the necessary information. They would also threaten sexual violence against female relatives.¹⁷² At other times, the interrogator would expose a family member to the detainee’s state. For example, the aforementioned man who experienced consecutive days of bodily harm and intrusion, had to face his wife on the “third or fourth day.” It is clear from the report that he does not remember the precise details, given the horror he had undergone, which had finally resulted in a loss of consciousness. According to his recollection, her screams elicited a beating from the guards, which continued until her husband “confessed.” There are multiple accounts of couples being beaten in front of each other.

It is particularly problematic that information upon which charges are based is obtained through these methods. As my interview subjects discussed, torture – even the mere threat of it – is a kind of terrorism, as they fully realized the dangers too much psychological or physical pressure could pose to the movement. Those who were politically involved in the 1970s had advance preparation for this impending doom, including via aforementioned documentation such as the *Philosophy of Confrontation*. As the prisoner movement unfolded, current and ex-prisoners realized the importance of documenting how to silently endure interrogation as a support to others.

¹⁷¹ Odeh, Second interview.

¹⁷² Langer talks about this in *With My Own Eyes*, as does Joost Hiltermann in “Deaths in Israeli Prisons,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3 (Spring 1990), 103.

Likewise, it is clear that the Israeli prison administration recognized the challenges of interrogation, especially that too much physical and psychological pressure could result in false confessions. As one scholar has pointed out, “the problem of torture does not lie with the prisoner who has information; it lies with the prisoner with *no information*. Such a person is also likely to lie, to say *anything*, often convincingly. The torture of the informed may generate no more than a normal interrogation, but the torture of the ignorant and innocent overwhelms investigators with misleading information.”¹⁷³ During Rabiha Diab’s excruciating 112 days in interrogation, she broke only once, and confessed to things she did not do.¹⁷⁴ It was not the physical treatment that resulted in her mistruths, but ultimately unbearable threats to her honor. She quietly and matter-of-factly relayed to me how the interrogators forced her to remove pieces of clothing, one at a time, all the while threatening to bring relatives to witness her “behavior.”¹⁷⁵ It was this threat of shame before – and thus for – her family that pushed her to mis-confess. As lawyers have reported, defendants would attempt to retract these confessions once they were in the safety of the courtroom. Not only was this impossible, but as Lea Tsemel notes, “there was certainly no chance of obtaining a decision that criticized the GSS or the Military Intelligence.”¹⁷⁶ She further recounts that, “every person in this industry, policeman and guard, doctor and nurse, and every judge, prosecutor, and soldier involved, knew about the torture and ill-treatment of detainees. Detainees used to be

¹⁷³ Rejali, 461.

¹⁷⁴ When I interviewed Rabiha, she was the Minister of Women’s Affairs and part of the Palestinian Legislative Council. I was lucky to get to know her over two years, inviting her to speak to my class. She passed away in 2015.

¹⁷⁵ Diab Interview.

¹⁷⁶ Leah Tsemel, “Notes on the history of Torture in Israel,” in *On Torture*, Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel (June 2012), 8.

dragged into [military] courtrooms stinking, shivering and crying. It was common knowledge.”¹⁷⁷

The Israelis were aware of the psychological and philosophical preparation of *fedayeen* for this period of interrogation, and reportedly were aware of the existence of preparatory texts, such as the aforementioned *Philosophy of Confrontation Behind Bars*. According to the Landau Report, the Israelis realized that their work was “hampered by the determination of those interrogated not to reveal information known to them, as the result of ideological indoctrination which includes a thorough briefing on how to cope with an interrogation, with this coping as such being considered an act of bravery by the terrorist’s organization.”¹⁷⁸ Thus, those in charge of interrogation had to try to break the suspects without coming too close to killing them.

When detained individuals did start to provide information, the tone of the interrogation changed. As soon as a suspect is willing to talk, a policeman takes over from the interrogator and the entire tone shifts. Every interview subject who confessed to his own crime(s) reports being given a cigarette, coffee, food, and treated by the policeman as an old friend, in an obvious attempt to garner more information about others. This division of labor is problematic when it comes to court cases verifying evidence; the policeman is telling the truth when he says everything was normal because it was his colleague – who is not present in the courtroom since he did not take the statement – who performed the deeds for extraction. According to Leah Tsemel, it is almost impossible for defendants to bring their interrogators before the court since they

¹⁷⁷ Diab Interview.

¹⁷⁸ Landau report, 18.

do not use their real names. Even in rare cases when it happens, the interrogator denies ever having seen the person in his life. In the case of the aforementioned couple that witnessed each other's mistreatment, both of them confessed to having harbored bombs, each trying to save the other. False confessions did not end the cycle of abuse, but merely served as starting points. When the interrogators could find no bombs, the special treatment resumed, this time out of anger at the lie. The suspect reported that one of the interrogators applied crushing pressure to his genitals in an attempt to either force further confession or merely for reasons of sadistic punishment.¹⁷⁹

The intention of harsh Israeli interrogation techniques was to extract information and sometimes to humiliate or punish detainees, but never to kill them. Indeed, as Joost Hiltermann points out in his work on torture during the Intifada, "if deaths occurred, it was usually because the interrogators had made a mistake, or had not judged the detainee's physical state of health correctly."¹⁸⁰ Rather, the Israeli interrogator would likely agree with Dan Mitrione, an American torture instructor in Uruguay: "you must cause only the damage that is strictly necessary, not a bit more. We must control our tempers in any case. You have to act with the efficiency and cleanliness of a surgeon and with the perfection of an artist."¹⁸¹ As one Israeli General Security Services interrogator put it in a 1990 interview with notable *Haaretz* reporter Gideon Levy, "however funny

¹⁷⁹ Moscobiya was reportedly famous for beating prisoners' genitals. Wasif (last name withheld) speaks to this during an interview. Two individuals cited in the "Insight report" (p. 17-18) are Shehadeh Shaladeh, arrested in 1969, whose penis was violated with a ballpoint pen refill, and Jamil Abu Gabeer, arrested in 1976, and beaten on his genitals. The "Insight Report," p. 19-20 also talks about Ghassan Harb, an *Al Fajr* journalist who was arrested in 1973. He was not interrogated until his 50th day in detention, when he underwent various forms of torture, including: constant beating, an urine-soaked bag over his head, and being forced into a dog kennel two feet square.

¹⁸⁰ Hiltermann, "Deaths in Israeli Prisons," 103.

¹⁸¹ Rejali, 446. There is a vast literature on the questionable value of harsh interrogation techniques. Rejali cites many sources, many of which are interrogation manuals that underscore the danger of using force. He draws on *Notes for the Interrogation of Prisoners of War* (a 1943 Japanese manual found in Burma), an Indonesian interrogation manual, the *U.S. Army Field Manual 30-15 Intelligence Interrogations*, the *CIA Kubark Counterintelligence Manual, 1963*, and *Human Resources Exploitation Training Manual, 1983* to illustrate a cross-section of warnings over time and space that the use of force can produce false confessions [as discussed in Rejali, 460-1].

and disproportionate from the point of view of causing a person's death it may sound to you – it's a serious punishment in a service in which the worker's involvement is so great. He might even be kicked out of the service.”¹⁸² Israel, the only “democracy” in the Middle East, a civilized nation of descendants from Western Europe, America, and the Middle East that rhetorically insists its values extend beyond the places from which their ancestors came, maintains a vibrant press industry. In fact, Israeli newspapers reported on torture of Palestinian security prisoners, with at least 40 cases described during 1981 alone.¹⁸³ It also has an international community to whom it must answer, and answer it did: Israeli spokesmen would tell the press, that harsh means were often necessary to control the rowdy terrorists.¹⁸⁴ The death of a prisoner was highly inconvenient. When it did happen, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, it was covered in the Arabic press, and reportedly in the Hebrew press as well. “Terrorists” needed to confess, to be punished, and to serve their time, but not to put the Israeli state in a position in which it was deemed unjust or a regular violator of human rights. To that end, Israel did, and continues, to cover up causes of prisoners' deaths. Odeh recalls one of his friends who suffered kidney damage from his beatings, and eventually died of kidney failure. The interrogators told the family that he was critically injured while running to see his parents on visitation day.¹⁸⁵ The bruises on the body and the subsequent autopsy told a different story. Thus, given Israel's position as a civilized and humane state, proving the authenticity of reports was critical. In 1981, ABC-TV filmed a 17-year-old student

¹⁸² Gideon Levy, “We are the Shin-Bet,” *Ha'aretz* Supplement, January 5, 1990, in Stanley Cohen and Daphna Golan *The Interrogation of Palestinians During the Intifada* (Jerusalem: B'Tselem, 1991), 113.

¹⁸³ Al Haq, p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ *London Sunday Times*, August 5, 1984, “row over the use of Gas in prisons divides Israel” by David Blundy examined allegations by prisoners in Israeli jails that gas was used against them while locked in their cells. Israeli spokesman responded that C5 tear gas was necessary because prisoners had a history of “hit[ing] the prison guards and there was no other choice than to use gas.”

¹⁸⁵ Odeh, Second interview.

reporting on his violent interrogation for it's 20/20 program. Notably, a part of the broadcast included footage of him taking a polygraph test as he recollected his experiences.¹⁸⁶ The authenticity of the story was critical because Israel's reputation was at stake. Thus, NGO's are careful to corroborate and verify their sources.

Until 1987, the only sources of information we have about what happened during interrogations are based on testimonies much like the ones I recount from Khrishi and Odeh. Al Haq and B'Tselem gathered many such accounts, as did human rights lawyers Felicia Langer, Leah Tsemel and Walid al Fahoum. Then, a decade after *The London Times* expose, the Israeli government constituted the "Commission of Inquiry into the Methods of Investigation of the General Security Service Regarding Hostile Terrorist Activity," also known as the Landau Commission [note: the report is hereafter referred to as the Landau Report], to evaluate the General Security Services (also known as *Shabak* or Shin Bet).¹⁸⁷ Answering to an international community meant that Israel also had to respond to allegations that interrogations went too far.¹⁸⁸

This resource is invaluable for research into the 1970s and early 1980s, as it offers a way to confirm many of the allegations of State-approved and/or directed prisoner torture leading up to 1987. The investigation resulted in a two-part report: the first was public and summarized GSS activities, while the second was secret and reportedly

¹⁸⁶ See the Al Haq report.

¹⁸⁷ Adalah reports on this in their 2012 report on Torture in Israel. It is also covered in the following scholarly sources: Alison Brysk and Gershon Shafir, eds, *National Insecurity and Human Rights: Democracies Debate Counterterrorism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Sanford Levinson, ed, *Torture: A Collection* (Oxford University Press, 2004); also the *Israel Law Review* 23, 1989 dedicated an entire issue to the topic, including articles by Mordechai Kremnitzer, "The Landau Commission Report – Was the Security Service Subordinated to the Law, or the Law to the "Needs" of the Security Service?" and Alan M. Dershowitz, "It is Necessary to Apply Physical Pressure to Terrorists and to Lie About it?"

¹⁸⁸ Interestingly the real spark for the Commission was not torture of Palestinians, but of a Circassian Israeli Officer in the army.

contained “guidelines for permissible interrogation methods.”¹⁸⁹ The report concluded that “the exertion of a moderate degree of physical pressure cannot be avoided” when dealing with individuals suspected of “hostile terrorist activity,” and that “national security imperatives required coercion in the interrogation of Palestinians and that the state should sanction such tactics in order to eliminate the GSS agents’ need to resort to perjury.”¹⁹⁰ The idea is that torture can be used against suspects who might have time sensitive information about an upcoming attack, those referred to as “ticking bombs” in the report. Interestingly, as B’Tselem points out, those with this kind of information “were tortured during interrogations on weekdays, while on weekends, when the interrogators did not work, the “bombs” stopped “ticking” until Sunday, when the process started over again.”¹⁹¹ Lea Tsemel summarizes the findings as follows: “torture is sometimes permissible, but lying to the courts is intolerable...if you have to torture someone, you must refer to the secret list of permitted and non-permitted methods, and if you use any of these permitted methods you must disclose it...the security service interrogators even had to fill out forms. Can you imagine? I have some of those forms.”¹⁹² Thus, while this study might have resulted in a reduction of the cases of torture, and possibly even eliminated some tactics, this act of bureaucratizing also made it somehow permissible.

As evidenced by B’Tselem’s tracking, many of the techniques employed prior to the Landau report continued, including: multi-day sleep deprivation while contorted into

¹⁸⁹The need for secrecy is defined in the report as “required in order to preserve State security” (Landau Report, p. 2 and again on p. 80). B’Tselem speaks about the material and its secrecy here: <http://www.btselem.org/torture/background>.

¹⁹⁰ Landau Report, 80.

¹⁹¹ <http://www.btselem.org/torture/background>

¹⁹² Adalah, 9.

awkward positions; enduring loud music; the urine-soaked head sack; exposure to extreme cold and heat; tying the detainee to a low chair, whilst tilted forward; tight handcuffs; positioning the detainee over a high stool, with his back arched backwards; violent shaking; long squatting with hands cuffed behind his back; threats against one's family. According to human rights organizations, this report had little to no impact on improving the interrogation process for Palestinians.¹⁹³ Rather, one could argue that it gave Israel a bureaucratic framework for its approach to interrogation. Indeed, the report states that the urgency of this report reflects a "crisis of confidence which must now be overcome for the sake of the common goals of these State authorities."¹⁹⁴ These findings both confirm prisoner testimony, while also providing a rare look into the history of the *Shabak*, which to this day operates almost entirely shrouded in mystery.¹⁹⁵

On Trial

Once a Palestinian is arrested for security violations, they become part of a military judicial system.¹⁹⁶ Both Al Haq and B'Tselem have extensively studied the courts system in the West Bank, creating many reports about the issues at stake. Based on interview testimony, however, the trial is the least-discussed period in the prisoner's journey from arrest to release. In contrast with interrogation, which prisoners resist discussing given the shame and painful memories attached to it, there is simply less for

¹⁹³ Not until September 9, 1999 did the Israeli Supreme Court, in an opinion written by Chief Justice Aharon Barak, forbid the GSS from using several methods of physical pressure against terror suspects, though it did not close all loopholes. In fact, Israel is one of the few places that had legalized certain forms of physical pressure falling under "torture and other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment" in the UN Convention against Torture.

¹⁹⁴ Landau report, 98.

¹⁹⁵ The controversial 2012 film *The Gatekeepers* is a rare and recent look at the experience of several former *Shabak* members, dating to this project's period.

¹⁹⁶ Although theoretically those arrested who are Israeli ID or passport holders are subject to Israeli law, this is not how things played out in the early years of the Occupation. Almost all Jerusalem residents ended up in West Bank prisons, in spite of the fact that this was a violation.

the prisoner to comment on regarding trial and sentencing. This is in large part due to language, since the deliberations were conducted in Hebrew. Indeed, from what I was able to glean from interview subjects, as well as from NGO reports on trials concerning security violations, the court experience is designed to be alienating and impenetrable for the defendant.

By the time a trial date is set, many prisoners have been in detention and undergoing interrogation for months. Any Palestinian accused of what Israel deems a “security offense” is tried in a military court, as set out in the 1967 Order Regarding Security Instructions (re-issued in 1970).¹⁹⁷ During the period on which this project focuses, military trials took place in Ramallah and Nablus, with the former serving the districts of Ramallah, Hebron, Bethlehem, and Jericho, while the latter heard cases from the regions of Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarem.¹⁹⁸ The outlined bases for trial in such courts are connected to the issue of security, and are determined by the Israeli police at the suggestion of the Attorney General and the Military Advocate General, including: any resident of the Territories who violates security orders; actions which infringe upon IDF security; anyone, including a Jew or a foreigner, who violates security orders, even if the violating act is not illegal according to Israeli law; and crimes that the chief police investigator recommends as being suited to a military court. In short, the military administrative leadership has a great deal of leeway and power. Although these orders have the potential for broad application, the reality is that only Palestinians are subject to such trials.

¹⁹⁷ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, security offenses can include anything from bombs or stone throwing, to mere membership in an illegal political party (ie Fatah, the PFLP, DFLP).

¹⁹⁸ This is discussed in B’Tselem, *The Military Judicial System in the West Bank*, p. 9.

The starting point for any court appearance is presumed guilt rather than *habeas corpus*. The order establishes a two-tiered system for judgment: for lesser security offenses (stone throwing, for example), a single-judge court is convened; for serious charges (incendiary devices, for example), the defendant faces a three-judge panel. The 1967 Order gives the Military Advocate General the authority to recommend army officers to the posts of military judges and prosecutors. For trials requiring three judges, IDF officer judges are appointed, with the only requirement being that one of them must have had six years of training at the Israeli Bar; for a single-judge trial, a judicial officer is appointed.¹⁹⁹ Although sentences issued by the military court of three must be approved by a regional commander, this system places a great deal of authority in the hands of those who have very little legal training or experience.²⁰⁰ An additional problem with the structure is that officers who serve as prosecutors and judges are part of the same military unit, and thus competition is fierce; those who serve as judges are frequently promoted to other senior positions.²⁰¹

Although military trials are, according to Israeli law, meant to be open to the public, much of the evidence used in trials against suspects is questionable. Signed confessions constitute the primary evidence and is often the *only* incriminating material the prosecution has for the trial.²⁰² As the aforementioned section on interrogation suggests, these confessions are frequently obtained via arguably illegal methods, but just as importantly they are written in Hebrew. Thus, almost all suspects are required to sign

¹⁹⁹ This is established by the *Order Concerning Security Regulations, Judea and Samaria Regions*, no. 378, 1970, article 3. Also, see Addameer's "A report on the status of defense lawyers in Israeli military courts, (Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, April 2008), pg. 9.

²⁰⁰ *Order Concerning Security Regulations, Judea and Samaria Regions*, articles 39, 14, 50.

²⁰¹ This argument is suggested by B'Tselem, *The Military Judicial System in the West Bank*, 34.

²⁰² This is discussed in the aforementioned articles by Michael Goldstein and Soraya Antonius.

documents they cannot read. Prisoners handled this fact differently, some signing under pressure, while others refused via special tactics. For example, evidence for a 1978 Ramallah trial for four boys, observed by two US Consular Officers in 1978 with Israeli permission, reportedly included information obtained in the following way: the boys “were beaten and threatened by the police until they signed statements written in Hebrew, a language none of the boys understands...the boys confessed to throwing rocks at [a] bus.”²⁰³ In other cases, detainees refused to sign. As Rabiha Diab proudly recollected, even in spite of 112 days of humiliating interrogation, she refused to sign her supposed confession. As she pointed out:

I don't know the Hebrew Language and they said just sign. They write whatever they want. I refused to sign. They said the lawyer went home. I said, I don't trust you and I can't sign unless the lawyer comes. The lawyer came back and she translated and after she read everything written, she went out to bring cigarettes. I scratched all of the things I did not say and wrote something different from what they said I said. I was precocious.²⁰⁴

While Diab is an aberration in terms of her brave approach to revising the presented document, prisoners increasingly refused to sign as a system of communication regarding how to contend with the interrogation period developed between *fedayeen* and faction members.

Apart from evidence, multiple factors arguably impacted the trial's legitimacy and fairness.²⁰⁵ Language continued to be an issue since they were conducted almost entirely

²⁰³ This is an excerpt from a 1978 series of over forty reports written by the Consular Section of the American Consulate in Jerusalem and sent to the State Department on the Israeli treatment of Palestinian political prisoners in Jerusalem and the West Bank. The report, entitled “Jerusalem A-19: Observations and Impressions of the Israeli Military Courts on the West Bank,” was excerpted in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 9, no. 2 (Winter 1980), page 83.

²⁰⁴ Diab interview.

in Hebrew, supposedly with simultaneous translation into Arabic. Reports, however, indicate that translation was inconsistent, with the translator “speak[ing] in a low, monotonous voice” so that “it was difficult to understand his words,” and were full of errors or not verbatim, mistakes that would sometimes be corrected by bilingual defense attorneys.²⁰⁶ In some cases, the judges and prosecutors would even communicate with the Arab defense lawyers in English.²⁰⁷ Besides linguistic challenges, trials were poorly planned and executed, including frequent delays and even misplaced materials. There are multiple accounts of soldiers or police witnesses, as well as attorneys, failing to appear, and the accused files are frequently lost. Such mismanagement could mean that by the time a second hearing was set, a new judge and prosecutor could have taken over the case, resulting in further complications and delays. Prisoners seeking to avoid such delays sometimes felt the pressure to plead guilty quickly, “to avoid serving a period of pretrial detention which would exceed the sentence likely to apply as a result of a plea bargain.”²⁰⁸ Influencing this decision is the fact that it is extremely rare for Palestinians to be found innocent when tried for security offences.²⁰⁹

Further exacerbating the unfairness of the trial experience was the generally atrocious conditions of the courts, which had underscored the humiliation factor while also having legal ramifications. During the 1970s, courts were “dirty in the extreme,”

²⁰⁵ B’Tselem reports that there was incessant and often excessive noise during their courtroom observations, with soldiers coming and going, as well as “continual vehicular traffic, and the sound of blaring radios” coming through the windows in *The Military Judicial System in the West Bank*, 25

²⁰⁶ B’Tselem’s *The Military Judicial System in the West Bank*, 25 - 26. There is much evidence of this, including prisoner testimony and from personal conversations with Anat Matar, based on her frequent court observations.

²⁰⁷ “Jerusalem A-19: Observations and Impressions of the Israeli Military Courts on the West Bank,” excerpted in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 83.

²⁰⁸ “US Dept of State Country Report on Human Rights practices for 1992, Israel and the The Territories,” reprinted in full in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 23, no. 1 (Autumn, 1993), 130.

²⁰⁹ Theoretically, once sentenced, an appeal can be appealed, however in reality this is only allowed with accompanying court permission, making appeal next to impossible.

while the “court rooms and the surrounding area show signs of neglect appropriate for neither a courtroom nor a military compound.”²¹⁰ They were also designed to be small with no private space for client-lawyer consultation.²¹¹ Ramallah, for example, consisted only of three courtrooms and an administrative office. The result of these conditions is that suspect-attorney conversations were conducted within earshot of the judge or prosecutor, which could have profound implications in the trial itself.²¹² In short, one can argue that trials are *pro forma*, in spite of State claims to the contrary.

Apart from the fact that trials can be read as farcical, court encounters were also entirely humiliating for suspects, their families, and even for Palestinian attorneys. For example, in Ramallah, defendants awaited courtroom appearances in “one of two small dirty rooms with no seating” where “large numbers of prisoners are kept in crowded conditions for many hours, without proper lighting or ventilation.”²¹³ Although families are theoretically permitted to attend trials, the lack of waiting rooms means that “dozens of people wait for long hours,” outside the court, often in the blazing sun, “and nobody bothers to inform them of what is happening in the courtroom.”²¹⁴ Information is not easy to obtain since these courtrooms are located inside Military Government compounds, with entrances guarded by (read: blocked) soldiers. Arab defense attorneys were not treated with more respect than suspects and their families, as they were barred from eating in the compound’s small dining room or purchasing provisions at the army store, to which Jewish lawyers had access.

²¹⁰ B’Tselem’s report *The Military Judicial System in the West Bank*, 23.

²¹¹ In many cases, lawyers have reported that it is difficult to actually see their clients, even when pre-arraigned with the court.

²¹² B’Tselem’s report *The Military Judicial System in the West Bank*, 23 and US Dept of State Country Report on Human Rights practices for 1992, Israel and the The Territories” reprinted in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 23, no. 1 (Autumn, 1993), 130.

²¹³ B’Tselem’s report *The Military Judicial System in the West Bank*, 23.

²¹⁴ *IBID*, 24-25.

Trials often resulted in sentences that were excessively punishing. Multiple life sentences were common. In Odeh's case, his eleven-month trial concluded in 1970 with a sentence of "three lives and ten years."²¹⁵ The courts had a clever way of dealing with lengthy sentences: they would be divided into what was called "active" and the "suspended" periods. For example, in the case of Khrishi, his 1985 arrest resulted in a ten-year sentence, six active and four suspended. What this meant in practice is that if the individual "did anything during the six years they will give you the four additional as a guarantee and they will judge you again."²¹⁶ Although many lengthy sentences were cut short with a major prisoner exchange in 1985, and then again with the Oslo Accords, some of those convicted in the 1970s remained in jail until well into the 2000s, spending close to thirty years of their lives inside the dreaded Israeli prison system.

Legal Wrangling: Why Reinvent the Wheel?

The system of arrest, interrogation, trial and eventual imprisonment is integral to the Israeli administration's efforts to manage the Palestinian population by complicating, hindering and fragmenting the resistance movement. As the preceding sections illustrate, once an individual enters the system, it is almost always a lengthy journey to eventual release – in some cases spanning multiple decades or even the rest of one's life, given that once arrested, re-arrest is a constantly impending doom. This system, over sixty years in the making, represents a remarkable pillar of stability in Occupation

²¹⁵ Odeh, Second interview.

²¹⁶ Ibrahim Khrishi, First interview.

management. An examination of Israeli laws related to security prisoners elucidates this constancy in control.

For starters, one of the most consistent aspects of a Palestinian prisoner's life is the encounter with the complicated and biased, yet stable, Israeli law, especially within the OPT. While the law has evolved since 1948, the base upon which it has built has not changed; whether a prisoner was arrested in 1967 or today, legal parameters have not substantially altered. Residents of the Territories are often subjected to the military law established by the British Defense Emergency Regulations of 1945, promulgated by the British High Commissioner of Palestine who acted with the authority of the Palestine Defence Order from 1937.²¹⁷ According to the Israeli argument, this was merely a continuation of Jordanian policy, and thus a way of maintaining some consistency.²¹⁸ There Mandate-era orders authorized the proclamation of seemingly extraordinary security regulations to protect the colony, at the time from the Zionists. With the beginning of the Occupation, the Israelis maintained this structure, thus subjecting the Territories to a military judicial system, a different system than operates within the state of Israel. That said, military courts handle all security offences, even for Arabs living within 1967 borders. At the same time, the Israeli authorities have granted lawyers access to the Supreme Court to challenge decisions.

²¹⁷ These were published in Supplement no. 2 to *The Palestine Gazette*, no 1442, September 27, 1945, p. 1055-1079 [accessible as a complete scan of the original document online at archive.org].

²¹⁸ The following is reviewed in Michael Goldstein, "Israeli Security Measures in the The Territories: Administrative Detention," *Middle East Journal*, 32, no. 1 (Winter, 1978): The Hashemites issued a proclamation May 24, 1948 that said all laws and regulations would remain in effect unless they conflicted with the 1935 Transjordan Defense Law. Two years later, in 1950, the Jordanians issued a statement that national council and the king would work to agree on general law codes, until which point all British laws would remain in effect. When the Israelis conquered the West Bank in 1967, IDF commander of the West Bank, Chaim Herzog, declared that the pre-1948 laws could remain except those that conflicted with the right of the Occupying power. Since then defense lawyers have argued that the 1950 Jordanian statement meant that the laws did not stand wholesale, while military courts uphold the position that they were never abolished.

Israel exists in a constant state of emergency and in a proclaimed state of war. What this means on a practical level for prisoners is that security and military orders can be issued without much fanfare. In 1970, Israel issued the Order Regarding Security Instructions for Judea and Samaria, a lengthy document outlining a starting point for managing the Occupation. Article 78 of the Order allows for an individual to be detained for up to 18 days without the issuing of an arrest warrant.²¹⁹ Furthermore, a judge may extend the period of detention to six months, even in the absence of an indictment. Even more dramatic, once an indictment is issued, there is no limit placed on the length of detention before a formal conviction in court. According to lawyers' testimonies, the most common reason cited to them for repeated extensions is that the indictment was not yet prepared.²²⁰ Article 79 of the same Order authorizes the court to release detainees on bail, although this almost never happens.²²¹

This is in stark contrast with the detention law inside Israel, which only allows for up to 48 hours without a clear order from a judge; an extension up to 90 days can only be made by the Attorney General and formally granted by a judge. The double standards are propagated by the fact that the military authority ruling the Territories can issue any orders it deems necessary. All orders must be published in Arabic and Hebrew and readily available so that those affected are properly notified. The first Military Proclamation was issued on June 7, 1967, justified "in the interests of security and public

²¹⁹ This order is outlined in Omar Ben-Naftali, *International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²²⁰ One judge noted that extending the detention in order to give the prosecutor the proper time to prepare the indictment is necessary in a region where "the number of prisoners is greater and therefore longer terms are given." This information is taken from B'Tselem, *The Military Judicial System in the West Bank*, 20.

²²¹ B'Tselem, *The Military Judicial System in the West Bank*, 34.

order.”²²² In the four decades that followed, the Israelis issued over 2,500 such orders.²²³ In 1978, Order 378 stated that a person can be arrested for reasonable suspicion of having committed a criminal act, but also that they can be held in solitary confinement for up to eight days without access to a lawyer.²²⁴ Since the very first order, these decrees become law immediately and are binding on all Palestinians in the Territories. The Israeli rationale for these orders is that they are necessary for security. In spite of the war state, one of the many contradictions at play in Israel is that Palestinian prisoners do not have political prisoner or prisoner of war status, although the IDF has always been authorized to judge and convict. While there are checks in place, organizations such as B’Tselem say that “this system has had a tendency to be practiced increasingly in theory alone.”²²⁵ The fact that military law has a long history, since it is based on that of the British Mandate period, relieves the burden of responsibility for Israeli administrators.

The constant state of emergency also means that Israel can justify certain actions against Palestinians on emergency grounds. For example, inside Israel a suspect has the immediate right to see an attorney, who will ensure that the investigation is executed in a responsible manner. In the Territories, the initial client-lawyer meeting is frequently delayed 30 days for the security of the interrogation. Israel often violates its own orders as well. Article 78 of the Order Regarding the Security Instructions confirms that the prisoner’s place of internment must be conveyed to a family member and his lawyer. According to B’Tselem, this rarely happens. The wait can seem interminable as families

²²² Cook, Hanieh, and Kay, 23.

²²³ This figure is as of 2004.

²²⁴ According to a 1989 report by B’Tselem, during the First Intifada, the General Security Services could prevent meetings between attorneys and clients for up to 30 days following arrest. See *The Military Judicial System in the West Bank*, p.19.

²²⁵ B’Tselem *Without Trial*, 6.

worry about mistreatment, but it also delays a family's ability to engage legal services to construct a defense. B'Tselem also discovered that attorneys are rarely notified and in fact each one they spoke with "described difficulties in locating prisoners."²²⁶ In one case, the report describes a prisoner's father and lawyer traveling to the place where it was rumored he was being held. Not only did the place in question deny his presence, the father had to wait eight weeks and submit a petition to the High Court of Justice to be notified of his son's location.²²⁷ Likewise, prisoners were frequently moved from one location to another, without notifying the attorney representing them.

The best example of this is the policy of Administrative Detention, a renewable and often lengthy holding period during which neither charges are issued nor a trial held. As B'Tselem pointed out in a comprehensive study of the military judicial system during the First Intifada, "many of the imprisoned Palestinians do not reach the courts," even though they are imprisoned for long stretches of time.²²⁸ Like other practices, the law permitting administrative detention is British in origin and was first applied to Jewish resistance fighters as early as 1937.²²⁹ Within the Territories, the Emergency Regulations established that the military commander has the right to order administrative detention if there is "a reasonable basis to suppose that regional security or public security necessitate that the person should be imprisoned."²³⁰ For prisoners within the jurisdiction of the Israel proper, the Israeli Minister of Defense can issue the order.²³¹ In other contexts, this

²²⁶ B'Tselem, *The Military Judicial System in the West Bank*, 13.

²²⁷ B'Tselem, 14.

²²⁸ Order Concerning Administrative Detention (Emergency Regulations), Article 1a.

²²⁹ Michael Goldstein, "Israeli Security Measures in the The Territories: Administrative Detention," *Middle East Journal*, 32, no. 1 (Winter, 1978), p. 35.

²³⁰ Order Concerning Administrative Detention (Emergency Regulations), Article 1a.

²³¹ This was reaffirmed in the 1979 Emergency Powers Law.

vague, sweeping “law” would be illegal. According to the 1979 Camp David Accords, an administrative order could be issued by a military Regional Commander for a period up to 96 hours, after which a detainee was meant to be brought before a military judge; a six-month order could only be issued by an Area Commander and the detainee had the right to petition the Israeli High Court of Justice to review that order.²³² The military commander is endowed with the power to execute this order “if there is a reasonable basis to suppose that regional security or public security necessitate that the person should be imprisoned,”²³³ although usually the Shin Bet makes the request. Approval of detention is not necessary except if the subject is a woman or a male under 16, in which cases the Area Commander needs to issue permission. What this means is that a great deal of power and control is centralized in the hands of one individual.²³⁴ In every other case the military commander has near complete authority, with the only exception being the existence of the Area Advisory Committee, which meets a few times a year to review detention extensions. Those under administrative detention are denied basic rights enjoyed by criminal defendants, especially straightforwardness: the criminal is interrogated and released or prosecuted for having committed an act, while the detainee is kept under wraps to “thwart a prospective danger,” the specifics of which are not shared with him, nor is he enlightened as to the existing evidence against him.²³⁵ Moreover, the judge and prosecution have the right to withhold information about charges and evidence

²³² *News From Within*, Jerusalem: The Alternative Information Center, 4:2, February 9, 1988. According to B’Tselem, *The Military Judicial System in the West Bank*, p. 6, from August 1989 it became possible to impose 12 months of detention without judicial review, as a result of the dangers brought upon Israel by the Intifada. This same report notes that at the time of publication, 9,000 administration detentions had been ordered since the beginning of the Intifada.

²³³ As established by the Order Concerning Administrative Detention (Emergency Regulations), Article 1a.

²³⁴ The Area Commander also appoints the Area Advisory Committee to oversee internal army regulations. This committee includes the area’s legal advisor as well as representatives from the various security branches.

²³⁵ B’Tselem *Without Trial*, 4.

from the detainee and his lawyer.²³⁶ Ultimately there are neither restrictions on the length of detention nor are the rules for appeal clear. Although in theory an appeal committee, also appointed by the Area Commander, to which any detainee can submit, appeals are rarely granted. Furthermore, in theory a detainee can petition the Israeli Supreme Court to revoke the detention order, but as Goldstein pointed out in 1978: “how much of a last resort this really is, is questionable.”²³⁷ He argues this is because the judiciary is very reluctant to get involved in affairs considered the military’s domain. According to Goldstein, although some Israelis in government “feel quite uncomfortable” with the continued use of the Mandate Emergency Regulations, “there seems to be a feeling that, despite deep misgivings, there is no alternative.”²³⁸ The ongoing conflict and the idea that every Arab is a potential terrorist, allows normally rational individuals to justify the use of administrative detention.

Israel’s continued emphasis on the state of emergency also means that the law can become malleable and civil liberties are compromised. In Diab’s case, she surprised the administrators by knowing something about the law, which meant that they simply adjusted the situation to fit within Israeli legal parameters. Although she hails from a small village outside Ramallah, at the time of her third arrest in 1981, she was brought to Jerusalem’s *Moscobeyya* for the duration of her interrogation. After a grueling 112 days, she was sent to prison without being sentenced. According to the Israeli law, if you spend one year and one day without appearing before a judge, the system must release the individuals. As Diab recounts, “when it became one year and one day, I reminded the

²³⁶ Addameer, “A report on the status of defense lawyers in Israeli military courts,” 9.

²³⁷ Goldstein, 40

²³⁸ Goldstein, 43.

administration of the prison that the law says this, so you should release me. They were surprised.”²³⁹ After consultation the administration concluded that the four months she spent in *Moscobeyya* could not be counted. After another four months, she inquired again and in response was moved to Ramle prison, at which point she was told the clock started over. Another 366 days passed. When Diab approached the administration and said “okay, now it’s been one year and one day,” they responded that the law was not applicable to individuals from the Territories. She tells the end of the story with a bitter laugh: “So I waited two years and twenty-four days without any sentence, without any court. And then finally I was sent to the court and I was sentenced for five years.”²⁴⁰ Diab’s case is not unusual. In fact, according to the Israeli Bar Association representative to the Knesset Law Committee, 33,000 men and women were detained (some briefly) over the course of 1976, of which “only 8,000 were charged because the police follow a policy of indiscriminate mass arrests.” The rest remained in administrative detention until their release, often in violation of Israel’s self-defined policies.²⁴¹

The policy of administrative detention has long been controversial in Israel and the Territories, in large part because it is illegal to imprison people on “the speculation that an individual may be dangerous in the future.”²⁴² Thus, it has long been critical to the prisoner movement, with the status of detainees a key site of prisoner resistance.²⁴³ In spite of the questionable legality, the number of administrative detainees peaked starting

²³⁹ Rabiha Diab, interview with the author, Palestinian Legislative Council, September 2012.

²⁴⁰ Rabiha Diab.

²⁴¹ This is quoted in Beirut-based journalist, Soraya Antonius’s, work: “Prisoners for Palestine: A List of Women Political Prisoners,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 9, no. 3 (Spring 1980).

²⁴² Alan Dershowitz, “Preventative Detentions of Citizens During a National Emergency – A Comparison Between Israel and the US,” *Israel Yearbook on Human Rights*, Vol. 1, 1971, p. 296.

²⁴³ One of the earliest hunger strikes was waged in protest of the policy, as will be discussed in Chapter Three.

in 1970 and then witnessed an overall decline through the decade. According to an interview with the Defense Minister in 1970, Moshe Dayan, Israel held 1131 detainees, 509 from the West Bank, 556 from the Gaza Strip, and 34 from Israel. He goes on to claim that over the course of that following year, the number dropped to 560 in total, as the police organized and more effectively targeted terrorist activities.²⁴⁴ The fact that the detention experience is so miserable often leads to acts of desperation manifested as plea bargains, when a trial finally takes place. This is in part because after a year of detention, the prosecution almost always had a signed confession to at least some of the charges, arguably forced by ill treatment. According to lawyers, this means that defendants often plead guilty to charges they did not commit.²⁴⁵ The B'Tselem report claims that prisoners were sometimes also pressured to take a plea bargain with statements such as: “finish it today and you’ll be out tomorrow. If you refuse the deal, the trial will be postponed and you’ll sit in detention until the end of the trial, and then if you’re convicted you’ll get an additional punishment.”²⁴⁶ This is particularly interesting given the widespread belief amongst prisoners and lawyers that it is a way for the Israelis to punish while stalling until a confession is made. As Langer reports, one of her clients, Abdallah Yusef Udwan, said: “I’m here under administrative detention order because they couldn’t find any proof against me.”²⁴⁷

Visual Markings of an Israeli Prison

²⁴⁴ *Jerusalem Post*, June 15, 1971, p. 7.

²⁴⁵ B’Tselem, *The Military Judicial System in the West Bank*, 37.

²⁴⁶ B’Tselem, 37.

²⁴⁷ Langer, *With My Own Eyes*, 35.

A second pillar of stability in the complex Occupation organization is the architecture of the prisons itself. The Israeli prison system accommodating “security prisoners” between 1967 and the mid-1980s was, and continues to be extensive. Dotted across Israel and the Territories, prisons inside the Green Line often housed prisoners from the Territories and vice versa. Many of the prisons the Israelis utilized were not of their own making, with buildings dating to the Turkish or British periods converted to house the growing number of security risks. Also, after the 1967 war, the Israeli Prison Services received five buildings that had served as prisons during the Jordanian and Egyptian rule. To add to those existing structures, the authorities immediately opened five prisons: Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Hebron, and Gaza. Over a decade into the Occupation, in 1980, they opened Nafha, and then in 1984 the Central Prison in Tul Karam, what the Israelis call the Judea-Samaria Central.²⁴⁸ The characteristics and traits of a given prison are determined in part by the space itself, including its size, but not necessarily by location.

The administration made full use of the sturdy existing structures. One very large former Ottoman building in Nablus was known in the 1970s as the Central Prison. With a capacity of 600 people, it was the biggest in the West Bank, and a site through which many prisoners passed. Ramle, inside the Green Line, had first been a British police station and then a stable for horses, but was converted to a major detention center for Palestinians from both Jerusalem and the Territories. Atta Qaymery, who was imprisoned there, referred to it as the “window shopping prison,” since it was often visited by representatives assessing the situation of prisoners. Throughout the 1970s, it was mostly

²⁴⁸ Korn’s article offers statistics and numbers inside prisons, p. 50.

inhabited by Jerusalemites, with around 100 prisoners at a time. He notes that Ramle was known for being “10 years advanced in everything,” recollecting that there were beds there, whereas in other places this was not possible until at least 1980. Given the prison’s relative advancement, Qaymery was able to propose an educational partnership with Bir Zeit in 1978.²⁴⁹

The authorities alternated between a policy of assigning prisoners in proximity to their point of origin, and then sometimes disregarding this entirely, and arguably intentionally. In fact, between 1967 and the mid-1980s, Asqalon prison, Nafha prison, the main wing of Beer Saba’a prison and the special wing of Ramle prison, located within the pre-1967 borders, were major hubs for Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza. Likewise, prisons earmarked for certain periods of incarceration hosted mixed populations. In the early 1970s, Beit Lyd, housed only about 50 prisoners, most of them Fatah members. Interview subjects dwell on this prison less than others because it was intended for those awaiting trial, thus inhabitants did not form the same attachment to this space. Even still, there was still a group of individuals who helped oversee daily life there, as will be discussed in Chapter Three.

While size was a factor in a prison’s conditions, the Israelis also earmarked prisons for certain purposes, upon which the prisoners would sometimes capitalize. Asqalon and Beer Saba’a, both inside the Green Line, are the best examples of prisons with purposes: both were intended for prisoners serving lengthy sentences. In Asqalon, situated in a former Tegart fort, a critical mass of long time residents meant that it became the site in which many of the democratic structures first evolved to their full

²⁴⁹ Atta Qaymery interview. This partnership ultimately did not work, as will be discussed in Chapter Four.

capacity.²⁵⁰ Organization was driven not only by the large population, but also by the fact that it was reportedly “hell” in the early 1970s.²⁵¹ One contemporary Israeli report describes it as a “place where prisoners – mainly Arabs – are sent to break their spirit. Not for interrogation, God forbid, but only after their trial. Ashkelon is a special punishment jail. Prisoners transferred healthy and upright from Ramle, go back to Ramle after a few weeks broken, destroyed – silent.”²⁵² Beer Saba’a, opened in 1969, was the first prison to be built expressly for its intended use. In spite of its enormous capacity, the 1970s witnessed serious overcrowding across the system.²⁵³ By the end of this decade, there were reportedly about 900 prisoners, of which approximately 700 were affiliated with the Fatah movement.²⁵⁴ This did not stop the influx: in 1980, Beer Saba’a served as a relief valve for overcrowded Ramle when 100 East Jerusalem residents were transferred there. Given the density, as well as the critical mass of Fatah prisoners, it is not surprising that it was among the first prisons to organize.

Yet another prison with a purpose is Nafha, opened in May 1980 for the stated purpose of alleviating overcrowding across the prison system. As multiple interview subjects stressed, its location, as well as the timing of the prison’s opening, spoke to a different driving force: to separate the perceived prison leadership from their followers.²⁵⁵ Indeed, the first cohort of inmates consisted of those identified as top leaders from the other prisons, the most dangerous and threatening, thus turning it into “a storage bin for

²⁵⁰ This will be discussed at length in Chapter Four.

²⁵¹ Langer translates an entire article from the Israeli paper *Ha-Olam ha-Zeh* that was published on October 27, 1971 that covers the riot in Asqalon that began on September 30th.

²⁵² Langer, 75-76.

²⁵³ As mentioned earlier, mass arrests began in fits and spurts in the early years of the Occupation and continue to this day, worsening at various moments and tapering at others.

²⁵⁴ Radi Ja’rai interview. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, the overwhelming majority of Fatah members made Beer Saba’a a key site for the evolution of political structures.

²⁵⁵ The make up of this leadership and its relationship with the other prisoners will be discussed in Chapter Three.

the most troublesome guerrillas, eight of whom are placed in each barren cell.” The location was not accidental. Deep in the Negev, prisoners were removed from civilization, even more psychologically removed from society than in a prison located within a town or city. By moving them into the middle of the desert, the administration hoped to deprive them of their connection to and role in the prisoner movement. Within just two months of the prison’s opening, the inmates agreed it was the “absolute worst,” already severely overcrowded. The intention was to relocate 50 to this prison, which it was built to accommodate, but it welcomed 100 on opening day, double its intended capacity.²⁵⁶ Interview subjects report that the prison was not yet ready to be inhabited, which exacerbated the already awful conditions. Beyond the issue of overcrowding, the place was not well-equipped: each room was approximately 20 feet long and 10 feet wide, housing eight prisoners, with a toilet and shower nozzle in a partly closed booth at one end.²⁵⁷ The only “furniture,” if you can call it that, consisted of thin mattresses and woolen blankets on the concrete floor, as well as cubbyholes along the walls to store limited personal belongings. The administration decided against issuing beds, to circumvent the possibility of prisoners dismantling them and using the metal for weapons.²⁵⁸ Given that this prison was intended to keep the leaders in check, the reports of how poorly it was managed are surprising; the conditions gave the prisoners ample and clear fodder for resistance. Former inmates report that the cells were poorly ventilated with only air slits for windows and solid metal doors, that there were too many bodies crammed into each cell necessitating that they sleep and eat on the floor, that they get

²⁵⁶ Yacoub Odeh, First interview.

²⁵⁷ These measurements come from Atta Qaymery and from a journalist’s account. See Christopher Wrenn, “Behind Jail Walls, Palestinians Speak Out: Two Inmates Died There,” *New York Times*, Aug 6, 1980, p. A3.

²⁵⁸ This issue of access to proper beds was pending before the Israeli Supreme Court at the time of Nafha’s opening.

only two hours of daily exercise outside cells, that food and medical care are poor, and that they are subjected to frequent solitary confinement.²⁵⁹ Indeed, within three months of its opening, activists and relatives of inmates loudly and publicly spoke out about the conditions. In response, IPS authorities told the *New York Times* that this prison had more space than others with 3.2 square yards per person compared to 2.8 or 3.0 in other places.²⁶⁰ Given the appalling conditions and the support from the outside, the prisoners launched a hunger strike within two months of opening.²⁶¹

With the number of prisons intended for “security prisoners,” the IPS experimented with different approaches to managing the population. Within a few years of the Occupation, it was clear that one Israeli policy was to disorient and destabilize individuals: prison assignments were far from permanent. Rather, the IPS regularly moved individuals from one location to another, especially those who were known to be politically active. The leadership of the prisons was especially subject to relocation since the Israelis believed that they would be able to break up the structure if they moved people around. As Chapter Three will illustrate, destabilization ultimately failed in the face of the well-organized prison-wide political structures.

“Managing” Prisoners

During the 1970s, the conditions to which security prisoners were subjected became a site of resistance, both inside and outside prison walls. As will be discussed at length in the next chapter, prisoners regularly waged hunger strikes to gain what

²⁵⁹ Atta Qaymery, Yacoub Odeh and Radi Jara’ai, all transferred there when it opened, described Nafha in great detail.

²⁶⁰ “Palestinian, Force-Fed, Dies In Israeli Prison: Jail Conditions,” *New York Times*, July 25, 1980, A3.

²⁶¹ Both Yacoub Odeh and Atta Qaymery spoke about this.

amounted to incremental improvements in their situation. Beyond prison walls, the press and local officials increasingly spoke to the impoverished conditions in the second half of the 1970s, based on prisoner and lawyer testimony. From an Israeli authorities' perspective, it is clear that permitting international monitoring was to cover them from international accusations of mistreatment.²⁶² The reality, however, was quite different from the attempted portrayal.

As evidenced by the number of reports cited in this chapter, human rights organizations, as well as other NGOs, have been tracking aspects of the political prisoner's experience for decades. The Red Cross has the longest standing monitoring relationship with the State of Israel, and in theory has been able to visit West Bank and Gaza prisons since 1968 in order to assess their mental and physical health.²⁶³ In practice, however, the authorities manage to circumvent exposure of some of the potentially image-damaging prison practices. For starters, delay tactics for observations are common: the Red Cross usually does not learn about arrests until the families or the prisoners' lawyers attempt to enlist the organization's help in establishing the prisoner's precise location. A major obstacle for Red Cross representatives is that they only have access to prisons, but not to police stations, interrogation centers, or military camps.²⁶⁴ For example, between 1967 and 1975, the organization was not allowed to visit detainees at *Moscobeyya* even though that is repeatedly noted as a site of mistreatment. Even in prisons to which the Red Cross has access, there are special cells that are neither visible

²⁶² The Red Cross was supposed to be notified of a person's arrest or detention within 12 days, but this is often not the case. They are also supposed to be allowed to visit detainees within 14 days.

²⁶³ Although Israel denies that the Geneva Conventions should apply to the Territories, and thus that the Red Cross has no actual rights to observe conditions, they have conceded admission to certain sites.

²⁶⁴ Israel and Torture, Special Report, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 6, no. 4 (Summer 1977), 206. There was a five-month period when the Israelis permitted Red Cross access to those under interrogation.

nor accessible. In Nablus Central Prison, for example, these are referred to as “X-cells,” located near the solitary confinement cells, to which the Red Cross has no access. Further hindering the organization’s observational work is the prison administration’s clear attempts at obstruction. According to the agreement, the organization must submit a list of prisoners it wants to see 48 hours before the delegates arrive. According to reports, it often happens that the prisoner is mysteriously “moved to another jail” upon their arrival.²⁶⁵ Furthermore, to the detriment of researchers, access to Red Cross files is extremely limited, as per the organization’s agreement with the State.

The prison system in which Palestinians lived was a curious combination of mixing and separation. At the onset of the Occupation, prisons rooms were not assigned according to political party. Although this altered by the late 1970s across the system, with hunger strikes winning prisoners the right to separate into rooms according to their factional affiliation,²⁶⁶ there was one key way in which all prisoners were grouped together and thus shared in one narrative: Palestinian “security” prisoners were completely segregated from Israeli criminals, imprisoned in separate wings of maximum security prisons within Israel or within military facilities in the Territories.²⁶⁷ There was a clear demarcation between Israeli criminals and their Palestinian neighbors, the latter for whom any action or violation of the law was framed as a security breach or an act of terrorism. What this meant in practice is that conditions were noticeably different within

²⁶⁵ Israel and Torture, 207.

²⁶⁶ According to ex-prisoners, the Israelis ultimately allowed this in the interest of keeping the peace. By housing faction members together, rather than mixing them, the hope was they would not come to blows and disrupt the management of the prison. In reality, by the mid-1970s, the prisoners were already self-administering their interfactional relationships via committees, as will be discussed in Chapter Three.

²⁶⁷ After Oslo, by 1996, all West Bank-based prisons were transferred to Palestinian Authority control. Interview subjects emphasized the decline in standards and the lack of control at play inside these prisons, even confessing that the Israelis were better jail managers than the Palestinian Authority.

prisons that contained both Israeli criminals and “security prisoners,” differences that sparked debate and resistance. For example, Ramle housed Israelis and Palestinians in such close proximity to one another that interview subjects report interaction. The disparity in accommodation and basic comforts, such as beds and access to books, inspired acts of organized resistance and even won certain improvements earlier than in other prisons.²⁶⁸

As this chapter has shown through the voices of ex-prisoners, NGO reports, and newspaper accounts, the world of the political prisoner was indisputably physically and psychologically traumatic. From the moment of accusation, when the period of interrogation commences, through the trial, to internment in multiple prisons throughout the system, prisoners faced improbably challenging circumstances. These circumstances are part of the Occupation’s architecture and a way to reach beyond the individual in question to the entire family. And yet, as this chapter has also shown, interview subjects do not dwell on the harsh circumstances of their experience as a way to evoke sympathy. Rather, they focus on their moments of victory against this punishing system. A resounding commonality amongst interview subjects was a refusal to break and the belief that others were participating in this steadfastness as well. As the remaining chapters will illustrate, prisoners created a platform for community and individual growth, as well as locally spun resistance, via hunger strikes and the evolution of political and educational structures. The hunger strike as a unified act of change seeking, and what drove prisoners to this life-threatening situation, will be the focus on the next chapter.

²⁶⁸ This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

“There is no such thing called ‘impossible’ in front of the faithful struggle by the heroes of the prisoners’ movement, who had nothing but their hunger weapon.”²⁶⁹

Chapter Two

Bodily Resistance: The Hunger Strike

From the beginning of the Occupation, Israel evolved a punishing and horrifying system of incarceration for those who dared resist the establishment and growth of the State. As discussed in the previous chapter, the network of prisons grew during the period in question, as did the factors with which prisoners had to contend. Organized acts of protest became a serious business inside political prisons between 1967 and the mid-1980s, but prisoners were largely on their own when it came to executing such actions. As discussed in Chapter One, NGO access was littered with stumbling blocks, and prisons were “closed” so tightly that even “the Israeli media do not have access to the prisons, and all information on them has to be obtained from secondary sources such as ex-convicts, prisoners’ families and the lawyers who visit the prison. More than once we have requested permission to visit one of the jails...our request is still under consideration.”²⁷⁰ What was clear to prisoners, although partially hidden from the outside

²⁶⁹ Prison document, Struggle for Asqalon, AG 8/1/203, Abu Jihad Library, Al Quds University Abu Dis Campus, 11.

²⁷⁰ *Al Hamishmar*, May 30, 1980, translated from the Hebrew by the *Journal of Palestine Studies* in a roundup entitled “From the Israeli Press: the Closed World of the Pal Prisoner,” 10:1, Autumn, 1980, 155-157, 156.

world, was that “the architecture of prisons...were made for one purpose: they were all created for the sole purpose of prisoner torture and ways to make the prisoners’ lives a living hell in every meaning of the word.”²⁷¹ Given this reality, Palestinian prisoners had to struggle for their own rights. Despite many miles between prison structures and gaping chasms between political factions, the period between 1967 and 1985 witnessed the coming together of prisoners through a particular mechanism of struggle: the hunger strike. In part through this form of bodily protest, political prisoners overcame interfactional differences and cultivated a sense of unity against the physical conditions in which they found themselves, and thus against the prison administration. This locally spun resistance represents a clear and repeated marker of a new form of political unity based on locally situated common goals and actions rather than shared pasts.

The First Strikes

Within months of the Occupation’s inception, prisoners embarked on small-scale hunger strikes. These strikes were usually short, often involved only a few people, and were contained within one prison. Although they did not garner media or widespread civilian attention, their occurrence was significant for three reasons: first, they established the notion of a specific type of Palestinian resistance inside the jails, one that was responding as much to the contemporary moment and their immediate surroundings as it was to the larger issue of the Occupation; secondly, the hunger strike as a regular event underscored a natural urge towards cooperation and the need for formal organization, thus helping to enable the creation of structures in the late 1970s; and third, the

²⁷¹ Yacoub Odeh, First interview.

occurrence of hunger strikes revealed knowledge gaps amongst the Israeli administration regarding Occupation management and techniques for keeping the prisoners under control. Given the lack of media attention, understanding the 1967-1970 period means relying on oral sources to reconstruct what happened. From interviews with ex-prisoners, one can begin to draw conclusions about what these actions meant for the development of a wider prisoner movement and later evolution of systems and structures.

In the first place, some early strikes responded to Israeli physical mishandling of the detainees' bodies. As mentioned in Chapter One, mistreatment was especially pronounced during periods of interrogation, out of the view of media attention and where external and/or international monitoring was impossible.²⁷² The very first strike mentioned by ex-prisoners lasted just one day at Ramle in 1968, directed against administrative detention as a general policy.²⁷³ The specifics of life during administrative detention also became the target of bodily resistance. As discussed in detail in Chapter One, detention could last from just several days to several months. Odeh aptly describes this experience as having undergone "48 hours a day under interrogation,"²⁷⁴ during which the interrogator tried to discern one's political affiliation, names of other faction members, and information about future operations. The seemingly interminable duration was not the spark for the hunger strike, rather the severe methods of extraction led to bodily protest. Israeli authorities would beat detainees, often using electric cables or other implements. In Odeh's case, he was beaten badly enough that he ended up with a head wound so severe Ramle prison would not even accept him until it was healed. Inspired by

²⁷² According to their agreement with the Israeli government, and as mentioned in Chapter One, the Red Cross did not monitor interrogation centers.

²⁷³ Yacoub Odeh interview

²⁷⁴ Yacoub Odeh interview, November 6, 2012, Jerusalem.

the recent death of a Fatah member at *Moscobeyya*, Odeh says that he and his fellow detainees waged a short hunger strike with the express goal of forcing the administration to take him to the hospital.²⁷⁵ Radi Jara'ai remembers this strike as lasting 10 days, and ending with an empty promise from the administration for humanitarian treatment.²⁷⁶ Another prisoner, Amal Awad Adi, imprisoned with Odeh in Ramle during this period, recalls this strike as "a demonstration to protest the racist treatment from a Zionist officer whose behavior is Nazi-like."²⁷⁷

Violent treatment the hands of the prison guards was the order of the day. Jara'ai remembers that "we were not allowed to talk freely in the yard, but we had to say "sir" after each sentence (spoken to the prison authorities) and can't look the Israelis in the face" for fear of a beating. He says they would "beat them for any reason and send them to individual cells (solitary confinement)."²⁷⁸ Around the same time, a strike took place in the interrogation wing of Ramallah prison against physical treatment, says Adel Samara.²⁷⁹ He recounts that after just a "few hours," the administration took most of them to the hospital.²⁸⁰ While these early strikes were short and did not lead to permanent changes, they did establish a mode of resistance particular to the prison.

Resisting physical violence was not the only – or frankly the *primary* – reason for early hunger strikes, especially outside of detention centers. Living conditions were a major factor. As mentioned in Chapter One, the surroundings in which prisoners found themselves were abhorrent. During the early years of the Occupation, prisons were

²⁷⁵ Yacoub Odeh, First interview.

²⁷⁶ Radi Jara'ai, first interview.

²⁷⁷ *Fatah*, November 16, 1970, 3.

²⁷⁸ Radi Jara'ai, first interview.

²⁷⁹ Adel Samara interview.

²⁸⁰ Adel Samara interview; while he remembers this as a "few hours," it is not clear how many hours he means.

severely overcrowded, filthy, lacking air circulation and access to natural light, without proper sanitation or access to personal hygiene products, and prisoners were not issued seasonal-appropriate clothing. As one paper reported when describing the Asqalon riot of 1971, Palestinians in this prison were “like beasts in their cages... they are held in their cells, as beasts in their cages, twenty-three hours a day, twenty or more to a cell.”²⁸¹

When they were allowed fresh air, Radi Jara'ai says, it was only “a half an hour every 24 hours” and for the rest of the day “we can't lie down on a blanket (in our cells). We can only spread them at six pm and must pick them up and not touch them again at six am.”²⁸² With only blankets to sleep on, prisoners lacked proper bedding for tolerable sleeping circumstances, and rooms were so brimming with breathing bodies that they “had to sleep head to feet, or on one side for the entire night, in order to lay claim to a very small amount of floor space.”²⁸³ Finally, the lack of medical treatment for prisoners meant that daily life was plagued by perpetual illness and poorly healed injuries. As Odeh, among others recount, from natural sickness to interrogation-inflicted wounds, aspirin was the prison-issued panacea.²⁸⁴ Early resistance thus targeted the urgent need for more humane – or simply even recognizably human – living conditions inside the prisons.

Interestingly, however, former prisoners report that these near-criminal conditions were not the chief target of ongoing resistance through hunger strike. Rather, they recall an overwhelming desire for improved day-to-day conditions based on access to certain

²⁸¹ Langer, 76.

²⁸² Jara'ai, first interview.

²⁸³ Ghassan Khatib interview.

²⁸⁴ Odeh, second interview. This is also discussed in Committee for the Defence of Political Prisoners in Israel, *Prisoners and Prisons in Israel* (Umm al Fahm and Tel Aviv: 1978). This publication was written by former political prisoners to “open a window for the public in Israel and for the world public opinion abroad into the reality of everyday life of the large prisoner population which is shut behind the bars of Israeli jails” (quoted on p. 1 of the document).

material resources namely books and radios. Material goods became the focus of the struggle, the axis around which the factions came together. Abu Bakr from Fatah and Dr. Adel Samara, one of the founders of the PFLP in the West Bank, both testify to this very fact in separate interviews.²⁸⁵ Abu Bakr, arrested in 1967 for a military operation on the Jordanian border that same year, asserted that the number one goal for his contemporaries behind prison walls was access to aural and written information. He participated in the 1968 strike in Ramle, which had these demands as its mission.²⁸⁶ Occurring just one year into the Occupation, the number of imprisoned was still very small, but Abu Bakr remembers that approximately eight of them waged this strike in total unity of agenda and purpose.²⁸⁷ Dr. Samara was involved in a similar action around the same time. Arrested in December 1967 for leading a military operation against Ben Gurion airport, Samara was sent to Beit Lyd prison after interrogation. He recalls one of the first strikes in that prison, which he was involved in starting. The small group of prisoners there had been meeting regularly to “discuss poetry and other intellectual issues.”²⁸⁸ During one of these informal discussions, they decided they wanted to approach the administration with a simple and direct message: “we want books.” At this time, there were no elected leaders. Samara, an avid reader and aspiring intellectual, enthusiastically embraced his role as one of the unofficial leaders. He recollects that with this strike “I got the first book

²⁸⁵ Note that across the board, interview subjects repeatedly focused on the importance of books and intellectual engagement inside the prisons. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, most of the prisoners look back on their time in jail as the most intellectually rewarding experience of their lives.

²⁸⁶ The first strike inside a prison, rather than an interrogation center, reportedly took place in Nablus the previous year, but lasted only three days and had very few eyes on it.

²⁸⁷ Abu Bakr interview at his home in Ramallah, conducted in the fall of 2012

²⁸⁸ Adel Samara interview.

after seven days,” which he says was about socialism and capitalism.²⁸⁹ According to Samara’s analysis, it was this hunger strike that led to the eventual general admission of books into security prisons. Indeed, we know from newspaper accounts that prison libraries existed by 1973, however there is no clear evidence that this particular strike led directly to their creation.²⁹⁰ While one cannot firmly establish a direct cause and effect between this hunger strike and later widespread access to books, it is clear that the early actions did establish access to cultural and intellectual resources as a priority. Rather than resisting Occupation more broadly, or fighting against bodily treatment, the prisoners clearly asserted a basic framework for inmate resistance, one which was rooted in education, knowledge and thought as powerful tools.

Verifying the precise details of the first strikes and piecing together a timeline is no easy task; without a plethora of source material, one must depend on cross-referencing oral sources. There is a startling absence of newspaper sources recording the late 1960s strikes, which reflects the wide array of other concerns following the Occupation’s inception, as well as to the fact that the prisoner movement was in its infancy.²⁹¹ In point of fact, the near absence of written sources, creating a precise timeline or establishing a list of outcomes is difficult. For example, Nashif’s work cites ex-prisoner Bashir al Kahyri reminiscing about a Beit Lyd strike and placing it in 1969 rather than Samara’s pinning it to 1968. Furthermore, in contrast with Samara, al Kahyri remembers the

²⁸⁹ In 2009, the Israeli Prison Services banned all prisoners, security and criminal, from receiving books from their families and banned security prisoners from using prison libraries. Walid Dakka, who has been incarcerated since 1986, filed a petition through his lawyer contesting this decision. This demonstrates that although prisoners struggled for improved living conditions and rights, one step forward almost always resulted in two steps back.

²⁹⁰ According to *Al Itihad*, December 9, 1980, 4, by 1980 books in prisons were very widespread. Indeed so much so that the Israeli government created a blacklist of dozens of books from all over the Arab world that were banned from import into the prisons “because of their extremist content.”

²⁹¹ Newspaper coverage of hunger strikes begins in the 1970s in Palestinian newspapers.

strike's main issue as the oppressive living conditions rather than a demand for reading material, perhaps a reflection on their own personal agendas during their internment.²⁹² Also, while Samara recalls the success of obtaining the first book, al Khayri remembers two less tangible successes: first, that the strike was "total;" and second, that it continued in spite of the Israelis trying to break it up by dispersing the strikers to other prisons, also confirmed by Samara who was one of the relocated prisoners. Nashif quotes al Khayri noting that "the Israelis were surprised by our determination... then each prisoner was thrown into a different prison... they kept moving me after each protest I participated in."²⁹³ In summation, al Khayri assesses the strike as having failed to achieve its goals, in large part because the Israelis moved prisoners around in an attempt to break the spirit. A point of agreement between the two men is that living conditions were far from improved as a result of this short action.

Although the specifics of strikes are difficult to pin down in the late 1960s, the value of looking at this period lies in the fact we can see that the hunger strike was established as one of the primary tools of Palestinian political prisoners from the Occupation's very inception. Indeed, the prisoners realized as early as 1968 that the hunger strike was a tactic of resistance they could hone, evident in the fact that former prisoners refer to these early actions as "total" (i.e. full scale participation of all prisoners within a given prison).²⁹⁴ This is a remarkable given that neither the prisons nor the prisoners were organized in the late 60s, and thus lacked any kind of formal leadership.

²⁹² Interview is quoted in Esmail Nashif, "Attempts at Liberation: Materializing the Body and Building Community Among Palestinian Political Captives," *The Arab Studies Journal*, 12/13, no. 2/1 (Fall 2004/Spring 2005), 56.

²⁹³ Nashif, 56.

²⁹⁴ This is corroborated by Esmail Nashif's work, in which he cites Bashir al Kahyri describing the strikes as "total." Bashir al Khayri was a client of Felicia Langer's and was thought by the Israelis to be behind the 1973 strike in Kefar Yonah, discussed later in this chapter. (Langer, *With my Own Eyes*, 131).

Such high rates of participation presents a noteworthy comparison with earlier strikes in other locales where one notable striker would execute a highly symbolic act or a handful of prisoners would cooperate for a similar end goal.²⁹⁵ In contrast, inside Israeli prisons, participation was widespread from the beginning. At the time of the Beit Lyd strike, for example, the prison was divided into three sections (A, B, and C) containing men from across the political spectrum. With existing tensions between factions, one would expect there to be impediments when it came to organizing prisoners to partake in a strike, since in these mixed settings political arguments frequently erupted. Remarkably, in the case of the 1968 strike, Samara reports that each section informally agreed within each section on one leader who could inspire and motivate large-scale participation across party lines.²⁹⁶ Thus, the action of the hunger strike trumped political divisions and conflict. In this initial period of Israeli political imprisonment, when a prisoner “movement” had not yet formed, these early strikes reflect an unspoken unity of purpose amongst the prisoners oriented towards locally situated common goals and actions.

While these strikes were small and were neither memorialized in the press nor given much attention by the general public, they represented the cultivation of a particular form of resistance possible only inside the prisons. This form of resistance was spontaneous and driven not by ideology, but by strides towards material change. Early strikes reflect an *inherent* urge to be part of and cultivate something larger, within the prison walls. The second phase, 1970-1977, did just that.

²⁹⁵ The best-known example is, of course, Gandhi.

²⁹⁶ As will be discussed in the next chapter, qualifications for leading in the late 1960s and early 1970s was very much about connections outside the prison, rather than accomplishments within. This is in stark contrast with the late 1970s when an elected committee would call for the strike, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Making Resistance Tangible: The 1970s

From 1970, those participating in hunger strikes began to coherently articulate their intentions, to outline increasingly well-defined and common goals. Like in the late 1960s, hunger strike resistance was not against the general concept or even the reality of the Occupation more broadly, nor was it about defining or asserting a “Palestinian identity.” Rather, these hunger strikes dealt in a currency of the tangible. As the strikers organized, they moved towards a system of carefully recording in writing their demands and physically circulating them within and between prisons, thereby creating a shared list of goals that transcended prison walls. Thus, the hunger strike was one way in which community was imagined between prisons and prisoners on both sides of the Green Line.

For starters, 1970 was the first year simultaneous strikes were called. On April 28, 1970, a strike began in Nablus, Tul Karam, Damun, Ramallah, Shatta, Kefar Yonah, including thousands of convicted prisoners as well as many Administrative Detainees.²⁹⁷ Remarkably, these prisons were hundreds of kilometres apart, and yet their purpose was not. According to Felicia Langer, who had many participating clients, the aim was two-fold: “1) either the release or the trial of administrative detainees and 2) an end to torture and the respect of the basic rights of political prisoners.”²⁹⁸ This strike ended after six days with no administrative commitment to meeting the two key demands. However, the strike had two important effects. First, it raised awareness “within the country and abroad” of the horror of Palestinian imprisonment, before and after conviction.²⁹⁹ The large numbers attracted attention from women’s and student organizations abroad, as well

²⁹⁷ Felicia Langer had many clients who participated. She discusses these strikes in *With my Own Eyes*, 49- 51.

²⁹⁸ Langer, 49.

²⁹⁹ Langer, 49-50.

as a joint march of Jewish and Arab women in Haifa, demonstrations in Nazareth and Tel Aviv, and a demonstration of young people outside Damun prison. The fact that the prisons spanned both Israel and the Territories enabled this widespread attention; far more eyes were on this strike than previous ones. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it launched the era of multi-prison strikes with a critical mass of participants.

Just two months later, on July 15, 1970, the prisoners interned at Asqalon launched the first open strike against the Israeli policy of multi-pronged violent attacks. The prisoners interpreted violence in several ways, including general maltreatment, torture, and also by being deprived of proper nutrition.³⁰⁰ According to one Israeli newspaper, prisoners at Asqalon underwent regular beatings in isolated dungeons, where they were then held for multiple days, sometimes more than two weeks, at a time.³⁰¹ Unlike earlier strikes, this one took place in a large prison intended for those serving long sentences. This fact raised the stakes significantly. If the strike failed, prisoners risked retaliatory violence by the Israeli administration. But, if they waged no resistance, they also risked many years – a lifetime in some cases – of deprivation and violence against their persons. Either way, the choice was far from enticing. And yet, between 450 and 540 men reportedly took part in this action.³⁰² In a prison full of men handed down sentences of over five years, the impact of such mass participation within one single prison is not to be underestimated.

³⁰⁰ Since this was before the prisoners organized, clear statements were not circulated. Rather, a description of the prisoners' rationale is recorded in *Fatah*, Thursday, August 20, 1970, p. 1. Also, note that this strike followed another strike reported in the June 24th, 1970 edition of *Fatah*, in which prisoners in Tul Karem also protested against bad treatment and nutrition.

³⁰¹ *Ha-Olam ha-Zeh* (in a full article translated by Felicia Langer in *With My Own Eyes*) references the beating of Muhammad Sa'id Sa'id as one of the causes of this strike.

³⁰² *Fatah*, Thursday, August 20, 1970 reports 450, while the Israeli paper *Ha-Olam ha-Zeh* (in a full article translated by Felicia Langer in *With My Own Eyes*) reports 540 as the number of participants.

On one hand the strike failed. It was not the first time prisoners had waged an attempt to stop the perpetuation of violence against them – the most recent one just three months prior – nor would it be the last; even today prisoners continued to demand more humane bodily treatment. Furthermore, this strike helped the Israeli Administration hone its preparedness for managing this aspect of the Occupation. This is evident in their attempts to stop such actions inside of their prisons. The primary tactic was to try to break up the informal leadership. They took two approaches to this: first, they sometimes placed the men in solitary confinement, and “completely ignored” them³⁰³; and second, they would disperse the strikers to various prisons, sometimes moving an individual more than once. In Samara’s case, they tried both tactics on him, hoping that the strike would dissipate as the presumed leadership was dissolved they would be forgotten and rendered irrelevant. Their second approach was to punish those involved in the strikes, either physically or by increasing their sentences. With such mass participation, the Israeli authorities had to react strongly to try to halt the repeated use of this tactic. According to the widely read Palestinian paper, *Fatah*, this strike resulted in a “policy of bloody terrorism” against those thought to be what it calls “strike instigators.”³⁰⁴ This report describes the vengeful punishment as including: prisoners’ sentences being extended, sometimes to life, while one individual was beaten so badly he ended up with a “severed leg;”³⁰⁵ *Fatah*, also viewed the Administration’s refusal to negotiate as a form of

³⁰³ Samara reports experiencing this strategy.

³⁰⁴ *Fatah*, Thursday, August 20, 1970, 1.

³⁰⁵ *IBID.*

violence since it resulted in the death of Abd al-Qadar Abu Fahim. They refer to his death by hunger as having been “assassinated” by the Administration.³⁰⁶

From another perspective, this strike can be seen as something of a success. Although the authorities took steps to disempower those presumed to be guiding a strike in the hopes that they could halt the collective action, the number of actions only increased throughout the 1970s. So too, this particular strike gained its own momentum, with the death of Abu Fahim sparking solidarity strikes in Ramle and Beer Saba’a.³⁰⁷ This latter prison, rivaling Asqalon in size, received some of the strikers thought to be acting as leaders. When they arrived to their new “home,” the prison immediately went on a work and hunger strike. Included in the list of relocated individuals who continued at Beer Saba’ was Samara.³⁰⁸ This strike reached beyond Asqalon’s walls via the press as well. In at least one instance, those who were tortured by the Israeli retaliation campaign were listed in the paper by their full names and either their increased sentences or specific injury. This, too, was a new move and highly symbolic: it marked individual prisoners out as having a role in the resistance, even within their places of punishment.³⁰⁹

To contend with what was fast becoming a brand of resistance, the Israelis developed clear policies for dealing with prisoners, as encapsulated in the 1971 Prison Ordinance defining prisoners’ rights, or lack thereof.³¹⁰ This ordinance responds to those hunger strikes waged in the early years of the Occupation. It codified in law that one could be punished for refusing to consume food daily, deliberately destroying food,

³⁰⁶ IBID.

³⁰⁷ Yacoub Odeh spoke about the strike in Ramle, recounting his role in it.

³⁰⁸ *Fatah*, Thursday, August 20, 1970, p. 1, column 2.

³⁰⁹ *Fatah*, Thursday, August 20, 1970, first page, column 4.

³¹⁰ This is discussed in detail in the previous chapter on the prison experience and living conditions.

introducing substances that might impair taste, and last but not least, for waging hunger strikes.³¹¹ This Ordinance defines hunger strikes as constituted by law as disciplinary offences. And yet, rather than stopping hunger striking, the frequency of strikes and number of participants increased during the 1970s.

The 1970 Asqalon strike was a kind of turning point: such a large scale display of unity of purpose among over 400 men identifying with different political factions helped to inspire the emergence of a prisoner movement, as well as to launch conversations about how to organize.³¹² This massive strike, accomplished by “screaming” its announcement out of the windows since “there was no communication between the prisoners,”³¹³ was a “major success,” which ushered in a “new period in the jails.”³¹⁴ Although self-appointed leaders were the instigators, it marked the beginning of the slow process of formal organization, with the first open committee meeting being held in its wake.³¹⁵ The hunger strikes waged to date had revealed something to them about the importance of working together and thus acted as a key impetus to cooperate in resisting the administration’s punishing treatment. It demonstrated clearly to the prisoners the importance of cultivating lateral power relations as a counterpoint to the vertical relations with the Israelis.

In the year of the Asqalon strike, prisoners lived in mixed rooms, with constant interactions between PFLP, Fatah, the Communists and the unaffiliated.³¹⁶ Clashes were

³¹¹ Interestingly the ordinance also lists a key punishment for misbehavior as a “punitive diet” with a food ration only sufficient to keep a person alive and working for a limited time.

³¹² Ahmed Shirin talks at length about changes in the prison beginning around 1971 in response to this strike.

³¹³ Jara’ai, first interview.

³¹⁴ Odeh interview.

³¹⁵ Jara’ai, first interview.

³¹⁶ This was the case in all prisons at this time, both inside the Green Line and in the The Territories.

frequent, most often occurring between the two largest factions, Fatah and PFLP.³¹⁷ In Asqalon, however, the sheer volume of prisoners provided strong encouragement for the prisoners to organize themselves in such a way that they could act in unison against the Israeli Prison Administration, with one commonly supported list of demands. This was the largest single prison strike to date and it leveled the playing field between the largest faction, Fatah, and its peers. As Ghassan Khatib pointed out in an interview, relations between the factions were very rocky in the early years of the Occupation, but “with strikes and with confrontations with the administration, things improved, relatively speaking.”³¹⁸ Out of this collective action for defined and tangible ends came the urge to work together rather than separately, to build bridges between the factions over certain issues. This was done by establishing a group to oversee the staging of hunger strikes and also by inscribing such an agreement onto paper. Through the early hunger strikes, it became clear that leadership did not lie in one person, but in the strength of the prisoner spirit. As individuals were transferred from one prison to the next it became clear to the prisoners that the essence of the strike was not dependent on a particular leader. Rather, a new leader would emerge in his place, evidence of a flexible system that was not dependent on an individual, but was instead increasingly based on talent and skills that any person could cultivate. The malleability of the unofficial hunger strike leadership somehow foreshadows the way in which the general prison leadership would look by 1980: individuals were replaceable, while the structure survived. This was particularly important for carrying out hunger strikes in the smaller prisons with frequent turnover,

³¹⁷ This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, which looks at the evolution of formal structures.

³¹⁸ Ghassan Khatib interview.

since it was not an individual's shoes into which a replacement was stepping, but a position within a formal structure.

In tandem with evolving this structure to oversee and execute such events, prisoners across Israel and the West Bank continued to wage strikes throughout the 1970s when they thought it necessary to achieve substantive progress in their day-to-day situation. These strikes took place against the backdrop of complex political activity concerning the Territories. Between 1972 and 1978 there was a dramatic surge in uprisings outside the prison walls, largely in response to the Yitzak Rabin and Menachem Begin governments embarking on rapid schemes of colonization in the West Bank and economic measures designed to cultivate economic dependency on Israel. Interestingly, the hunger strikes did not necessarily reflect these escalating outside tensions in their actions, focusing more on their day-to-day existence. As had been the case since the beginning of the Occupation, and as the PLO's weekly magazine pointed out, "it is important to observe that most of the violent uprisings have started, in form at least, as minor struggles for the improvement of prisoners' conditions, and then developed into violent confrontation with the occupation, terror, and fascist measures of Zionism."³¹⁹ One issue with which strikers continued to grapple was the inhumane circumstances in which they lived, although the spark for taking action was usually in response to the way in which prisoners were dehumanized in a particular location. For example, in July 1972, a warden at Beer Saba' badly beat an inmate, igniting a two-day hunger strike.³²⁰ While violence was not at all unusual, this particular event acted like a tipping point for

³¹⁹ *Filastin al Thawra*, January 2, 1974.

³²⁰ Discussed in the News Roundup, translations from Hebrew newspapers, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 3, no 3 (Spring 1974), 169.

continuously endured unbearable living conditions. At first glance, a hunger strike that was responding to a particular event was actually the result of months, or even years, of pent up rage for the unimproved living conditions. Thus, the mid-1970s hunger strikes were pointedly waged to meet a particular demand in a specific prison, even though the demands unintentionally spoke to system-wide needs and challenges, as well as to the Occupation more generally.

Hunger strike successes were far from linear and accomplishments were frequently followed by setbacks. Sometimes the prison administration would suddenly rescind existing privileges, as either a punishment or, arguably, a provocation. Several strikes in 1973 illustrate this point, each of them targeting different kinds of access with which the IPS tampered. In Hebron, inmates launched an action to protest the prison having installed an additional barrier separating the inmates from visitors. This added layer of “security” impeded communication with visitors, whether lawyers, friends or family. A short hunger strike succeeded in getting this extra barrier removed.³²¹ There are three reasons why prisoners resisted this additional measure. First, the further physical separation placed between the prisoners and their visitors translated into an emotional barrier. Secondly, starting around this time, political messages started to be transported out of prisons. These messages moved via *kabsulih*, messages inscribed in tiny handwriting, illegible to the naked eye, folded, wrapped in plastic and swallowed; a second barrier would certainly hinder this movement. Third, and most importantly, imposing such restrictions was part of the Israeli attempt to control the prisoners by

³²¹ Discussed in the news roundup, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 3, no 3 (Spring 1974), 170.

alternately tightening restrictions and then loosening them as a negotiation strategy.³²² A slightly different case involved scaling back of a recently granted privilege in Ramle. The prisoners went on strike after prison authorities stopped receipt of food baskets from visiting family members. The deliveries were already tightly controlled, authorized to carry only two kilograms of fruit, up to two packets of cookies, one chocolate bar and six packs of Omar cigarettes.³²³ Intended to supplement their paltry diet, and to make up for the fact that their in-prison labor wages were not enough to begin to satisfy their long-cultivated nicotine habits, the prisoners revolted against these new measures of control with their bodies.³²⁴ The justification was to prevent weapons and drugs smuggling, although such products usually came via the warders, not family members.³²⁵ Finally, and significantly, in January 1973, approximately two-thirds of a the 300-man prison in Kefar Yonah went on strike when officials rejected “an attempt by influential prisoners to establish facts about everything concerning the way of life there.”³²⁶ When a new Israeli director was put in place, those who had emerged as unofficial leaders of the prisoners tried to assert themselves with him. Not only did authorities reject this unsolicited advice on prisoners’ needs, after the five-day strike ended they punished the prisoners via a “deficiency of food.” According to their lawyer, they “did not receive their full portions” of the already under nourishing amount of food they were allocated.³²⁷ The Israelis refused to acknowledge the evolving structure inside the prisons, thus sparking an act of full resistance. While these 1973 strikes were not successful in changing anything within

³²² This strategy is comparable to the Israeli authorities’ rounding up of large numbers of people and arresting them in advance of beginning political negotiations.

³²³ *Prisoners and Prisons in Israel*, 23.

³²⁴ *IBID*, 23.

³²⁵ *IBID*, 23.

³²⁶ *Ma’ariv*, January 14, 1973, translated from Hebrew and cited by Langer, *With My Own Eyes*, 131.

³²⁷ Langer, 131.

the prisons, it is significant that the Israeli press began to feature prisoner struggles and strikes within their pages.

Strikingly, interview subjects frequently talk about a given strike as a *fait accompli*. Even when discussing one particular prison, the individuals tend to universalize the failure or accomplishment. Given this, it is challenging to reconstruct what hunger strikes actually accomplished. What is clear is that when allowances were granted in one prison after a successful hunger strike, those accomplishments were often localized. As mentioned earlier, Samara remembers his late '60s achievement of getting the first book in the prison, but later press indicates that access to books continued to be an issue throughout the 1970s.³²⁸ As late as 1973, *Al Ittihad* reports that Ramle and Shatta prisoners were not allowed to receive any books that were not obtained via a formal request to the prison administration.

Sometimes multiple hunger strikes were necessary to achieve a certain goal. Odeh talks about a strike he helped wage in the late 1960s protesting forced labor in making supplies for the Israeli military. The initial strike was unsuccessful and according to his timeline it was not until 1973 that prisoners achieved such a stoppage.³²⁹

Impact of Hunger Strikes: The Trickle-Down Effect

The Palestinian hunger strike was a distinctly non-ideological act within the context of the resistance to the Israeli Occupation. Such action, embraced widely and across factional divides, represented the very best of the resistance movement, its ideal

³²⁸ Chapter Four, focused on education, will show how access to books remained a battle.

³²⁹ Odeh, First interview.

functioning. This was in stark contrast with, but also a budding solution to, the bubbling tensions between the main political parties: Fatah, PFLP, DFLP and the Communists. From 1969 when Fatah assumed leadership within the PLO, competition with the other factions arose. In the early 1970s, Fatah had been at the forefront of terrorist activity and thus seen as the leader of the armed struggle, while the smaller PFLP faction competed for members. This began to shift in the second half of the 1970s, after Arafat's 1974 United Nations speech, when the PLO – with Fatah at its helm – moved away from armed struggle towards diplomacy. These strains and competitions were mapped onto prisons, with factions competing for members even on the inside. As will be discussed in the next chapter, written guidelines produced inside the prisons governed intra- and inter-factional relationships by the late 1970s, key to which was planning for and executing community actions. To that end, the hunger strike's primary power lay not in its ability to destabilize the Israeli position in the conflict, but rather in its ability to activate factional and national cooperation. Thus, one can read the strikes of this period as having a significant impact on the inner workings of the resistance movement. So too, by the late 1970s the hunger strike had become a site upon which resistance could be built across broad and oft-divided swaths of the community. From this period forward, the hunger striker was a symbol of unity, albeit just a glimmer, within the Palestinian resistance.

Two consecutive strikes in Asqalon, the first of which began in late 1976, demonstrate the power of the prisoners' emerging administrative structure. For the first time, the action was highly coordinated by individuals who had been nominated to

represent the rest of the prison population.³³⁰ According to Fatah's "constitution," reportedly produced in Asqalon itself sometime in 1976, they were part of the "struggler committee," with representatives from each of the political factions.³³¹ The committee would meet together to discuss issues that affected the prison population at large, regardless of political affiliation. As a group, the members were a kind of public relations team, and thus could help frame and stage a hunger strike. According to the written documentation, "leadership of the struggle committee in the prison is executive and legislative and is considered at the top of the leading national authority in the prison."³³² Thus, this committee had a great deal of decision making power for very critical, even life threatening actions. Their work involved polling the prisoners and determining the level of interest in and commitment to a potential strike. Once a strike was decided upon, the members were responsible for drafting the list of demands and seeking the feedback of their peers. They would then communicate these demands to the prison authorities in the hopes of avoiding taking action. If and when a strike became an imperative, the struggler committee would "advertise" to ensure total participation across all rooms within the prison. While the 1970 strike had been announced via prisoners screaming to each other out their windows, written announcements were circulated in 1976 to alert participants of the coming strike. Being part of the struggler committee carried a great deal of responsibility, too. The members did not take lightly other prisoners' lives. As one prisoner eloquently recounted, "I, as one with responsibilities, had to prepare them

³³⁰ This structure will be discussed at length in Chapter Three.

³³¹ This document will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four. I first accessed this document in November 2012. At this point it was not cataloged. The title of the document is "What is Fatah and what are its Features?" Radi Jara'ai was involved in the writing of this document, thus the dating of it is attributed to his memory.

³³² Fatah's uncatalogued "constitution."

for protest... you know, I was like a father to them.” He emphasized repeatedly the need for preparation, saying “when you start a hunger strike you want it to succeed, and all the suffering to be worthwhile. So you take your time to prepare it and you don’t rush.”³³³ As Odeh affirms, “Getting our demands met came at a high price for us and our friends.”³³⁴ Thus, strikes would often take months to prepare, to ensure that the proper rationale and commitment were there. The close cooperation necessary to successfully wage a large scale action produced a committee that is a remarkable representation of how prisoners were able to move beyond factional divides, to traverse ideological boundaries.

On December 11, 1976, the struggler committee at Asqalon launched an open strike that was to last for an unprecedented 45 days, followed in quick succession by a well-reported 30-day strike that began right on its heels in February of 1977. In total, this act of resistance spanned a noteworthy three months of time. Once again, these protests were initially against maltreatment in the prisons, which, nearly a decade into the Occupation, had not significantly improved. According to an investigation launched by the Israeli paper *Yehdiot Aharonot*, Asqalon contained 830 prisoners, with 280 serving life sentences and over half sentenced to hard labor.³³⁵ The inmates were protesting overcrowding and a desire to be treated as well as the Israeli prisoners. After six weeks of near starvation, the authorities promised to send an official delegation to meet with the struggler committee if they prisoners agree to limited eating. Two weeks later, the infamously harsh Chaim Levy brought an IPS delegation to Asqalon, distributing

³³³ Radi Jara’ai talks about the debates between the prisoners about whether or not to launch a strike. In some cases there were divisions amongst the struggler committee, or between the struggler committee and the Revolutionary Council, the top ruling body

³³⁴ Odeh, second interview.

³³⁵ This report was published in *Yehdiot Aharonot*, March 11, 1977, and translated in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1977), 170.

hairbrushes and offering permission to buy almonds and Turkish delight from the canteen with their monthly allowance. Neither of these proposed privileges addressed the prisoners' declared needs, and indeed were received as a kind of taunting. Although the strike halted completely at 45 days, promises to formally address prisoner grievances never materialized into anything. In response, after just a short break, some 250 prisoners re-embarked on yet another strike in an even more organized fashion the third week of February; it was an open strike that would last until their demands were met.³³⁶

Mohammad Bsisu, allegedly the leader of the prisoners at Asqalon, was quoted in *Al Ittihad* around the time of the beginning of the second part of the strike, outlining the agreed upon list of demands for the public to see. They issued a substantial list of material and lifestyle requirements, including: remedying overcrowded rooms in which 20 prisoners were crammed into spaces not able to accommodate even half that; providing regular beds and mattresses instead of the one-cm thick rubber pads; offering adequate clothing for each season; eating the same quality food as the Jewish prisoners; visiting regulations and access similar to Jewish prisoners, meaning one visit a fortnight and no restriction on the number of family members permitted; and last but not least, a reading room filled with the books prisoners actually want, rather than only books that were approved by the IPS.³³⁷ In other words, as lawyers Leah Tsemel and Felicia Langer pointed out, the strikers in Asqalon were not struggling for "political recognition of their

³³⁶ This figure is according to the "West Bank Students Demonstrate," *New York Times*, March 7, 1977, p. 5. MERIP says the strike included only 215 prisoners.

³³⁷ *Al Ittihad*, February 25, 1977, 1.

statues as prisoners of war at this stage, but only to reach equalization of their conditions with that of criminal prisoners.”³³⁸

In addition to displaying an aspect of the careful organization and structure building of the 1970s, these strikes also attracted a great deal of external attention, ranging from solidarity activities to widespread press coverage. As Ghassan Khatib rightly pointed out, the hunger strike was *the* national issue around which Palestinians could rally. Indeed, such actions were something tangible against which one could demonstrate; they had a beginning and end, unlike the general state of the Occupation. As one foreign observer noted, this strike provided a “focus for political dissent.”³³⁹ For the first time, solidarity marches became commonplace throughout Israel and the Territories. Indeed, hunger strikes came to be seen as a kind of collective punishment; when prisoners were moved from one prison to another in an attempt to break up a strike, this affected families. As Samman Khoury noted, “if you take me from Ramallah to Nablus, you’re not punishing me. It’s just more difficult for my wife and mother to visit me. Collective punishment. Even in my first two years in prison, I was moved to Ramallah, Hebron and Nablus. They thought they were punishing us.”³⁴⁰ Rather, for the prisoners, this kind of movement helped foster connections, facilitate movement of political materials through *kabsulih*, and thus contributed to the evolution of prisoner political structures and organization.

In March, approximately 50 individuals, Arabs and leftist Jews, marched to Asqalon from an unmentioned starting point in “sympathy for the security prisoners who

³³⁸ They are quoted in “Asqalon: Palestinian Prisoners on Strike,” *MERIP*, no 57, May 1977, 17.

³³⁹ “New Violence on the West Bank Is Feared as Arab-Israeli Tension Rises: Special to The New York Times,” William Farrell, *New York Times*, Mar 25, 1977, 3

³⁴⁰ Samman Khoury interview.

are on hunger strike,” while calling for “the establishment of a secular, democratic Palestine.”³⁴¹ A few days later, a Palestinian paper reported on a demonstration in front of the Knesset of representatives from the Jerusalem Arab Students Committee and mothers of the striking prisoners. The latter group had marched there from the Red Cross Headquarters, where they had submitted an official memorandum to the commissioner demanding improved conditions for political prisoners.³⁴² Students demonstrated in Ramallah and at the Arab universities,³⁴³ while shopkeepers closed up shop in a solidarity strike.³⁴⁴ Even further afield, the Arab students at Israeli Universities, as well as the Arab University Students Committee at the Institute for Applied Engineering in Haifa, staged demonstrations expressing solidarity with the prisoners. Having generated attention and proclamations of support from Israeli Arabs and Jews, as well as residents of the Territories, this hunger strike was a great mobilizer, traversing territory and crossing boundaries between disparate groups of people.

This strike also generated a noticeable paper trail, Palestinians and Israeli supporters as well as in the press. Women’s and other popular organizations in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as well as several mayors, sent memoranda and appeals to international bodies to condemn the conditions under which the prisoners were forced to live. Likewise, *Al Ittihad* reported that the Democratic Women’s Movement in Israel sent a letter emphasizing two points: that the strikers were simply demanding the same conditions as Jewish prisoners, and also the medical danger for those embarking on a

³⁴¹ *Yediot Aharonot*, March 14, 1977, translated from Hebrew by the *Journal of Palestine Studies*.

³⁴² *Al Hamishmar*, March 17, 1977.

³⁴³ “West Bank Students Demonstrate,” *New York Times*, March 7, 1977, 5.

³⁴⁴ “Israelis Seize More Arabs As Protests Expand,” *New York Times*, March 9, 1977, 7.

second strike without having recovered from the first.³⁴⁵ From abroad, the French Professional Unions Federation sent a cable to the Chairman of the UN Human Rights Committee calling on him to “use his authority to exert pressure on the Israeli authorities to respond to the just demands of the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.”³⁴⁶ Beyond institutional expressions of solidarity, foreign reporters covered it daily, as did the Arabic and Israeli press.

The strongest show of solidarity, and also evidence of strong prisoner organization, was displayed when about 200 prisoners in Jenin prison joined the strike in early March.³⁴⁷ This solidarity strike was well prepared. As early as January, during part one of the Asqalon action, the struggler committee was discussing it and communicating their points of major contention with the prison authorities. According to local press coverage, the head of the Jenin municipality conveyed to the military governor ways in which the prisons needed immediate improvement, including: “to permit scientific and scholarly books, magazine, and local newspapers,” “to make the visit every 15 days instead of 30 days, and to allow prisoners’ parents to bring in sweets, fruits and food,” and “not to imprison the young youth.”³⁴⁸ These demands were reportedly accompanied by a call for similar improvements in Asqalon and Ramle as well. In mid-March the Arabic press reported that 200 security prisoners in Ramallah also followed Asqalon’s lead, as did Hebron, Kfar Yonah, and Hebron.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁵ *Al Ittihad*, March 1, 1977.

³⁴⁶ *Al Ittihad*, March 8, 1977.

³⁴⁷ “Israelis Seize More Arabs As Protests Expand,” 7.

³⁴⁸ *Al Quds*, January 1, 1977, no 2621, 2

³⁴⁹ These strikes are referenced in *Al Ittihad*, March 15 and 22, as well as *Al Hamishmar*, March 21.

The IPS did not reward the prisoners' efforts with substantial changes. On the contrary, they employed the same methods of punishment as those used in the early 1970s, adding new forms of torture. Widely dispersing participants to other prisons was once again a tactic in attempting to halt the strike. Felicia Langer was granted access to her client, the aforementioned Mohammad Bsisu, who reported that 176 strikers were spread throughout the prison system, while members of the struggler committee were thrown into a separate cell without any mattresses or coverings of any kind.³⁵⁰ Many prisoners were moved to Kfar Yonah, where they were subjected to punishing conditions. According to one report, the rooms were "unfit for human habitation" since the new inmates "received few blankets, no change of clothing, no reading material, and no daily exercise;" 55 out of 59 of the relocated prisoners continued to strike.³⁵¹ Many of those who remained on the strike in Asqalon were force-fed milk through tubes in their noses and throats, arguably a form of torture. One effect, however, was it forced an Israeli response. As one foreign news outlet reported, the prison administration conceded that overcrowding was an issue, but denied that there was a difference in treatment between Arab and Jewish prisoners when it came to food quantities and other material necessities.³⁵² The leaders planned for a tapering off of the strike, rather than stopping completely with a decisive agreement. Although the IPS refused to have any contact with the prisoners while they were striking, high level talks were held in mid-March between the military authorities and IPS regarding the issue of overcrowding and improving sleeping conditions.

³⁵⁰ Langer is interviewed in the March 8, 1977 edition of *Al Ittihad*.

³⁵¹ *MERIP*, no 57, May 1977, 17.

³⁵² Farrell, *New York Times*, 3.

United by Protest

Coverage of prisons in the press is scant in between the 1977 strike and the next major event in 1980, thus piecing together a timeline of the material improvements is challenging.³⁵³ We can discern that prison conditions had not stabilized at an acceptable level. For example, an Israeli paper reported in 1980 that Asqalon and Beer Saba' were "suffering from intolerable overcrowding. The space allotted to each prisoner is tiny. The prisoners eat off the floor, and have neither underwear nor pajamas. There are no sheets (unlike in Ramle), and some prisoners have complained about the relatively superficial medical treatment given. According to them, a single tablet of aspirin is the only medicine given for almost any illness. There is not even toilet paper."³⁵⁴

It appears, however, that the State took note of the overcrowding issue, as evidenced by the opening of Nafha in the Negev on May 2, 1980.³⁵⁵ As mentioned in the previous chapter, this prison was intended to relieve some of the pressure on other locations, as well as to serve as a high security establishment for approximately 50 hardened terrorists, otherwise known as leaders within the prisons or the "cream of the Palestinian prisoners."³⁵⁶ To that end, notes an Israeli paper, Nafha was an "exceptional place, especially designed to break the spirit of prisoners thought to be leaders."³⁵⁷ These presumed leaders – more than half of them convicted for life or more – were removed from their rooms in places like Asqalon, Beer Saba', Ramle and Jenin and exiled to the

³⁵³ As will be discussed in Chapter Three, the late 1970s was the period when prisoners cemented their organizational structures, thus much attention was directed at that evolution.

³⁵⁴ *Al Hamishmar*, May 30, 1980 (from *Journal of Palestine Studies* roundup, "From the Israeli Press: the Closed World of the Palestinian Prisoner," 10, no. 1 (Autumn 1980), 156.

³⁵⁵ Nafha was the 17th prison in the State of Israel.

³⁵⁶ Atta Qaymery used this expression to describe those who were sent there in 1980, including himself.

³⁵⁷ *Al Hamishmar*, May 30, 1980.

desert to finish their sentences. In so doing, the authorities hoped to decapitate the strengthening prisoner movement, or as Qaymery eloquently put it, to “subjugate” the prisoners “to a liquidation process.”³⁵⁸ Part of this process included destroying all of the papers of the prisoners upon their arrival, in an attempt to destroy a written record of the movement. Qaymery recalls feeling “devastated,” that “I lost everything when I went to Nafha.” Within a month of arriving, however, he reached the conclusion that his papers could be recreated, that “they haven’t touched my mind, myself...I can rebirth all of the ideas in a higher standard.”³⁵⁹ What the Israeli movement of individuals and accompanying destruction of materials revealed was that leadership within the prisons was not dependent on just one or two people or one set of documents; rather, a complex vertical and lateral system had emerged by this point, one which could survive an individual’s removal.³⁶⁰

According to interview subjects Yacoub Odeh, Radi Jara’ai, Ata Qaymery, Jabril Rajoub, and Na’il Barghouti, who were among the first to be transferred to Nafha,³⁶¹ they decided immediately they would launch a hunger strike that very summer if ill treatment came to be the norm at the prison. As one of the first to arrive reflected on that moment of entry:

Since 1967 we have fought for improvements in prison conditions. We have gone on strikes and on hunger strikes, we have suffered punishment and solitary confinement, suspensions of visits and many other deprivations, until we bit by bit gained certain basic rights. Now we are again being deprived of them. At Nafha, we have to

³⁵⁸ Qaymery interview, American Colony Hotel, 2012.

³⁵⁹ Qaymery interview.

³⁶⁰ This will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three.

³⁶¹ *Al Hamishmar*, May 30, 1980 specifically mentions Odeh, as well as another leader Omar al-Qassim.

start all over again.³⁶²

It was clear to the prisoners upon arrival that all of the gains made through twelve years of protest and hunger strikes had unravelled in the desert climate. They were “welcomed” to the prison by being forced to strip down to their flesh; they were then hosed down with DDT while they paraded around a room naked.³⁶³ As if this was not enough, living conditions in this desert prison were atrocious. According to the oral accounts, it appeared as though they were moved in before the prison the building was completed, with unfinished barbed wire fences complemented by a team of loud and angry guard dogs to fill in the gaps. Odeh vividly describes Nafha’s appearance and conditions:

Six meters by two and a half meters was the size of the room with no windows and a thirteen meter high ceiling. They were cement and iron rooms, not even rooms but box containers. Since Nafha was located in a desert atmosphere, the weather in the winter would be freezing cold and in the summer time it would be unbearably hot. In the winter it would be like living inside of a freezer.³⁶⁴

The harsh climate, augmented by frequent sand storms, combined with strikingly inadequate accommodations, was a disaster for the prisoners. In the two months following their arrival, says Odeh, “our situation was getting worse and worse... and we had to do something about it.”³⁶⁵ Exacerbating these conditions was severe overcrowding. Within a couple of months, this prison, intended for just 50 hardened

³⁶² Anonymous “old timer” quoted in *Al Hamishmar*, May 30, 1980 (News roundup, Autumn 1980, 157).

³⁶³ Both Odeh and Qaymery mentioned this. Qaymery, being a self-described “good natured gentlemen,” recalls finding it amusing watching his peers getting hosed with bug repellent.

³⁶⁴ Odeh, Second interview.

³⁶⁵ IBID.

terrorists, was reportedly bursting at its seams.³⁶⁶ Attorneys Leah Tsemel and Walid al-Fahoum noted in an interview that each cell contained ten mattresses, taking up almost all of the floor space, low ceilings, tiny windows, and a Turkish toilet with a shower above it.³⁶⁷ Having to spend 23 hours a day inside these cramped cells, with all forms of sport forbidden when they were allowed to venture outside, the prisoners believed that all of their striving to date towards material and lifestyle improvements had been superseded by this new establishment.

Given that by 1980 the prisoners were highly organized, and many of these men had been leaders in their previous places of incarceration, strike planning began immediately and was collective, measured and careful. Odeh emphasizes that due to the risks involved in starving oneself, hunger strikes “were not done overnight, they were planned. This protest was planned two months before it actually started.”³⁶⁸ On the first day of Ramadan, July 14, 1980, the strike began. Initial demands included “beds, rather than the thin mattresses that lie on the floor crawling with insects and reptiles...tables to eat and write on, and an end to the terrible congestion inside the cells, which should house four people instead of ten.”³⁶⁹ Then, as Odeh put it: “during the protest we just started requesting it all, from medical treatment to books.”³⁷⁰ By August, prisoners demanded “a sink for washing, a longer walk outside their cells, permission to exercise, the provision of toilet paper, shaving equipment, a mirror, books, newspapers, a change

³⁶⁶ Odeh describes it as severely crowded by July. Not even suited for the 50 prisoners the prison claimed it was prepared to accommodate, Reuters notes that 76 prisoners were interned there when the strike began (Reuters, July 26, 1980), while the Israeli press say there were 100 inmates (*Al Hamishmar*, May 30, 1980).

³⁶⁷ They are quoted in the feature by *Al Hamishmar*, May 30, 1980.

³⁶⁸ Odeh, Second interview.

³⁶⁹ Anonymous “old timer,” 157.

³⁷⁰ Odeh, Second interview

of clothing, the right to buy staples at the canteen and to listen to the radio.”³⁷¹

Additionally, they sought the right to work in the prison kitchen, longer visits with relatives, the replacement of the welded steel doors with traditional bars, and better ventilation.³⁷² The prisoners had a motto for the 1980 strike: “sun, water, air.” According to their collective agreement on the strike’s goals, access to all three of these basic necessities was nonnegotiable.

This strike coincided with what ex-prisoners call the springtime period, or the “Golden Years,” in Israeli jails: a period of complete unity, as evidenced by the rapidity with which the strike spread.³⁷³ The prisoners in Nafha, although protesting certain conditions, were also protesting the fact that the Israelis had overturned many of the gains made inside prisons over twelve years of struggle. This was not the first time, nor the first prison, in which access to materials or certain privileges had been revoked. Thus, Odeh argues, “this protest was not just for us, but for everyone.... The prison, its rules and regulations, was the reason why we even protested.”³⁷⁴ Further evidence of prisoner unity was the fact that within three weeks, close to 600 prisoners were striking in solidarity, in Ramle, Shatta, Asqalon and Beer Saba’.³⁷⁵ News of the strike spread in several ways, according to Odeh: “by the different prisoners, when some went to the hospital, visits from parents who told other parents, who told their sons and other inmates, from the lawyers that were going to the different prisons for cases.”³⁷⁶ Moreover, organization was so strong inside the jails, that there were also clearly established lines of communication

³⁷¹ Anonymous “old timer,” 157.

³⁷² Wrenn, *New York Times*, A3

³⁷³ This period will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Odeh reminisces fondly about the steadfastness of his peers.

³⁷⁴ Odeh, Second interview

³⁷⁵ Wrenn, A3.

³⁷⁶ Odeh, Second interview

open with the outside. As ex-prisoners recount, the movement on the outside, as well as the media, knew in advance that the strike was going to happen. By 1980, coordination was tight and effective.

The prison administration employed various tactics in attempting to break up the strike. As Odeh says, “the prison started forcing harsh consequences on us after they noticed our protest.”³⁷⁷ First, they tried to circumvent the established power structure in the prison by going straight to the top. Rather than speaking with Nafha’s appointed representative for communicating with the administration, Radi Jara’ai says the administration approached him. As the head of Fatah’s Central Committee inside Nafha, he was the highest ranking in the faction, and arguably the most powerful in the prison full stop, given that he represented the largest faction within the resistance movement. Radi recalls that they tried to enlist his help in halting the strike, claiming they would negotiate with him if it stopped, to which he says he responded: “don’t talk to me about this issue, you have the special representative of the jail to speak to.”³⁷⁸ The fact that the administration took this approach is significant: it suggests an awareness of the power structure and simultaneously a desire to break it. By circumventing the individual appointed to speak on behalf of his comrades, the administration actively resisted the existence of the complex prisoners organization, attempting to reject it by going straight to the top.

Secondly, forced feeding was employed with great enthusiasm. Odeh’s vivid description captures what this was like for his colleagues:

³⁷⁷ IBID.

³⁷⁸ Jara’ai, Interview 2015. He recalls that a man named Abu Marouf was Nafha’s representative at the time.

The interrogators got tubes and tried to insert them in different entry ways to their bodies, through the prisoners' noses, and other sensitive areas of their bodies. They inserted tubes that contained certain formulas and chemical mixtures into the body until it reached the stomach. When it reached the stomach it would affect it so badly they kept taking it out and putting it back in, hitting and damaging the stomach.³⁷⁹

As a result of this harsh method, the Israelis killed two prisoners at Nafha within the first month of the strike.³⁸⁰

And finally, the Israelis tried the by-now-standard tactic of dispersing the perceived leadership of the strike amongst other prisons in the Territories and Israel. After seven days of striking, reportedly 27 of the protesters were moved to other prisons.³⁸¹ Odeh himself was moved to Ramle. He recalls the treatment accompanying the relocation. Already weakened by seven food-free days, they were:

beaten unmercifully, and were cuffed from their hands and legs. When they got there [to the new prison], they were welcomed by the dogs [the Israelis], sticks and more torture methods were applied to their bodies. Each one was placed in solitary confinement, the interrogators wanted to break their hunger strike in any way. So they tried to force them to eat in any way they could, but the prisoners refused.³⁸²

When Odeh arrived in Ramle, a solidarity strike was gearing up to begin, and he stepped right into a leadership role in that prison. Both of these cases demonstrate a clear unity of purpose and mission, as well as agreed up on approach to running the strike. Neither of these efforts made a dent in the progress of the strike. In fact, they had no impact at all.

³⁷⁹ Odeh, Second interview.

³⁸⁰ *Al Quds*, July 22, 1980.

³⁸¹ Odeh Second interview.

³⁸² Odeh, Second interview.

Instead, the cohort of imprisoned leaders in Nafha had already smuggled out a formal appeal to the international community the week before the strike began, a message that was presented to the UN. They asked for a neutral party to evaluate their conditions and to intercede on their behalf. In so doing, they took moved their resistance beyond their own material conditions, and beyond prison walls, inserting themselves into an international discourse on liberation and resistance.

This strike is symbolic for two key reasons: first, it continued to evolve outside attention to and local participation in prisoner issues; second, it gained the prisoners widespread recognition of their internal organization. Not even two weeks into the strike a group of Arab women, many of whom had sons confined to Nafha, launched their own hunger strike in solidarity.³⁸³ Basing their demands on reports from the inside, they contended that conditions were untenable, with very little ventilation, hardly any exercise, frequent solitary confinement and too many bodies in one building. With a great deal of media attention from the Arabic, Israeli and foreign press, Chaim Levy, the head of the IPS, allowed reporters into the prison to observe. *The New York Times* observed the following conditions: each cell for eight prisoners was only about 20 feet long and 10 feet wide, with a toilet and shower nozzle in a partly closed booth at one end; the only furniture was a thin mattress for each prisoner on a concrete floor, and small cubbyholes for personal belongings. There were no table or chairs for eating meals, and very poor lighting.³⁸⁴ Widespread press on the mothers' solidarity strike, as well as reports on Nafha's living conditions meant that the IPS had to answer to the public. More

³⁸³ *Fatah*, July 26, 1980.

³⁸⁴ Wren, A3.

significant, however, is the attention that the prisoner movement gained through this strike. In the same *New York Times* article, Chaim Levy admitted to knowing that the prisons “have become dominated by an inmate hierarchy with rival loyalties to the Fatah guerrilla group or the most radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.”³⁸⁵ After two deaths caused by force-feeding,³⁸⁶ 33 days of hunger, and local press, the strike accomplished something profound: the government agreed to meet with the Struggler Committee.³⁸⁷ Consisting of representatives from all of the factions, and responsible for organizing the launch, continuation and stoppage of the strike, the fact that the authorities agreed to meet with them speaks to a significant success of the Prisoner Movement. According to interview subjects, although they lost two compatriots to the strike, the gains were critical to the prisoner movement, which resulted in an improvement in their day-to-day circumstances.

The strikes that followed during the first half of the 1980s continued to demonstrate the strength of prisoner unity, as well as their committees and structures. Strikes were carefully planned and well executed, always with massive participation. In 1984, 800 prisoners went on a 10-day hunger strike, once again to improve quantity and quality of food, and to get more time outside in the fresh air. Although the requests were often the same, the resolutions of the 1980s featured a process of negotiation between the prisoners and the administration.³⁸⁸ In this case, the minister of police, Haim Bar-Lev, reportedly met with the struggler committee to hear their complaints, after which he

³⁸⁵ IBID.

³⁸⁶ Kassem Mohammad Halawi and Al Mohammad el Jaafari both died after liquid entered their lungs when they were force fed with tubes.

³⁸⁷ The committees will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

³⁸⁸ Beyond the scope of this project are the First Intifada strikes. On September 27, 1992, a strike began that turned into the largest ever, including not only prisons, but also detention centers. According to one scholar, 8,000 participated at its height (See John Collins, *Occupied by Memory: The Intifada Generation and the Palestinian State of Emergency*, New York: NYU Press: 200 132).

circulated a letter throughout the prisons in Arabic addressing the issues.³⁸⁹ This constituted a kind of success, as one ex-prisoner asserts, “we forced our new life on the prison guards” by “retaliating with our protests in different forms. It was not just about hunger strikes. There were other ways, like refusing to shave, refusing to out to the courtyard for inspection, or refusing to take a certain order as attend our family visits.”³⁹⁰ By the time of the Intifada, prisoners had achieved many goals, including more family visits, but more significantly the right to hold classes, read books and newspapers, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters. As one scholar succinctly pointed out in his work on the First Intifada, the main achievement “centered on their right to use their time as they pleased.”³⁹¹ How prisoners filled this hard earned time is the subject of the next two chapters.

Conclusion

Prisoners waged tens of hunger strikes between 1967 and the early 1980s, some of them lasting just a few hours and others months. From the beginning of the Occupation, the prisoners resisted poor treatment while also asserting their right to proper material conditions. What is clear is that every time there was a step forward in the struggle, every time an allowance made or a privilege granted, there was no guarantee that it would remain. Family visits were lengthened, shortened, and lengthened again. Access to education was granted – even access to the Open University’s degree program – and then rescinded. Thus, one cannot look to Palestinian hunger strikes for evidence of a linear

³⁸⁹ This story is as per Samman Khoury. I have tried to find this letter; several interview subjects have confirmed it happened, as does the press.

³⁹⁰ Odeh, Second interview.

³⁹¹ Collins, 132.

trajectory of success in improving prison conditions. Rather, one can look to them for evidence of prisoner steadfastness, a refusal to be broken. As Odeh asserts, “we forced our new life on the prison guards” by “retaliating with our protests in different forms. It was not just about hunger strikes. There were other ways, like refusing to shave, refusing to out to the courtyard for inspection, or refusing to take a certain order as attend our family visits.”³⁹²

So too, Palestinian hunger strikes in the pre-Oslo period are interesting because they represent a moment in resistance and liberation politics when ideological boundaries dissipate, moments when each person’s action matters. No matter how much disagreement might have plagued the main factions inside and outside of prisons, during a hunger strike unity prevailed. Moreover, as one ex-prison leader emphasized, “hunger strikes were often for little things – refusing food because we wanted a spoon to eat with. There is a struggle, there are negotiations, then you get something. You learn the politics of life in prison. You don’t allow them to break you and you don’t break them. You learn the importance of negotiation.”³⁹³ Hunger strikes helped drive the systematization and organization of prison life; they formed a key axis around which political unity and locally situated resistance revolved. The ways in which prisoners organized is the subject of the next chapter.

³⁹² Odeh, Second interview.

³⁹³ Samman Khoury interview, January 2016

“Fatah had and has the honour of national leadership and the honour of carrying national historical responsibility”³⁹⁴

Chapter Three

Forging Local Actors:

The Creation of Fatah’s Political Structures inside Prisons

Shared struggle drove prisoners to a sense of belonging to something that extended beyond the confines of their cells and sites of incarceration. As Chapter Two argued, hunger strikes were key to producing unity within and between political factions. Indeed, many of the individuals cited in Chapter Two, who spoke to their experience of bodily struggle, agree that something resembling a formal National Prisoners’ Movement dates to 1980 when prisoners were successful in getting the bulk of their demands met through such struggles. The tangible manifestation of this movement is the professionalization and resulting codification of prison leadership, which went through various permutations between 1967 and the First Intifada. From the beginning of the Occupation, one can see an ongoing dialectic, as well as manifestations of divergence, between the Fatah leadership in the Diaspora and the affiliated cells inside Israel and the Territories. Thus, those striving towards organization inside political prisons had to engage in this balancing act, as there existed a tension between looking to the outside

³⁹⁴ “The Internal Regulations List for Detention,” AG 13-3-1-3, Abu Jihad Library, Al Quds University Abu Dis Campus, p. 3.

leadership for ideological and structural guidance and fine-tuning a locally appropriate detailed political structure for preparing future political leaders. To understand how political structures represent both exchange with the outside and the forging of a new way, the opening of this chapter looks at the creation and building of Fatah and the PLO in order to contextualize how the prisoners both drew on the example of and veered from Diaspora organization. This chapter argues that the resistance movement most relevant to local Palestinians' day-to-day existence was built inside the prisons, as well as by released prisoners who joined *Shabiba* or grassroots organizations;³⁹⁵ that structures with the potential capability of governing³⁹⁶ a Palestinian population were locally cultivated rather than shaped by the internationally recognized Fatah movement, whose leadership and political activities were situated in the Diaspora. In particular, it was within political prisons and at the hands of ex-prisoners that the real work of building nascent governmental structures took place. As this chapter will show, the existing literature on formal Palestinian politics in the 1970s and 1980s examines its evolution in the Diaspora, including how factions survived without a territorial base, the personalities and whims of the leaders, and the tactics organizations used in resistance politics. This chapter asserts an alternative reading, tracing the emergence of prisoner-created political structures; it will highlight prison leaders who were absorbed into the formal political structure in the post-Oslo period, as well as those who rejected the direction of the Palestinian Authority. In so doing, this chapter complicates the portrait of resistance politics as Diaspora-based.

³⁹⁵ This dissertation does not delve extensively into *Shabiba* or grassroots organizations, as it focuses on the prison experience during incarceration. Closer consideration of these groups will be part of the larger project in the future.

³⁹⁶ I use the term governing here intentionally. In 2016, Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem feel both an absence of a governing force and a leadership that can inspire and help drive.

Fatah's Repositioning: The PLO Years

As discussed at length in the introduction, Fatah was founded in 1956 as a small, secret group in the Diaspora, made up of refugees and dependent on the good graces of host countries for staging grounds and operational facilities. Initially formed in Cairo, grown in Kuwait, with headquarters at various times in Jordan, Damascus, Beirut, Tunisia, and Algeria, Fatah was firmly a Diaspora-rooted organization. Thus, planning and execution of Fatah's strategy and major operations occurred outside historic Palestine, including setting up the structure of the organization through general assembly-style meetings. The first large-scale gathering was convened in Kuwait in 1962, during which Fatah's strategic vision, goals and organizing structure were determined, yielding the establishment of a Central Committee of ten members in 1963.³⁹⁷ Scholars emphasize the role Diaspora Palestinians and non-Palestinians played in Fatah, such as Helga Baumgarten who argues "it is difficult to overestimate the extent to which the Diaspora experience shaped the formation and ultimate success of Fatah."³⁹⁸ The refugee status of Palestinians in exile was the key point around which political groups rallied. As a resistance group in exile, from the beginning they had to weigh opinions external to "the cause," arguably as heavily as Palestinian concerns. Indeed, as Helena Cobban asserts, the roots of the Fatah movement was "firmly dug into the communities of the Palestinian exile, as opposed to those Palestinian communities which remained on their ancestral soil in the West Bank and Gaza, even inside 1948 Israel."³⁹⁹ A Palestinian graduate student at

³⁹⁷ Today's Central Committee includes 23 members, including 19 members elected by the General Congress and three appointed members.

³⁹⁸ Helga Baumgarten, "The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism, 1948-2005," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 34, no. 4 (Summer 2005), 32.

³⁹⁹ Cobban, 16.

American University of Beirut noted the complexity of Diaspora-rooted resistance in a 1975 article; he says, “the different areas in which Palestinians were located had a different effect on their freedom to conduct nationalist activities. In the case of Jordan, Palestinian aspirations were discouraged by the Hashemite regime, whose dynastic territorial interests in the West Bank clearly ran counter to aspirations for the recovery of all of Palestine, followed by its establishment as an independent state.”⁴⁰⁰ Having evolved out of a refugee community “Fatah networks had woven through and between communities of the Palestinian Diaspora in all the Arab countries and beyond.”⁴⁰¹ They recruited heavily in Cairo and Beirut, with posters plastering walls around the city and actual recruiting centers open in most Arab countries. Furthermore, the 1967 defeat of the Arab states raised the profile of guerrilla action as a solution to Middle East tensions. As Yezid Sayigh has pointed out, their successful operations gained enough notoriety that “armed struggle provided the central theme and practice around which Palestinian nation building took place, and laid the basis for state-building by driving elite formation and militarization and allowing political legitimization.”⁴⁰² As one commentator noted just two years after the war, they “attained a degree of political legitimacy and popularity throughout the Arab states whether “conservative” or “radical” – a fact significant for the future internal political development in the Arab world.”⁴⁰³ From its early days, the faction also realized the importance of international support for their cause, actively

⁴⁰⁰ Rashid Hamid, “What is the PLO?”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 4, no. 4 (Summer 1975), 92.

⁴⁰¹ Cobban, 6.

⁴⁰² Yezid Sayigh, 665.

⁴⁰³ Michael Hudson, “The Palestinian Arab Resistance Movement: Its Significant in the Middle East Crisis,” *Middle East Journal*, 23, no. 3 (Summer, 1969), 291.

seeking it.⁴⁰⁴ By 1969, they had won recognition by USSR, North Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba, and China.⁴⁰⁵ A gaze diverted from historic Palestine was not without impact: Arafat's failure to set up offices in Ramallah in 1967 has been attributed to Fatah not having built strong networks – or any at all – in the Territories. Rather, from 1948 to 1967 and even after, “its ideological base and organizational impetus were still directed towards the Palestinians in exile rather than towards the Palestinians who still, in the West Bank and Gaza, remained in their own homes.”⁴⁰⁶

The creation of the PLO in 1964 and Fatah's eventual rise to the top in 1969 only further underscored the key role of the Diaspora in Fatah's politics. By the time Arafat became the chairman of the umbrella organization, the beginnings of a bureaucracy had been written into place with input from non-Palestinian stakeholders. These documents ranged from the Palestinian National Charter adopted on May 28, 1964, which established the PLO, to the Basic Constitution outlining the organization's structures and procedures; nowhere do the National Charter or the PLO statutes refer to territorial sovereignty for a Palestinian state. Indeed, from its inception, the PLO was duty bound to powers beyond the Palestinian people. As a result, Fatah had to shift from a guerrilla organization with little accountability, to one that had to maintain public credibility in the interest of the PLO's reputation, political relationships, and funding. As Alain Gresh has argued, the Palestinians became a “trump card in the hands of Arab leaders, in their struggle to extend their regional influence.”⁴⁰⁷ Arab states meddled from the beginning, trying to shape the organization they desired, rather than the organization necessary to

⁴⁰⁴ This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

⁴⁰⁵ This will also be discussed in Chapter Five.

⁴⁰⁶ Cobban, 38.

⁴⁰⁷ Alain Gresh, *The PLO, the Struggle Within: Towards an Independent Palestinian State* (London: Zed Books, 1985), 84.

attain liberation. According to Gresh's assessment, it was not primarily Palestinian suffering that led to the formation of the PLO; rather, it was a rivalry between Nasser and Qassim that drove the organization's formation. It was from Nasser and the United Arab Republic that main governmental support came for the PLO, they had to humor these states. Much of the organization's funding came from non-Palestinian Arabs, and individuals (Palestinian and non-Palestinian alike) residing in oil-producing countries. Given that these established countries were entrenched in regional and Cold War politics, they had interests beyond the welfare of the Palestinian refugees, notably containing anti-Israeli sentiment. The 1967 defeat discredited the PLO, opening up a space for Fatah to take the lion's share of control and restore legitimacy to the group, as well as to improve military cooperation amongst the guerrilla groups. Winning control of the Cairo-based Palestine National Assembly in February 1969 cemented Fatah's need to heed regional politics and interests.

Exacerbating this already palpable level of outside involvement in the Palestinian issue was the 1974 declaration by the Arab League and the United Nations recognizing the PLO as the "sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." From this moment forward, Fatah, as the head of the PLO, would be in the international spotlight. Rashid Khalidi argues that Arafat became the head of a "para-state," rather than guiding a "humble revolutionary movement."⁴⁰⁸ Thus, public relations and marketing became increasingly important, including Fatah and PLO publications that targeted the international community and the Palestinian Diaspora, including: Fatah's widely read

⁴⁰⁸ Khalidi, 29; Helen Schulz also speaks to this in Chapter Three in *The Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism: Between Revolution and Statehood*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

Filastinunua (Our Palestine, published in Beiru), *Al-Thawra Al-Filistiniyya* (The Palestinian Revolution) and the PLO's *Sawt Filistiniyya* (Voice of Palestine); *Shu'un Filastiniyya* was published by the PLO research centre from 1971-1993.⁴⁰⁹ Such publications represent a shift in the Palestinian approach to liberation, away from Arab unity as a prerequisite to promoting the idea that Palestinians could rebel “successfully against foreign settlers by relying mainly on its own resources.”⁴¹⁰ And yet, although these publications were intended to promote the Palestinian cause and discuss the history of the Palestine question amongst a wide audience, they were still *external* to the reality of life in the Territories. By the beginning of the 1980s, the Fatah bureaucratic apparatus in the Diaspora was overseeing all activity connected to the resistance, including: military, political, social, information distribution, economic issues, and relations with the resistance movement inside historic Palestine. At the same time, however, parallel institutions to manage all aspects of local life were growing up in the West Bank and Gaza, including societies, clubs, and other politically-affiliated organizations.

Thus, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, when the leadership was in exile, one can see how the relationship between the constituency within the Territories and the leadership was unsteady for two reasons: first, because this period of exile was meant to be transitional, and thus Fatah did not have a reliably fixed base of operations; and second, because they never came face to face with Palestinian people on their own soil.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ Chapter Five will examine some of this marketing by focusing on political poster art.

⁴¹⁰ Hamid, 93.

⁴¹¹ Ali Jarbawi, “Palestinian Politics at a Crossroads,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 25, no. 4 (Summer 1996), 29. In this piece he analyzes the significance of the evolution of new political body, the PA, which will replace the Diaspora organizations of the PLO and the PNC. With this movement, the political process would “henceforth derive from the reality and constraints of life inside Palestine.” What this means is that the Diaspora issues, such as the fate and rights of the refugees, would not be the primary focus.

The return of the leadership after Oslo presented many challenges – it was a painful shift – which are beyond the scope of this work.⁴¹²

Fatah on the Inside: Building Prison Resistance Politics

As illustrated above, Fatah's macro-focus between 1967 and the early 1980s was largely directed away from the day-to-day of historic Palestine, in spite of the growing number of cells. This started to shift in the years immediately preceding the lead up to the Intifada, when the "outside" leadership began to pay more attention to "inside" developments.⁴¹³ As Graham Usher points out, the 1980s witnessed a stoking of the Fatah cadre under the guidance of Abu Jihad (Khalil al-Wazir); in the lead up to the Intifada they "cut their teeth in the youth, social and armed organizations."⁴¹⁴ The "inside" leadership, however, extended beyond those identified by Fatah in the Diaspora as possible leaders. Rather, residents had evolved their own system of identifying leaders, many of whom participated in choreographing the Intifada. The Fatah leadership and its accompanying political organization that developed inside the prisons present a particularly interesting alternative to that in the Diaspora.

The site of the prison offered several key attributes when it came to Fatah cultivating complex political structures and associated processes. First, inmates and their leaders did not encounter the same kind of geographical flux as the Diaspora leadership. Many prisoners spent a half-decade or more in the same prison, some living out several

⁴¹² I deal with some of these issues in the conclusion, in terms of directions for future research.

⁴¹³ Interview subjects who were part of the Unified Leadership attribute this attention to the fact that the Diaspora leadership felt threatened.

⁴¹⁴ Graham Usher, "Fatah's *Tanzim*: Origins and Politics," in "Beyond Oslo: The New Uprising." *Middle East Report*, 217 (Winter, 2000), 26.

decades in the incarceration system. By the late 1970s, even when the Israeli authorities moved prisoners from one location to another in an attempt to destabilize relationships and to interrupt ongoing dialogue and planning, political structures were not disrupted. Rather, prisoner movements enabled precise replication of structures from one prison to the next. Second, Fatah-affiliated prisoners who became leaders did not have to contend with the Diaspora-related pressures and necessary framing discussed above, but were focused almost entirely on their own context. Finally, given the constraints of prison, cells carrying out armed insurgency was not an option, thus a kind of nascent state building replaced those actions as legitimizing tools for leaders. Thus, the prison's distinctiveness opened up a space for intriguing political developments

The initial example for Fatah prisoners seeking to organize was that which had evolved outside the prison walls in the Diaspora, both within Fatah and the PLO. Fatah's published writings emphasized a formal, administrative infrastructure with a transparent chain of command, a structure with which educated prisoners were familiar. On the surface, it was quite simple and organized, and even relatively democratic: the organizations in each country had their own budget and internal organizational structure, with a direct reporting line only to Fatah's Central Committee. The widely discussed assumption was that these quasi-governmental structures would eventually be the basis upon which a Palestinian state would be built.⁴¹⁵ Thus, it is not surprising that Fatah's tripartite organization was the loose basis for the prisoners' movement: Fatah's General Conference, which was supposed to meet every five years, was reflected in each Fatah-

⁴¹⁵ Discussed in John K. Cooley, "Kuwait provides Arabs with prosperous rear base," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 26, 1968, p.1, summarized in Michael Hudson, "The Palestinian Arab Resistance Movement: Its Significant in the Middle East Crisis," *Middle East Journal*, 23:3 (Summer, 1969), 291.

affiliated prisoner having voting privileges in the prison which he inhabited; Fatah's elected Central Committee, which functioned as a collective leadership, was replicated inside the prisons; and Fatah's Revolutionary Council, which decided policy in the Diaspora when the General Conference was not in session, was reinterpreted to work in a prison context. With all the infighting and the Diaspora-focus of Fatah's formal hierarchy, and given the number of ex-prisoners who joined the Palestinian Authority, the administrative system developed in the prisons represented an ideal that could have – and should have been – transferred to the outside.

Understanding how the system evolved, both in dialogue with Fatah in Diaspora and also by plotting a separate course, requires relying heavily on interview material. The lengthy, multiyear conversations and negotiations that went into creating an organized and well-oiled structure were not recorded in writing. Thus, the next section of this chapter will draw heavily on oral sources to help contextualize the written material that is discussed in the final two sections. To do so, I will highlight four Fatah leaders in particular who played an important role in the formulation, development and maintenance of the political structures described in the documents: Ahmad Shirin, Yacoub Odeh, Radi Jara'ai, and Ibrahim Khrishi. Shirin was arrested at the age of 20, having just finished high school. At the time of his arrest, he was a member of a Fatah military cell and was active in operations within the 1948 borders. As mentioned in the introduction, and quoted in Chapter One, Odeh first entered prison in 1969 and spent 17 years in Israeli custody. As an early prisoner with a long sentence, he can help us understand what drove the creation of formal structures and the role prisoners played. Another voice already

present in the opening chapters of this work is that of Radi Jara'ai's. As mentioned, Jara'ai was arrested in 1976 and was a leader in creating one of the prison movement's key structural markers: the Prisoners' Constitution. An educated high school teacher from Jerusalem, his was well suited to take a leading role in translating on going internal conversations into agreed upon and written processes and procedures. Jara'ai is important to understanding how prison politics evolved, as his narrative helps fill in the gaps on both the process and the final product. Ibrahim Khrishi presents a different, but equally interesting, portrait of the changing times. As discussed in Chapter One, Khrishi was enrolled in Bir Zeit University when the soldiers came to search for him at his family's home. He was not, however, involved in the Fatah movement or involved in formal resistance activities prior to his 1982 arrest, but was focused on his studies. Rather, he is an ideal example of someone who was politicized inside the prisons. By the time of his conviction, clear structures were in place inside the prisons, outlining democratic elections and offering a path towards leadership. Khrishi represents one of the individuals who traversed this path within the prison, and upon his release he returned to Bir Zeit as an active member and leader of *Shabiba*, the student arm of Fatah. Today, thirty years later, Khrishi remains an active member of the faction, holding a position of power within the Palestinian Legislative Council. Taken together, these four individuals will help shed light on the conversations, struggles, and accomplishments of those involved in establishing a clear political organization that came to define the prisoner's movement.

Putting the House in Order: The "Individual Leadership" Stage

As mentioned, the post-1967 period witnessed a sizable influx of prisoners – thousands – into Israeli jails, many serving sentences of 10 years or more. Neither the Ottoman and British structures nor the prisons built by the Israelis themselves were equipped for such numbers. Between serious overcrowding, atrocious conditions, and inhumane treatment by the guards, the prisoners had many complaints, all of which inspired some of them to consider secretly organizing. Former prisoners recall conditions in minute detail that led to the rise of individual leaders and the “individual leadership” stage of the movement inside the prisons. For example, in Tul Karem, Ahmed Shirin describes the situation when he arrived in 1969 as completely lacking in even an inch of extra space or a modicum of privacy. He was in a room intended only for about one-quarter of the number of bodies inhabiting it. When night fell, he recollects that “in order to sleep in these rooms, we had to use all the available space, so we had to sleep on our sides.”⁴¹⁶ As another interviewee eloquently put it, sleeping arrangements often resembled that of “sardines in a tin, with one man’s feet next to his neighbor’s head, and his feet brushing up against the head of the person on his other side.”⁴¹⁷ Space was so coveted that if one rose to use the bathroom in the middle of the night, he would come back to where he was sleeping and “won’t find a space because somebody will take it.”⁴¹⁸ Even worse was the complete absence of privacy. The “bathroom” consisted of a bucket in the corner of the room, without any kind of curtain or divider marking it off as a private space. Such severe overcrowding was not particular to Tul Karem, but was a challenge across the prison system from the Occupation’s inception. As discussed in

⁴¹⁶ Shirin Interview.

⁴¹⁷ Khatib Interview.

⁴¹⁸ Shirin Interview.

Chapter Two, it was a contributing factor to Ramle's first hunger strike in 1968.⁴¹⁹ Thus, as many ex-prisoners recollected, it was clear some kind of leadership was needed to communicate and negotiate with the prison administration, as well as to coordinate and guide resistance efforts, that the evolution of a leadership would be key to any improvement at all in conditions.

Endowing an individual with permission to lead presented its own challenges in the early years of the Occupation, given that prisoners were not distributed into rooms according to their political affiliation, as would be the case by the late 1970s. What this meant was that those who aligned with Fatah, the PFLP or the Communist movement lived side by side in these horrid conditions, in spite of deeply felt ideological and political differences. Thus, choosing a leader came with its own political obstacle: how would a Fatah member trust a PFLP leader to represent his interests, or vice versa? The situation was urgent by the early 1970s: with such uncomfortably close quarters as a way of existence, it is not surprising that interpersonal temperatures rose and sometimes erupted into physical violence. Density led to conflict and competition, to inter- and intra-faction flare ups, often pitting the prisoners against one another rather than unifying them against their common enemies, the Israeli prison system and the military administration writ large. With a lack of outlets for release of such strain, tensions were frequently mapped onto factional divides and resulted in inter-faction clashes. Ghassan Khatib spoke in great detail over several interviews about the violence between factions even in the mid- to late-1970s. When asked how relations were between groups, his answer was in

⁴¹⁹ As discussed, Yacoub Odeh was involved in this hunger strike and its coordination, which was also contending with treatment during administrative detention.

direct contrast with those of many of his compatriots, saying they were “very bad,” and that the prisoners of various factions would “compete on many things.”⁴²⁰ Asqalon, among the most crowded and politicized of the prisons inside Israel, was a site of frequent clashes. An oft-recounted quarrel erupted in the early 1970s between Fatah and PFLP members, resulting in a member of the latter attacking a Fatah member’s face with a razor.⁴²¹ Abu Ali Shaheen, the informal “boss” of Fatah in that prison at the time, not only demanded an apology from the PFLP, but also organized a counter attack against the presumed leaders of that faction.

In spite of reports of such violence between the groups, the vast majority of interview subjects insisted that the relationship between various movements was good. In fact, the language used to describe these relationships was always positive, including: “perfect,” “excellent, perfect”⁴²² “very good,” “we were all friends,” and everyone was always “laughing and talking.”⁴²³ While the common adage says that a common enemy temporarily unites the usually ideologically divided, it is clear that this bright picture is not without blemishes. First, written documentation suggests that violence was indeed a pressing problem. As the next section of this chapter will discuss, material from the 80s and 90s include parameters for dealing with tensions between individuals. Secondly, when pressed, ex-prisoners would hesitantly, or even unintentionally, reveal that the situation was far more complicated, and that such positive framing was just that: framing. For example, Abu Mohammad’s immediate response to my query was “excellent, perfect,” but when pressed, he conceded, “there were problems, small problems that

⁴²⁰ Khatib, second interview.

⁴²¹ Khatib and Jara’ai both spoke about this; Abu Ali Shaheen also mentions it in his book.

⁴²² Abu Mohammad Interview.

⁴²³ Qaymery Interview.

would be solved at the moment.”⁴²⁴ Abu Bakr, Fatah’s self-described “first prisoner,” emphasized several times during our three interviews “we were like one hand, in one prison everyone was equal. There was no Fatah, no Jabha, we were all one”⁴²⁵ or “everybody’s together.”⁴²⁶ Then, every time this subject arose, a few sentences later, his language hinted at more complexity, for example: “there was division, but I was against it”⁴²⁷ or “I didn’t want to separate from my neighbors, I want them to live another way, to be one family together.”⁴²⁸ Such admissions were common across interviews, and required probing and usually more than one meeting. Khatib directly addressed ex-prisoner reluctance to dwell on the underbelly of the experience, emphasizing that they had no interest in revealing the dark side. By emphasizing inter-faction cooperation, former prisoners reclaimed these lost years. The positive spin allows for them to have a space in which they maintained control, which they mediated in the face of crushing oppression. Only rarely was an ex-prisoner as open as Khatib about the prevalence of inter-personal violence. He described the viciousness that occasionally coursed through the population, with razors as the weapons of choice, employed frequently in PFLP and Fatah fights. He recounted close to ten occasions during his imprisonment when the violence was so extreme, when prisoners were beating each other so severely that the guards had to intervene with tear gas to break up it up violence and to prevent the prisoners from killing or maiming each other.⁴²⁹ Khatib is in a special place in terms of speaking out: he was a member of the very small Communist Party in the 1970s and

⁴²⁴ Abu Mohammad Interview.

⁴²⁵ Abu Bakr, First interview.

⁴²⁶ Abu Bakr, Second interview.

⁴²⁷ Abu Bakr, Second interview.

⁴²⁸ Abu Bakr, Third interview.

⁴²⁹ Khatib Interview.

today claims to be unaligned in his senior administrative position at Bir Zeit. Not having to protect or shape the narrative of Fatah in the still Fatah-dominated West Bank gives him a degree of verbal freedom. For an ex-prisoner who identifies, or identified, with Fatah, recalling violent relations is far more complicated. Indeed, one common response to a question about violence between factions is that Fatah members refused to respond to incitement or attacks from the PFLP because there was no reason for them to feel threatened.

That said, it was in large part these divisions and tensions that invited, albeit out of necessity, the evolution of an informal leadership, which is now known as the Individual Leadership Stage inside the prisons. As Jara'ai argued, organization was initially sparked by the urgency of the terrible prison situation, which infighting only compounded. The physical manifestation of tensions persuaded certain educated and astute individuals that their differences would be better resolved by talking than through violent skirmishes; they understood that the administration of the jail could use such inter-factional disputes to escalate violence and further divide people.⁴³⁰ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, initial conversations about how to collectively seek improved conditions were muted, as the prisoners had to avoid the watchful eye of the Israeli prison administration.⁴³¹ Living in factionally mixed rooms, self-identified prisoners took the lead in these conversations, which usually consisted of one or two people discussing the issues and then connecting with individuals from other rooms during times when they were allowed to move about. Such discussions were quiet and entirely informal. Those

⁴³⁰ Jara'ai and Khatib both speak to this.

⁴³¹ Odeh and Abu Bakr both speak to this initial stage. Jara'ai also spoke about it, but not from first hand knowledge since his involvement began in the mid-1970s.

who assumed the role of leaders tended to be well connected, educated individuals, since the social life inside the prisons at this time closely resembled that of the outside; neighborhood disputes as well as family tensions and/or alliances were mapped onto prison life. This reflects the traditional emphasis on cultivating trust through social networks rather than through accomplishments. Individuals like Shirin and Odeh came to occupy early leadership positions because of their outside reputations, their relative education levels, and the length of time for which they were sentenced. Since rooms were not divided out according to faction, and thus sustained conversations amongst, say, Fatah members was next to impossible, the need and general desire for a calm collectivity had to be the driving force for organization. During this Individual Leadership Stage, the leaders were informally appointed—without any rules or regulations defining the selection process – to organize the lives of the prisoners and maintain a certain calm.

Other leaders had held positions with Fatah outside the prison and thus were naturally looked to as leaders once they were on the other side of the wall. The vast majority of those arrested in the first decade after the Occupation were under 20 and thus had little life experience, not to mention the limited education with which many began their internment.⁴³² Thus, individuals such as Abu Bakr and Abu Ali Shaheen were respected Fatah military officers prior to their arrests and knew something about the principles of the political movement from their work outside. As Shirin recollects, Shaheen was an important leader in early 1970s Asqalon. Given his importance to the movement prior to his arrest, messages from political leaders outside were transferred to

⁴³² I have not been able to locate official statistics on this, but based on interview subjects and the sheer numbers of those in their 60s today who were quite young at the time, it is clear that *shabaab* were arrest targets.

him during family visits.⁴³³ Individuals who received such messages were suited to act as prison leaders and negotiators during the individual leadership stage.

For the men acting as an informal leadership, the list of complaints and issues emanating from each room was so long that they primarily acted as liaisons with the administration. One ex-prisoner reflected on his unofficial appointment as the top leader in Ramallah in 1971. A key concern was food, which required a well-honed negotiator to campaign for improvements. As he recollected, his leadership role included many discussions with the administration about “the amount and type of food, how much fruit and how much meat.”⁴³⁴ An ongoing debate concerned whether prisoners would eat according to weight or amount, with the Ramallah guards offering two grams of apple that would result in each prisoner only getting half of an apple rather than a full apple. After weeks of discussion, they agreed to feed the prisoners according to unit, until the issue of the watermelon came up, at which point they reverted to feeding in grams rather than units. As he recalled, these negotiations went on and on, resulting in one apple, but then only “five grams of banana and five grams of watermelon.”⁴³⁵ In negotiations over bodily issues, the room or section leader, the manager and often the Red Cross would be present.

The “Individual Leadership” approach to managing inter- and intra-faction relationships was not practicable when it came to overseeing and guiding a rapidly expanding prison population with many stress factors with which to contend. Those who gained the trust of compatriots acted on their behalf during the early 1970s by trying to

⁴³³ Shirin Interview.

⁴³⁴ Abu Mohammed Interview.

⁴³⁵ Abu Mohammad Interview.

force the administration to improve living and material conditions, as well as to ease relations between hundreds of inmates. More significantly, they became the locus of intense and quiet planning conversations, which grappled with ways of managing the large population and the accompanying difficulties. The result of these conversations was a movement away from this so-called “individual leader” period towards a more institutionalized and – notably – documented approach to organizing the masses. This urge to write one’s way through political conflict and towards a form of resistance was not without precedent in the Diaspora, a fact that was not lost on the first leaders and which will be discussed in the following sections.

Written Precursors: Fatah’s 1964 Constitution

Starting around 1973 or 1974, the planning conversations to which ex-prisoners allude focused on how to develop a clear administrative structure with established guidelines and rules necessary to support it, all in the interest of improving the safety and security of the inmates, as well as improving living conditions. At first, before hunger strikes won inmates access to writing implements, they recorded nascent regulations using smuggled pens and cardboard from cigarette packets or cooking margarine.⁴³⁶ Then, beginning in the second half of the 1970s through the early 1980s, prisoners put pens to paper, hard won through hunger strikes, and began to carefully inscribe their activities into Israeli copybooks that were provided to them by the prison authorities.⁴³⁷ The surviving documentation of the eventually agreed upon formal rules and regulations

⁴³⁶ Abu Bakr, Odeh, and Shirin all discuss this.

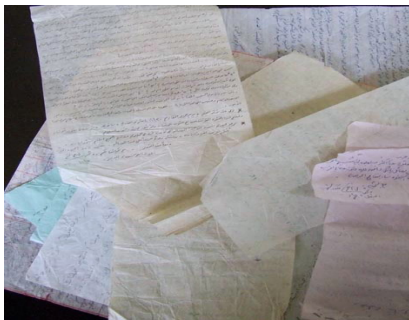
⁴³⁷ Copybooks started to enter prisons in the second half of the 1970s, but did not arrive in each prison at the same time, nor was it consistent: sometimes the Israelis would halt access as punishment.

consists of tidy penmanship on the pages of small Israeli exam notebooks intended for schoolchildren. It cannot have been lost on the prisoners that they were inscribing their guidelines for their existence and political resistance into booklets with Hebrew letters adorning the covers. Rather than subverting the system, the prisoners were creating documents that were somehow made permissible by the Israelis, and perhaps even desired since it allowed for the production of material for monitoring.

Although Fatah was established as a highly secretive organization in the 1950s, and continued as such through the 1960s, 1970s and into the 1980s, the faction also recorded its history, messaging, and regulations in writing. These documents served as bases from which prisoners could draw as they conceptualized their own structures. The group's 1956 founding was accomplished through two such documents: *Haykal al Bina al Thawri* (Structure of Revolutionary Construction) and the movement's Manifesto.⁴³⁸ The drafters of these documents were clearly well read in resistance literature, as they seem to draw on guerrilla writings, such as those by individuals like Franz Fanon who emphasizes the purifying effect of violence. From the start, writing also played an important role for the faction's supporters, a highly literate Palestinian population and other Arabs, who regularly read the mouthpiece *Nida' al Hayat Filistinuna* (The Call to Life, Our Palestine). As evidenced in the prison documents, which will be discussed in detail in the following section, Fatah's 1964 Constitution had the most significant influence on the evolving structures.

⁴³⁸ Robert Olson emphasizes the significance of these written documents, arguing that the formalizing of the guerrilla movement led to far-reaching affects, including within Turkish politics. In "Al-Fatah in Turkey: Its Influence on the March 12 Coup," *Middle East Studies*, 9, no. 2 (May 1973), 197-205.

Prisoner access to Fatah's official documentation was a considerable challenge in the 1970s and 1980s, since Palestinian political documents were not technically allowed on the inside. However, published Fatah documents, as well as statements issued by the movement's main governing body, the General Conference, did manage to make it into circulation via an unusual and circuitous path. In a strange twist, copies of these documents, translated into Hebrew, were often shelved in Ramle's library for Israeli criminal prisoners' use. Hebrew-literate Palestinian prisoners gained access to these documents and translated them back into Arabic for general reading consumption.⁴³⁹ By the mid-1970s, prisoners had developed various conduits for transporting materials from one site to another. In some cases, material would be secretly passed to a family member with a particular addressee in mind at another prison.⁴⁴⁰ Lawyers are also said to have carried written material on occasion. As multiple interviewees confirmed, prisoners' bodies were the most innovative transport vehical and reportedly the most widely used. As briefly mentioned in Chapter Two, documents would be transcribed in chunks in near microscopic handwriting onto very small pieces of paper, called *kabsulih*, as shown below.



⁴³⁹ Odeh, Jara'ai, and Khoury all speak to this.

⁴⁴⁰ All interview subjects spoke to this, but Hilmi Al Araj talked in detail about his wife moving materials.

These papers would then be neatly folded, wrapped in plastic, swallowed, and moved to another location via the below *kabsulih*.



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The most common site of document exchange was Ramle hospital, where prisoners from all over Israel and the West Bank were transferred for treatment.⁴⁴² Accounts of the amount of material transported this way are startling. As will be discussed in the next section, interview subjects report that entire documents capturing the planned political structure moved from one prison to the next via individual bodies. Scraps of *kabsulih* show, and interview subjects confirm, that the prisoners' constitution traveled throughout the prison system via this method.⁴⁴³ So too, popular books employed in educational programming moved from one prison to another via prisoners' bodies, as will be discussed in Chapter Four. Once the *kabsulih* were retrieved from the human mule, they information would be copied out in larger handwriting, eventually into the very copybooks we now rely on to understand these prisoners' experiences.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴¹ Photograph of the papers is mine; the wrapped *kabsulih* photograph is available on the Abu Jihad Museum's website.

⁴⁴² Mohammad Ibrahim Abu Ali and Jara'ai interviews in particular, but all interview subjects spoke to the importance of the hospital as a site of exchange.

⁴⁴³ This document will be discussed at length in the following pages.

⁴⁴⁴ Material transported via *kabsulih*, beyond the Prisoners' Constitution, will be dealt with in greater depth in the book project, as the expense in working with these documents is not minimal. One needs to professionally enlarge the documents to be able to make out the microscopic handwriting.

In prisons to which Fatah's official political material did not make it via these *kabsulih*, prisoners relied on the knowledge of those who had held some kind of leadership position in the West Bank or Jerusalem prior to imprisonment. As mentioned earlier, those involved in the structural planning conversations were highly educated, and many had been in leadership positions, even just of individual cells, and thus were ideologically and intellectually prepared to guide the evolution of the prison organization.⁴⁴⁵ One characteristic of some individual leaders in the prisons is that they remained linked to the outside movement during their imprisonment and thus could draw on established external examples as guidance.⁴⁴⁶ When moved to a new prison, these individuals were tasked with reproducing the documentation begun in other prisons.

One can detect the influence of the principles enshrined in Fatah's 1964 Constitution on prisoner-produced organizational documents. First, the faction's armed struggle is framed as a "public revolution, and not one of a distinguished class."⁴⁴⁷ Further to that, the Constitution claims to value the public as the "sole source of authority and the sole, honest guardian of the Movement" since it is the "only party authorized to take decisive decisions, and to elect the leadership at all levels."⁴⁴⁸ Secondly, this "public" participation lends itself to the Constitution's emphasis on "collective leadership," in which "democracy is the basis of discussion, investigation and decision-

⁴⁴⁵ Odeh and Jara'ai are excellent examples of this.

⁴⁴⁶ Khatib was one of many ex-prisoners who referenced these links. It is difficult to determine how many prisoners remained linked and to what degree these relationships impacted the internal conversations. Ex-prisoners emphasized the ways in which they looked to the outside for inspiration, but took their own path. I read this framing as reflecting their desire to assert agency, as well as to positively frame their own empowerment inside the prison. It is clear that the prison structures go beyond what Fatah in the Diaspora was capable of, given the necessary complex political manoeuvrings and intra-faction skirmishes.

⁴⁴⁷ The Fatah Constitution (1964), section 1 of the Introduction, Abu Jihad Library, Al Quds University, Abu Dis [hereafter "Fatah Constitution."]

⁴⁴⁸ "Fatah Constitution," section 1 of the Introduction.

taking at all organizational levels.”⁴⁴⁹ These three principles speak to the Movement’s stated democratic inclinations; they intend for participation to be wide and for members to believe that their voice is one of many driving the movement’s engine. They also invite faction members to be the protectors of their revolutionary organization, to be completely invested in the struggle. However, implementation would have required regular meetings of the General Conference, since public input is conveyed through voting.⁴⁵⁰ These meetings did not happen regularly enough to support the realization of such intentions. Even though the Constitution calls for an official General Conference every five years, with hundreds, if not thousands, of participants from all over the Diaspora and the Territories, only seven have taken place since 1964.⁴⁵¹ In addition to electing members of the top tier leadership, the Central Committee and the Revolutionary Council, the General Conference was intended to determine the faction’s strategic vision. General Conference scheduling was delayed for a variety of reason, including the faction’s geographical instability, as well as infighting amongst the leadership. Prison politics drew on these values, while also being a more suitable venue to bring them to life.

The leadership structure outlined in the Constitution is highly organized and served as a model for the prisoners; it has also “become the more or less standard model for other commando groups, whose own organizational features replicate those of Fatah.”⁴⁵² As mentioned, the General Conference is the largest body and is also meant to be the highest authority, given that it theoretically elects the executive branch of the

⁴⁴⁹ “Fatah Constitution,” Essential Principles of the Constitution, number 4a

⁴⁵⁰ The General Conference as the highest authority is described in Article 32 of “Fatah Constitution.”

⁴⁵¹ The 4th General Conference was held in Damascus, the 5th in Tunis in 1989, while the 6th was not until 2009 in Bethlehem.

⁴⁵² John Amos, *Palestinian Resistance: Organization of a Nationalist Movement* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1981).

leadership, the Central Committee.⁴⁵³ This powerful group was made up of 21 members, with 18 elected via secret ballot during General Conferences and three appointed by those who were elected.⁴⁵⁴ According to the Constitution, they were supposed to hold monthly meetings to review departmental/committee performance and to issue decisions and recommendations.⁴⁵⁵ Just below the Central Committee is the Revolutionary Council, which is supposed to act as a policymaking group, contending with issues put forth by the Central Committee. Indeed, the Revolutionary Council consists of members of the Central Committee, the heads of the financial and membership protection committees, 50 representatives from the General Conference, 20 members selected to represent Fatah's military wing, 15 highly skilled individuals selected by 2/3 of the Central Committee members, as well as a number of leaders from the Territories who were nominated by the council itself.⁴⁵⁶ Within the Revolutionary Council, members were supposed to elect a secretary and two deputies by secret ballot, to act as guides for the larger group.⁴⁵⁷ Because the General Conference met so rarely, this meant that leaders were not easily unseated, which led to disappointment amongst the ranks, and even violent infighting. As will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, the prison allowed for these intended democratic leanings to come to fruition, as well as the proper functioning of checks and balances.

⁴⁵³ In practice, some of these leaders are appointed.

⁴⁵⁴ "Fatah Constitution," Article 63.

⁴⁵⁵ "Fatah Constitution," Article 66.

⁴⁵⁶ "Fatah Constitution," Article 48.

⁴⁵⁷ "Fatah Constitution," Article 51.

Due to physical distance between different Fatah cells, as well as the necessity of operating undetected, the Constitution regulated trust and secrecy.⁴⁵⁸ For starters, the document outlines the steps towards membership in the Movement, including: 1) a minimum age of at least 17 years; 2) recommendations from two individuals who had been members for at least two years. More striking, however, are the subjective membership qualifications, including the following: having a “good reputation and national credibility... [he must] respect the people and their traditions, serve them and protect their interests and security...he must be independent, not committed to any other organization or party...he must have leading qualifications and demonstrate a reasonable amount of awareness and ability to assume responsibility, and have an amicable personality... he must have sufficient readiness to sacrifice, self-denial and altruism.”⁴⁵⁹ Such vague markers of suitability allow for the movement to both exercise control and also to attract widely, from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and geographical locations.

To ensure that a member meets these qualifications, Fatah’s documentation outlined two methods: observation and punishment. Every candidate had to undergo a six-month probationary period in which he is required to “grasp the theoretical principles of the Movement” and “enthusiastically perform his assignments.”⁴⁶⁰ During these months, the candidate is vetted and observed by senior compatriots, in line with a structure laid out in the Constitution. According to article 105, the Movement’s “Base Operations” were highly stratified and included the following: the smallest unit of

⁴⁵⁸ As will be discussed in the next section, these regulations were quite different from what was needed inside the prisons.

⁴⁵⁹ “Fatah Constitution,” Article 35.

⁴⁶⁰ “Fatah Constitution,” Article 34.

organization was the “Cell,” each with three to five members; the “Chain” consisted of two to five cells; the “Wing,” two to five Chains; the “Branch,” two to five Wings; and the Area included at least four Branches.⁴⁶¹ Thus, Fatah’s system of checks and balances was organized. It was intended to both provide monitoring and also prevent individuals from knowing too many other operatives. A safety mechanism of this type is critical in an environment rife with detention and interrogation; structure of this sort ensures that one can only be certain of a handful of members at any given time. Furthermore, unity is critical, which is why discipline and abiding by all of Fatah’s regulations at all times, is an organizational rule. Indeed, one can only express disagreement or dissent during an official session.⁴⁶² Walking a line between monitoring and punishment, the Constitution highlights the importance of “self-criticism.”⁴⁶³ A cornerstone of Fatah’s practices, this process asks members to reflect on their “revolutionary practices” and to evaluate them according to “their positives results and circumvent the negative effects.”⁴⁶⁴ Self-criticism is a particularly profound activity for those occupying leadership positions,⁴⁶⁵ the idea being that it holds them publicly accountable while also underscoring the importance of personal investment and commitment. Finally, the Constitution permits outright punishment for violators, in the following order: drawing attention to one’s wrongdoings, public rebuke, issuing a warning, freezing one’s rank, demotion, firing from a position and firing with slander.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶¹ “Fatah Constitution,” Article 105.

⁴⁶² “Fatah Constitution,” Article 29

⁴⁶³ Prisoners wholeheartedly embraced this approach, as will be discussed in the next section.

⁴⁶⁴ “Fatah Constitution,” Article 31

⁴⁶⁵ “Fatah Constitution,” section 4 of the Introduction

⁴⁶⁶ “Fatah Constitution,” Article 110

As Fatah's primary regulatory document, the 1964 Constitution outlined constraints for a geographically dispersed, and sometimes culturally diffuse, membership. The degree to which monitoring and punishment were activated is harder to trace, given the secrecy shrouding the faction. That said, one can say with certainty that the absence of General Conferences undermined the Constitution's power. As the next section will illustrate, the Fatah's Prisoner constitution, albeit influenced by this one, exercised far greater power over individuals' lives.

The Formation of the “Group Leadership” Stage

The Prisoners' transition from relying on spoken agreements and informal regulations to creating written records of rules did not happen simultaneously across the prison system, but was initially more pointed inside larger prisons.⁴⁶⁷ The relative stability of Fatah's inmate population in prisons such as Beer Saba' and Asqalon enabled them to become the primary sites of production for foundational political documents. As previously mentioned, hundreds of inmates served there at a given time, with Beer Saba' reaching 900 individuals at different points. Such numbers meant that simple practicalities inspired organization: density led to conflict and competition, pitting the prisoners against one another rather than unifying them against their common enemy, the Israeli system. Although the “individual leadership” was born in an attempt to tackle this challenge, it proved to be merely a starting point in the process of organization. Secondly, as Beer Saba' and Asqalon were located inside the state of Israel, these institutions, and later Nafha, were intended for those serving long-term sentences of more than seven

⁴⁶⁷ According to oral sources, the first Prisoners' Constitution was drafted in Asqalon.

years.⁴⁶⁸ Those convicted of shorter sentences were sent to prisons inside the West Bank and frequently moved from one site to another during their internment, including sometimes to inside the 1948 Israeli borders.⁴⁶⁹ Such extended periods of time in captivity yielded unexpected fruits: time for inmates to sit idly in close quarters, discuss the challenges of being in prison, to determine the need for organization, and to begin planning a process of organizational and political institution building. With little to do in regards to daily work for the prison administration, the daily rhythm was largely determined by the prisoners themselves. Hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of days of geographical stasis transformed these prisons into highly productive spaces. The initial organizational efforts were decentralized and driven by quiet but regular meetings amongst the individual leaders discussed in the previous section.⁴⁷⁰

Over the course of the 1970s, these conversations focused on how to develop a clearly stratified administrative structure, while balancing a cultivation of the rules and enthusiasm necessary to support it. Given that both Fatah and the PLO had a history of codifying their political agendas and rules in writing, the prisoners had a basis from which to work.⁴⁷¹ One can see clear points of convergence between Fatah's Constitution and that which the prisoners drafted during this decade. In part, such planning was in the interest of improving the safety and security of inmates within and across faction lines. Significantly, in moving towards what came to be known as the Group Leadership Stage,

⁴⁶⁸ A document of Internal Regulations from Jneid, located in Nablus in the West Bank, will be discussed as well. This prison is called the Judeaea and Samaria Central Prison by the Israelis, and regularly housed over around 800 prisoners. Thus, this was a significant location in that many Palestinian political prisoners passed through it at one stage or another during their imprisonment.

⁴⁶⁹ West Bank and Gaza residents ended up in Nafha when it opened, especially since the purpose of this prison was to house the more serious threats to Israeli society.

⁴⁷⁰ Jara'ai and Odeh discussed this as length, as they were intimately involved.

⁴⁷¹ In addition to Fatah's Constitution, discussed in detail, one can also look to the Palestinian National Covenant and the Constitution of the PLO as examples of written guidelines for members.

those involved in the planning sought to encourage, or even cultivate, continued commitment to the Palestinian resistance. This goal is obvious in the revolutionary rhetoric peppering the opening of documents. One pamphlet, representative of others in the archive, encourages prisoners to remember that “we in the prisons of Zionism, we represent an objective, natural extension of the struggle movement of our people,” language that fosters a continuation of prisoner connection to resistance, even whilst behind bars.⁴⁷² This same text goes on to further encourage prisoners by saying “we are in the grip of a ruthless enemy, which admits no human or moral values, all what it cares about is to kill us politically and nationally, to kill our revolutionary existence, and even eradicate us from existence if possible.”⁴⁷³ To support the initiatives of maintaining prisoner safety, while also encouraging revolutionary engagement, the texts speak to a unified mission.

Indeed, these writings drove the establishment of the Group Leadership.⁴⁷⁴ As will be discussed in the next section, agreed up and widely circulated documents spoke to a major transition: leaders would no longer be unofficially or self-appointed based only on personal connections or former roles outside the prison. Rather, a transparent process was established, with clear guidelines for the election of individuals to various oversight committees. This process emphasized “collective leadership [as] the only base for organizational work” which meant “democracy [was the] reference in all discussions, investigations and decision making,” as well as “the base for practicing...

⁴⁷² AG 13-3-1-3, 3

⁴⁷³ AG 13-3-1-3, 3

⁴⁷⁴ The term Group Leadership stage was used by many interview subjects.

responsibilities.⁴⁷⁵ In the next section I will examine the documents that codified the Group Leadership stage through detailed rules and regulations.

Regulating Prisoners Lives Through Written Text

Jara'ai, and others, affirm that the written records of organizational principles were first "published" in copybooks in the late 1970s, although reportedly parts had already been drafted onto other bits of paper and circulated via the aforementioned *kabsulih* prior to the formal codification.⁴⁷⁶ This section will focus on two documents which elaborate on Fatah prisoners' political structure: what is known as the Prisoner's Constitution, entitled "What is Fatah and What Are its Features," reportedly drafted in Asqalon towards the end of the 1970s, and the internal regulations from Jneid prison, seemingly first published around the beginning of the First Intifada, but reflecting a decade of discussion and work to hammer them out. The use of documents finalized in years beyond this project's cut off date of 1985, such as Jneid's regulations, are useful in that they clearly reveal the ideal functioning to which the prisoners aspired.⁴⁷⁷ As the writer(s) of the Jneid document points out, "these regulations are one of the most comprehensive regulations recapping eighteen years of struggle in various sites and stages."⁴⁷⁸ Thus, a careful look at two documents from two different prisons, one from within Israel and one from the West Bank, reveals a clear picture of prisoner organizational intentions and structural planning.

⁴⁷⁵ AG 13-3-1-3, 7.

⁴⁷⁶ Odeh, Samara, Abu Bakr, and Shirin all discussed how materials circulated throughout the prison system via *kabsulih*.

⁴⁷⁷ As I will discuss later, this ideal is one which was not always attainable.

⁴⁷⁸ AG 13-3-1-3, 6.

Prison documents were anonymous and almost always lacked a date, thus oral sources are important for contextualization. The obvious explanation for such anonymity and lacking context is to avoid immediate identification by the Israelis as leaders inside the prisons and after one's release. Prisoners who took leading roles in creating the internal political structure often remained connected to Fatah for at least a time, and some for many decades, after their release. For example, Ibrahim Khrishi became the head of the student Fatah movement, *Shabiba*, within a month after his release in 1991 and would not have wanted any writings traceable back to him.⁴⁷⁹ During the 1970s and 1980s, and even to this day, once an individual was arrested, they became part of the Israeli prison system; avoiding re-arrest was a feat rarely accomplished. Almost every person I interviewed went to prison at least two times, if not more. Thus, avoiding the limelight of a publicly declared leadership role via anonymous documentation was one small way that prisoners could moderate Israeli knowledge and observation of them, in spite of near constant monitoring and close scrutiny. There are less obvious reasons for this as well. The lack of dates on much of the political material suggests a certain timelessness to the written records; that these documents are not intended to reflect a specific historical moment, but to govern the prison organization until amended at some undetermined point in the future. Intentional anonymity can be read yet another way: the documents were not only the instructional record for how to govern Fatah prisoners, but also a clear reflection of the democratic, participatory intentions of the prisoners.

⁴⁷⁹ This speaks to the importance of the prisoner as symbol within the West Bank community during the 1980s, to be discussed in chapter five.

As mentioned earlier, the prisoners' starting point for designing an internal political system was to look to Fatah in the Diaspora, which had created something of a state-in-waiting, as a model upon which to build. At first glance, the hierarchy inside resembles a scaled down version of what was outlined for the Movement outside.⁴⁸⁰ However, the way in which the prisoners' structure played out was far from a reflection of Fatah in the Diaspora's top down and static leadership. The reality of Fatah's organization on the outside is that its stratification and structure did not amount to much in the end; as mentioned, the General Conference rarely met, in spite of the regulations calling for meetings every five years and the fact that it was responsible for electing the members of the Central Committee by secret ballot. Thus, the checks and balances, although detailed, were largely theoretical. As is well known, the membership of Fatah's Central Committee remained in power for decades.⁴⁸¹ In contrast, the leadership laid out a structure that invited the participation of all Fatah members in a given jail, and even across the network of prisons with the evolution of the system for secretly moving materials.⁴⁸² As the drafting and approval of regulations occurred with the input of hundreds of prisoners, anonymity also reflects an environment in which nobody would be singled out as the supreme leader; it speaks to a collective desire to allow everyone equal participation in decisions about prison life and politics. A radical departure from Fatah's operations in the Diaspora, this represented a situation-appropriate and local form of

⁴⁸⁰ See the previous section.

⁴⁸¹ When the Central Committee was formed in 1963, it consisted of 10 members. Today it includes 23 members, including a chairman (Abu Mazen), 19 elected and three appointed members. For more on today's Central Committee, see the 2015 report by the Washington Institute at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/FCCProfiles2.pdf>.

⁴⁸² Jara'ai and Odeh both spoke to this in interviews.

political organization, as well as a truly locally generated structure for organizing the resistance.

Equal participation did not, however, mean there was a lack of centralization. On the contrary, the most important thing these documents accomplished was the written codification of an elected and strong leadership for the prisoners. By 1977, which oral sources cite as the first year of general elections for leaders inside the prisons, various written sources laid out a clearly delineated hierarchy with specific tasks assigned to each position.⁴⁸³ Like in the Diaspora, the baseline of the prison's formal structure was a General Conference, with tens of members in larger prisons. Also similar to Fatah on the outside, the Central Committee was the highest governing body of the prisoners. Inside, however, it was smaller, usually consisting of between five and ten members,⁴⁸⁴ one of whom was appointed as the "secretary" to "preserve the archive" of the group and to "be the connection between it and the Revolutionary Council."⁴⁸⁵ Under that was the Revolutionary Council, with membership size determined within each prison.⁴⁸⁶ Modeling itself on that in the Diaspora, which appointed this group the "highest authority in the movement,"⁴⁸⁷ in between General Conferences, the Revolutionary Council occupied the key leadership role inside the prisons.⁴⁸⁸ Its responsibilities were wide ranging, appointing committee members,⁴⁸⁹ discussing and "framing" Central Committee decisions and activities, "carrying out emergency meetings in case of challenges...or

⁴⁸³ Interview subjects references this as the first year when elections occurred.

⁴⁸⁴ Jneid prison's Central committee is discussed in AG 13-3-1-3, p. 10, while Radi Jara'ai also spoke about Asqalon, Beer Saba' and Nafha.

⁴⁸⁵ AG 13-3-1-3, 12.

⁴⁸⁶ Jara'ai reports that in Asqalon the Revolutionary Council consisted of 15 members, while in Jneid the "Internal Regulations list for Detention" calls for 21 members (see document AG 13-3-1-3, 9).

⁴⁸⁷ "Fatah Constitution," Article 48.

⁴⁸⁸ Note that because the General Conference did not meet with a great deal of frequency in the Diaspora, this endowed the Revolutionary Council with extraordinary power.

⁴⁸⁹ "What is Fatah and what are its Features?", 10.

upon the request of the central committee,” providing the central committee “with directions and notes,” and “settling the issues of punishments and applying punishments.”⁴⁹⁰

Documents and interview subjects alike reveal that the most striking characteristic of the governing structures was the emphasis on process, notably one that was democratic and strove to be open and fair. From 1977 onwards, even in the largest prisons with hundreds of Fatah members, democratic elections became the norm, scheduled between every eight and twelve months depending on the prison and determined primarily by the frequency of prisoner movement.⁴⁹¹ As the written documents and interview subjects recount, candidacy was open to everyone who met certain qualifications, as outlined in “terms of reference” for each level of leadership. Qualifications were strictest for the upper tier of leadership, the Revolutionary Council and the Central Committee, with the length of arrest determining how high one could climb. In Jneid, to run for election to the “general conference,” the prisoner must have been a prisoner for at least one year and have spent a minimum of four months in Jneid.⁴⁹² Standing for the Revolutionary Council required having served more time: a minimum of three years, with a whole year in Jneid.⁴⁹³ In outlining the terms of reference, the prisoners took the frequency of prisoner relocation into account, in this case allowing those who spent a full year in Jneid, but then moved to another prison, “to be treated as any regular prisoner that spent a year in al Jneid if they came back within one year.”⁴⁹⁴ Finally, election to the Central Committee

⁴⁹⁰ AG 13-3-1-3, 10.

⁴⁹¹ Jara’ai, Jundi and Wasif interviews, as well as AG 13-3-1-3, 9 and the “Prisoner Constitution” from Asqalon.

⁴⁹² AG 13-3-1-3, 7.

⁴⁹³ AG 13-3-1-3, 8.

⁴⁹⁴ AG 13-3-1-3, 8.

necessitated the same requirements for time spent on the inside as that of the Revolutionary Council, but the elections were handled differently. Rather than being open to the entire Fatah prisoner population in a given prison, the Revolutionary Council elected the Central Committee members according to secret ballot.⁴⁹⁵ All names of those who were eligible would appear on a roster to be circulated. One copy of each roster would be sent to each room and the prisoners would vote secretly, with the election committee counting the votes at the end. These elections presented a stark contrast with those that occurred for Fatah's formal "outside" leadership. An interesting example of how the process outside yielded something quite different from that which the prisoners evolved is represented by the General Conference election in the spring of 1980. In spite of wide participation, all fifteen members who were elected had been active in the movement since before it had launched its armed struggle in 1965.⁴⁹⁶

Multiple committees were established to support the work of the senior, centralized leadership, formed according to set processes. Although the idea of a strong committee network was also borrowed from Fatah's Constitution,⁴⁹⁷ the roster inside the prisons represents adjustments made to accommodate the realities of incarceration and include, but are not limited to: Administrative, Education, Security, Cultural, Revolutionary, and Foreign Relations.⁴⁹⁸ Inside the prison, the Central Committee elected a head of each of the main committees who would in turn select several other members –

⁴⁹⁵ AG 13-3-1-3, 11. In the case of Jneid, nine members were chosen for the Central Committee, but this reportedly differed from one prison to the next.

⁴⁹⁶ Cobban, 8.

⁴⁹⁷ Article 31 of Fatah's Constitution states that collective leadership was "via the committees' work, for each committee from top to bottom has to undertake its tasks on the basis of its being a complementary unit collaborating with other units in assuming its responsibilities, and that all issues must be rationally discussed through the committees and units and that all decisions must be taken in light of the legal majority."

⁴⁹⁸ This particular breakdown is based prisoner interviews, but documents refer to the committees by variations on these names.

usually three – to manage the workload.⁴⁹⁹ Each committee had clearly outlined tasks resembling job descriptions. For example, the “foreign relations” committee, in Jneid known as “the committee for relationships with other factions,” was responsible for “organizing the relationships with other factions based on the critical role of Fatah and the national unity.”⁵⁰⁰ Another group, the Cultural Committee, which will be discussed at length in Chapter Four, addressed the issue of unity via fostering intellectual investment. Members of this committee had the pleasure of “determining the cultural program and submitting it to the Central Committee based on the essence of the movement and its political, national and humanitarian goals.”⁵⁰¹ A key part of this included overseeing the creation of books lists for the educational program, as well as the promotion of prisoners from one “grade level” to the next. Arguably a less pleasant job, but critical to prisoner wellbeing, was that of members of the “security committee.” Appointed by the Central Committee, it “has its own regulations, which should be kept secret between the security committee and the Central Committee.”⁵⁰² Secrecy was key because of the sensitive nature of their work, the main agenda being to preserve the “security and safety of Fatah inside and outside.”⁵⁰³ Among other tasks, they are said to have monitored the plans and movements of the Israeli occupation authority in the jail, followed the movements of possible spies or informers and meted out punishment, and tried to protect prisoners from being co-opted by the Israelis to work as spies. They also oversaw the “security status for the other factions, because of the controversial relationship between Fatah and the other

⁴⁹⁹ See AG-13-3-1-3, 13-18. Multiple interview subjects also spoke to this, Wasif and Jundi in great detail since they were in prison when the committees were at their apex.

⁵⁰⁰ AG-13-3-1-3, 17.

⁵⁰¹ AG-13-3-1-3, 13.

⁵⁰² AG 13-3-1-3, 12.

⁵⁰³ AG 13-3-1-3, 15.

factions.”⁵⁰⁴ Because the Central Committee was “considered the higher security committee,”⁵⁰⁵ an important part of the work included “providing periodic reports” through the representative, who was himself a member of the Central Committee.⁵⁰⁶

The hierarchy was further stratified to include room and section representatives as well. Each committee was responsible for appointing an individual to oversee its work and activities within a room or section; recommendations were then made to the Central Committee, which had the power to approve or deny. These representatives reported to the sub-committees (cultural, security, foreign relations, administrative) and they in turn had a direct reporting line to the Central Committee.

This structure, clearly delineated in ink and inscribed into copybooks intended for circulation, assigned specific tasks to each position. Thus, centralization was not concentrated in one, or even a few, individuals; rather, it was broadly maintained across a wide swath of committees. The elected body, the Central Committee, maintained a great deal of authority, acting as a clearinghouse for other appointments, but was not omnipotent in that the Revolutionary Council was technically the senior body. As a result of this clear organization, ex-prisoners refer to this period as the Group Leadership stage: an era which promoted an organized, institutionalized, and, very importantly, documented, approach to organizing large groups of prisoners. This committee-based structure was intended to provide layers of checks and balances, while also helping to monitor prison life and provide for prisoner needs. Moreover, structures established inside large prisons established a replicable model. By the turn of the 1980s, even the

⁵⁰⁴ AG 13-3-1-3, 16.

⁵⁰⁵ AG 13-3-1-3, 15.

⁵⁰⁶ AG 13-3-1-3, 16.

smaller prisons such as Beit Lyd, intended for people awaiting trials and housing only about 50 prisoners at a time, had a small cohort of leaders overseeing the daily life of the inmates.⁵⁰⁷

Divided or Unified? Cultivating a Prisoners' Movement

The apparent emphasis on formulating well organized structures that underscore cooperation and democratic decision-making practices extended outwards towards other factions as well. Unlike Fatah in the Diaspora, prisoner writings concerning other factions emphasized unity rather than competition as a guiding principle.⁵⁰⁸ One notebook full of writing, which, according to interview subjects was widely circulated from one prison to another, set out to answer the question “What is Fatah and what are its features?”,⁵⁰⁹ According to Jara'ai, who counts himself among this work's authors, this text served as the by-laws for Fatah prisoners and is commonly referred to as the “prisoners' Constitution.”⁵¹⁰ Although it lacks any marker to identify its point of origin, he says it was written in Asqalon and then formed the basis for Fatah's by-laws across West Bank and Israeli prisons.⁵¹¹ He recounts the drafting of this document as involving many sets of eyes and multiple revisions. While members of the Central Committee were ultimately in

⁵⁰⁷ Jara'ai, interview 2012. It is not possible to establish a particular date when such written documents were transmitted to and adopted by the prisoners in these smaller, more transitory jails

⁵⁰⁸ This emphasis on unity also appeared in Fatah's 1964 Constitution, including in Article 28, which stated that all members must defend Fatah's approach and decisions. Beyond this notion of unity, the Constitution's introduction stressed Arab unity, emphasizing that “Palestine is part of the Arab World, and the Palestinian people are part of the Arab nation, and their struggle is part of its struggle” in “Fatah Constitution,” Article 1.

⁵⁰⁹ Hereafter I will refer to this untitled document as the “Prisoners' Constitution” for ease of identification and because I argue that the document does actually reflect this goal.

⁵¹⁰ Like most of these documents, there is no identifying date, indication of authorship, or point of origin in part to avoid identification by the Israelis, but also because Fatah sought to make everyone an equal participant rather than singling someone out as the author. After many conversations with Radi, however, he confessed that he had a part in its compilation, dating its production to sometime during his imprisonment between 1976 and 1985.

⁵¹¹ We have no way of knowing if this is the original or an edited version from another prison. What we do know is that this document is thought to represent the intentions and plans of Fatah inside the prisons.

charge of transcribing the Constitution into a copybook, Fatah members in each cell reviewed it and provided feedback, including proposed revisions.⁵¹²

“What is Fatah and what are its features” accomplishes a dual purpose: it establishes the ideological underpinnings of the faction and it serves as a prescription for how to form and run certain internal committees. The document’s framing and phrasing reflect a clear position. From the very first sentence, under the subheading “introduction,” language of unity and inter-faction cohesion is employed. The phrase “national unity” is repeated throughout, and is said to be “the common denominator” of all public interests and of Palestinian nationalism itself.⁵¹³ Representing a striving towards good relations within this enclosed space, Fatah’s by-laws go so far as to equate the concept of nationalism with unity. They do not privilege Fatah’s resistance know-how, nor do they speak of Fatah in a way that highlights the faction’s successes and offerings as superior to its contemporaries; it does not read like Fatah propaganda, per se. Instead, the document nearly harps on the idyllic harmony amongst the factions, and Fatah’s support for and place within it. A reader of this document can presume that factionalism is equal to a kind of anti-nationalism; that “polarization” can negatively impact the struggler and thus the national struggle itself.

This inclination towards unity is evident in the rhetoric of ex-prisoners as well. When asked about the relationships between members of the various factions, both Jara’ai and Khrishi emphasized the cooperative spirit that developed alongside the political structures. In describing interactions with, say, PFLP members, ex-prisoners

⁵¹² Jara’ai, Second interview.

⁵¹³ Page 1 of this untitled/uncatalogued document; there are no page numbers and the pamphlet is not catalogued.

spoke in glowing terms about the warm spirit that developed across faction lines, often emphasizing that prison was the only space they experienced such tensionless politics.⁵¹⁴ Interview subjects have often repeated that there were no tensions between factions and that prison was the best time of their lives. Likewise, both Jara'ai and Khrishi emphasized that factions *strove* to support one another, rather than attempting to undermine each other by poaching members or other devious schemes. This verbal framing can be read as representing the deep influence of the texts on shaping prisoners' beliefs and understanding.⁵¹⁵

To that end, prisoners established general "detainee institutions," committees that cut across party lines. For example, there is a detailed explanation of a general "struggler" committee formed from "representatives of the Palestinian factions under a Palestinian framework its basic program for the detainee."⁵¹⁶ According to Fatah's account of this committee, it consists of three Palestinian National Liberation representatives, a member of the PLA, a representative from the Palestinian Democratic Front, as well as representatives from each faction. This committee is responsible for anything connected to how the national struggle puts on a public face, a kind of public relations group. The document discusses how the committee is responsible for "establishing collective appearances," by putting together sporting and cultural competitions.⁵¹⁷ Moreover, as mentioned in the previous chapter, this committee decides

⁵¹⁴ Two interview subjects were less positive, hinting at the dark underbelly of the experience and the violence that continued to erupt between Fatah and the PFLP in particular.

⁵¹⁵ I will return to this idea later in discussing the educational aspect of these documents.

⁵¹⁶ Chapter Three of the "Prisoners' Constitution," letters a and b in the first section.

⁵¹⁷ Chapter Two of the "Prisoners' Constitution," item number 11.

when to launch a hunger strike.⁵¹⁸ Another is the “Reception committee,” which welcomed each prisoner to his new home, oriented him to the prison, and invited him to choose a political faction with which to align. This committee was critical to the smooth functioning of the prison since very few prisoners remained unaligned once they were sentenced to a prison. Individuals who actively chose not to commit to a faction were in the minority. Ex-prisoners have suggested that the gap between the politically committed and uncommitted was so wide that one could count the latter on one hand – and that one hand representing the unaligned throughout the entire system at any one time, not just within the confines of one prison.⁵¹⁹ Joining a faction, and thus the work of the welcoming committee, was an important part of becoming a political prisoner. One’s faction became his family for the period of internment, or as one prisoner eloquently put it: “the sense of affiliation, belonging, caring is very deep” amongst the prisoners.⁵²⁰

Given the importance of unity, when a prisoner violated his commitment to his brothers, punishment was harsh. All prisoners were subject to consequences if they violated the established rules. Even the members of the Central Committee and the Revolutionary Council were “subjected to the same punishment law decided by the internal system and the internal regulations which apply to all members.”⁵²¹ Throughout the prison system, spies were a pressing issue. These were individuals who had been co-opted by the Israeli administration, either in exchange for shorter sentences, or in response to threats of harm coming to one’s family outside of the prison. Spies were

⁵¹⁸ Chapter Two of the “Prisoners’ Constitution,” General provision number 10 and Chapter Three, section J on “tasks and powers,” number five.

⁵¹⁹ Qaymery, Jara’ai, Odeh, Khrishi, and Khoury all speak to this.

⁵²⁰ Qaymery interview.

⁵²¹ AG-13-3-1-3, 11.

planted amongst political prisoners from the very beginning, including within centers of interrogation. Spies were often discovered during night watches; ex-prisoners report that every night a member of Fatah's intelligence committee would stay awake and observe the room in which he lived, as a way to ensure that everyone stayed in line. When there were, say, 50 people in a room, this was no easy task.⁵²² Prisoners saw spying as a deep betrayal, given the closeness of prisoner relationships within confined spaces. Khatib stressed that they "worried" about spies amongst them because they talked "frankly" with each other about "things that might be dangerous, or about the organizational aspects of the prison."⁵²³ Thus, they were concerned that spies might not only convey information about the prisoners themselves, but also about cells' plans or Fatah's organization beyond prison walls. Inside the prisons, Fatah established harsh guidelines for dealing with such traitors.⁵²⁴ Once an individual fell under suspicion, he would be interrogated in an extremely violent way. Many ex-prisoners described these interrogations as akin to what they had undergone at the hands of the Israelis during their initial detention. In many cases, a confirmed spy would be killed.⁵²⁵ According to Fatah's internal regulations, "eliminating spies" was the responsibility of the security committee, which would work closely with the Central Committee to "determine the place and time."⁵²⁶ Besides, spying, sexual encounters were also seen as a violation of Fatah's principles and rules. A sensitive subject, only a few prisoners spoke to this, stressing that the accused would

⁵²² Khatib and Jara'ai spoke in detail about these night watches.

⁵²³ Khatib Interview.

⁵²⁴ Each faction dealt with his own spies, since it was related to the faction's personal business.

⁵²⁵ Abu Mohammed recalls this happening during his time at Beer Saba' and Jara'ai mentions it happening in Asqalon.

⁵²⁶ AG 13-3-1-3, 16.

appear after their punishment with clear marks on their face.⁵²⁷ This physical marring of one's face, not unlike a kind of scarlet letter, made public the strong suspicion of and/or the act itself. In both cases, spying and sexual cases, a suspect was permanently marked, even if he was cleared. This mark complicates the so-called democratic notion of innocent until proven guilty; in this case, one is somehow guilty even if proven innocent. According to the prisoners' thinking, there must be a reason why one fell under suspicion in the first place, which somehow permanently erodes his trustworthiness and renders him somewhat irrelevant in terms of participating in the prison political organization.

As the largest faction inside the prisons, Fatah's support for inter-faction cooperation was critical. The fact that ex-prisoners refer to this document emphasizing unity as their Constitution speaks to the importance placed on the cultivation of a tangible and homegrown national struggle. The local contribution to the wider national movement was this spirit of unity, which did not always emanate from Fatah in the Diaspora. Rather, one can argue that a locally rooted alternative to Fatah-in-the-Diaspora emerged out of prisoner efforts: strong links emerged between those involved in the prison movement and *Shabiba* at the universities, with the prison acting as a sort of feeder school. Written documentation suggests that there was at the very least a desire to cooperate on issues related to the general prison experience, rather than focusing on the ideological differences between the factions. This inclination towards unity is confirmed in the rhetoric of ex-prisoners as well, reflecting the language of the documents.

⁵²⁷ In three cases, the prisoners brought it up without me asking about it. All three of them framed their reference to this as something most would not want to discuss, given the sensitivity of such topics in Palestinian culture.

Furthermore, there is something aspirational about this focus on unity. Jara'ai refers to this booklet as both "by-laws" and "the constitution," using the terms interchangeably. When shown this document, other interview subjects also employed the term constitution to describe it, a usage that is neither unintentional nor insignificant. The word itself, in English, is commonly defined as the established and accepted principles for running a state. In Arabic "constitution" also refers to a basic or foundational law by which societies abide. In employing this term, the ex-prisoners convey the seriousness they attach to their internal project of developing state-like structures to regulate their spaces. The formulation of legalistic principles was critical to supporting this effort. As in English, the Arabic word for constitution also carries a connotation that deserves attention: a lofty ideal to which one can aspire. There is something high-minded and celebratory about the notion of a constitution; it can represent the best and brightest expressions of thought and action of which a place and people are capable.

While the emergent structure enabled previously unconnected prisoners to climb the political ladder, to establish leadership roles within the prisoner and also the resistance movement writ large, it was not without challenges or failings. For starters, elections had the potential to pose problems for prisoners: Jara'ai recalled the 1984 elections in Beer Saba' when "collaborators became leaders in the prison."⁵²⁸ Although this accusation is not recorded in writing, it certainly speaks to one of the challenges of democracy: ceding of a certain degree of control over outcomes.

The production and circulation of these documents were remarkable feats within the strictly monitored spaces of prisons intended for prisoners seen as security risks. As

⁵²⁸ Jara'ai, Second interview.

mentioned earlier in the chapter, initial conversations in the early 1970s about organizing were muted, nearly whispered amongst those men who were involved in the planning. Rooms were mixed faction-wise, but Fatah members worked with their compatriots on figuring out how to create something akin to a management structure for bettering their lives during internment. Through repeated hunger strikes across the prison system during the 1970s, prisoners won more access to the courtyard and somewhat freer movement when inside the building. By the late 1970s, this limited mobility gave them more access to each other and time to deliberate before returning to their cells to write, the implements for which they had also won through hunger striking. By the late 1970s, written material was moving from room to room and from prison to prison, quietly passing from one hand to another within an individual prison or smuggled out via *kabsulih* to a different locale. It is not clear to what degree the Israelis were closely monitoring these exchanges, as these are sources to which I do not presently have access.⁵²⁹ According to the ex-prisoners with whom I spoke, there is a general agreement that the prison administration had a sense of what was happening and let it happen, given that these prisoner actions served at least some of their ends as well: the establishment of an uneasy peace and quiet between the factions.

Written Sources: The Impact

According to the Director of the Abu Jihad archives, Abu el Haj, the Prisoners' Constitution –filling about half of an Israeli exam notebook – and others like it, were

⁵²⁹ Given my visa status, I was advised not to reach out to Israelis who had been involved in the military administration or the prison services.

widely circulated amongst prisoners in the late 1970s and into the 1980s. As a result, even the smaller prisons housing only 50 -100 prisoners (Beit Lyd, for example), mimicked the leadership structure and spirit established in places like Asqalon and Beer Saba'. The relocation of the prisoners themselves further supported consistency within Fatah politics. During turbulent times, such as when large hunger strikes occurred, the Israelis would move those who were thought to be leaders within a particular prison. The authorities' plan was to destabilize the faction, but the effect was not commensurate with the goal. Instead, the established hierarchy demonstrated a degree of unflappability and the relocated leader often assumed another top position in his next prison residence.⁵³⁰ Indeed, the wide circulation of such documents facilitated the evolution of a common political language and agreed upon understanding of political approach.

In stark contrast with Israeli intentions, this movement enabled remarkable commonalities between Fatah's structures from one prison to the next, sometimes separated by hundreds of miles, where implementation was not forced but desired. Prior to the late 1970s, the prison experience was contained in the oral reports and stories. The transition to written documentation and the resulting replication of organizational structures across the system created a shared sense of belonging to something larger; the circulation of written and reproducible rules, regulations and ideology bound together seemingly disparate and discrete spaces. Out of this circulation and widespread adoption came the birth of a formal political organization inside the prisons. It was from this point forward that one could truly talk about "the prison experience" and "the prisoners' movement."

⁵³⁰ Khrishi and Jara'ai interviews.

The most significant impact of written documentation in the prisons is that it led to more diversity in political participation inside, and eventually outside. Khrishi is an excellent illustration of someone who had next to no political interest, and certainly no experience, prior to prison, but who now plays a significant role in the Palestinian Authority. Transitions like Khrishi's were made possible by written materials, which served as tools for obtaining a political education. At the beginning of his decade-long sentence in 1982, he was not a politically active individual. During his interrogation period in Jenin he remained largely uninterested, in large part because the organization was not as strong in this smaller prison. Upon his December 1986 arrival in Jneid jail in Nablus, he was welcomed by the "Reception Committee" and joined Fatah. This move was not out of any particular urge to be part of a faction; rather, he asserts, "less than 1 in 100 remained unaffiliated."⁵³¹ Many interviewees have cited this majority participation rate, with Jara'ai claiming that only the religiously observant remained unaffiliated.⁵³² Having joined Fatah, he was immediately included in their structured educational programming, much of which dealt with the Palestinian issue and the national movement.

Khrishi is not someone who could have risen to the top in the late 1960s or early 1970s. After all, he was not politically connected before his imprisonment and, although he was a university student at the time of his arrest, he was not educated in the ways of resistance. He fell in love with the written word and vowed to read everything available to him in the prison, from social and cultural works, to novels and poems. It was through text that Khrishi was drawn into the history, politics, and policies of Fatah; it was through

⁵³¹ Khrishi, First interview, 2013.

⁵³² Jara'ai, August 2014.

study that Khrishi rose to the top of the political command chain by the time of his release. Through his educational encounters inside the prisons, and through these texts codifying Fatah, Khrishi was able to *develop* and stoke the flames of a political career; the system inside the prisons invited individuals to political participation and into quite a different version of political resistance from that in the Diaspora. It changed the course of his life and now, thirty years later, Khrishi continues his political involvement by sitting on the Legislative Council.

Another significant impact of such writing documentation is the way in which it enabled the solidifying of a particular kind of protest: one that was organized, structured, and planned. In speaking about the Nafha strike of 1980, discussed in detail in Chapter Two, Odeh emphasizes that the planning of the system-wide strike was made possible because of the internal political organization. By passing messages from prison to prison, this strike was able to involve hundreds of prisoners, all striking in support of the Nafha motto, “sun, water, air.”⁵³³

By the mid-1980s, these documents were well established as key signposts for the Fatah movement’s political structure inside the prisons. Today, looking back on their experience, many of the prisoners who experienced the production of these documents, as well as those who entered prison during the early years of the structure’s operation, remember and refer to that period as the “Golden Years” – as the time when a spirit of democracy and cooperation prevailed in the written word and beyond.

The creation of written records was not premeditated, but their value was quickly embraced as a way to inspire participation, unity, and support for the Fatah movement.

⁵³³ Odeh, Second interview.

Indeed, recording in writing how a system and its participants should behave is a process newly emerging or changing states undergo. Written sources outlining rules and regulations served as a kind of contract between the leaders and the participants, as well as a standard against which to judge success and failure. So too, written documentation gave the prisoners a basis from which to work, a starting point from which they could continuously pursue political development. The creation and circulation of written sources had profound implications for the political organization amongst prisoners: thousands of men were transformed into politicized beings, a kind of citizenry. Through these sources they learned the craft of politics and they participated in shaping the Fatah faction inside the prisons into a well-oiled machine. Thus, these places intended as sites of punishment allowed for the production of streamlined and efficient operational structures. Even more significantly, the introduction of accessible written sources meant that individuals could develop political careers while still in prison by participating in a systematic educational system, rather than by simply tapping into connections. Within the Israeli prisons of the 1970s and 1980s grew what can be seen as an ideal political structure that had the potential to serve as the basis for a future state.⁵³⁴ The true power of these records is that they were key to establishing a prisoner's movement. Inscribing beliefs, practices, and codes in ink ensured that the system would survive beyond a particular leader's release; it guaranteed something greater, movement that was bigger, than the imprisonment experience itself.

⁵³⁴ The Conclusion will look at the demise of these structures.

“...All Members should commit to the program for their benefit and for the sake of the organization.”⁵³⁵

Chapter Four

From *Fellahin* to Fatah:

Schooling Inside the Prisons

Today, Palestinians are amongst the most educated in the region, with figures from 2005 demonstrating that the population maintains the highest literacy rate in the Arab world.⁵³⁶ With a plethora of post-Oslo reports assessing the challenges of access to education, most of which are linked to occupation, as well as educational achievements, one can see that education in Palestine represents a developmental marker.⁵³⁷ Indeed, a major Oslo-era initiative was the establishment of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, an oversight body that took a rigid approach to education, using the end of high school exam, *Tawjihi*, as the ultimate determiner of a student's success. And yet, the field of education is also highly contested within Palestinian society, a site where politics, resistance, and the domestic converge and sometimes compete. Unlike other parts of the Arab world with which Palestine is compared in NGO reports, Palestinian education carries the burden of nation building from scratch, the conceptualization of what it might

⁵³⁵ AG 13-1-149.

⁵³⁶ Figures are cited in the Arab Human Development Report published by UNDP, 296. Accessed at: <http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/other/ahdr/ahdr2005e.pdf>

⁵³⁷ See, for example, Ghadeer Fannoun, “The Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education: National Report of Palestine,” April 2008 [commissioned by the UN; accessed at http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UII/confintea/pdf/National_Reports/Arab%20States/Palestine.pdf]

mean to be a citizen, and a lingering hope for a solution to the conflict. Over the past six decades, since the creation of the state of Israel, the educational system has continued to reflect something of the many generations of external control, resembling a hodgepodge of influences.⁵³⁸ In fact, even today, in spite of an influential Ministry of Education, one cannot look to the Palestinian education and speak of just one system, but must think in terms of four different systems: UNRWA, the Jordanian system in the West Bank, the Israeli school system teaching to the *Tawjihi* in East Jerusalem, and the Israeli system which Arab-Israelis attend. Beyond the official system, scholarly literature has largely neglected a major site of educational advancement and intellectual engagement in the pre-Oslo period: the Israeli prison intended for political prisoners. The evolution of formally structured, yet unaccredited and thus largely unrecognized, educational programs inside the prisons during the 1970s and 1980s benefited thousands of undereducated individuals, as well those whose formal education had been interrupted by imprisonment. Indeed, education inside the prisons served a dual function: first, it contributed to the development of a Fatah identity; and second, it was formulated to serve the resistance movement and to shore up the struggle. As this chapter will elucidate, the confinement and relative stability of the prison population produced near ideal circumstances for education, one in which learning was neither disrupted by the Occupation nor outside pedagogical influences. Within Israeli prisons, Palestinian inmates were free from these constraints to fashion and supervise their own educational

⁵³⁸ This is not unlike the prison system itself, which reflects the influence of the Ottomans, the British and the Jordanians, all of which the Israelis adapted to suit the intentions of their Occupation.

system, one that would support their evolving democratic state-like structures and thus their institution building, while also creating and sustaining resistance ideology.

Educating a People without a Place

Like many aspects of Palestinian life, access to education and pedagogical approaches are subject to many external influences, including the Ottomans, the French, the British, and the Jordanians. One cannot understand the state of Palestinian education without reflecting on these influences. With the foundation of the Israeli state and then the onset of the Occupation, the educational picture was made even more complex, with schools in the Territories continuing to use the existing curricula, but with Israeli oversight.⁵³⁹ Literature dealing with Palestinian education tends to take one of three approaches: first, how education was influenced or determined by external powers; second, education as a charity effort; and third, the ways in which education sites, especially universities, were sites of Palestinian nation building and sometimes cauldrons in which resistance ideology and practice were formulated.

The period of British involvement, both unofficial and during the Mandate era, receives some attention in the existing literature. Scholars focus on British intent and approach, as well as Palestinian responses to it, tending to agree that British educational efforts had a two-fold purpose: to civilize the natives, reconciling them to their colonial situation, and to pave the way towards establishing a Jewish nation. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Palestinians woke up to the fact that Jewish schools

⁵³⁹ Some scholarship looks at the way knowledge is framed in textbooks and curricula. See, for example, Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, "The Production of Self and the Destruction of the Other's Memory and Identity in Israeli/Palestinian Education on the Holocaust/Nakbah," 2001, which looks at the "institutionalized unwillingness" of israelis/Palestinian educational systems to acknowledge each other's suffering because of presence of what the author terms "the otherness of the other." [add the other authors here]

outnumbered those intended for Arabs, taking into account both Muslim and Missionary schools, 43 to 8:17 respectively. As one recent scholar pointed out, the 1930s witnessed an educational vacuum. Mandate Palestine contained only six government schools offering lower secondary education and only two secondary schools.⁵⁴⁰ In response, Palestinian leaders pushed for the establishment of more private schools, with the number of schools skyrocketing from a total of 308 schools in 1931 to 478 government, 135 Muslim, and 182 Christian.⁵⁴¹ The British did not see education of Arabs as a priority. A full decade into Britain's civil administration of Palestine, a report states "no complete new school have been erected from general revenues since the occupation."⁵⁴²

The British established an approach replicated by the Israelis post-1948: rather than re-envisioning the educational system, they maintained much of the existing structure, only tweaking aspects that would serve their agenda. In practice, this meant that many educational structures remained untouched, and continued to focus either on training administrative and military personnel, as established by Ottoman colonial predecessors, or centered on religious instruction. The schools where the British exerted the most control was within the walls of those run by Christian missionaries, while the third school system during this time, the Hebrew system, remained largely untouched. Among the earliest scholars to write about Palestinian education, Khalil Totah (1937), then headmaster of the Friends Boys' School in Ramallah, outlines the available educational system at the time. He emphasizes the excessive British control maintained over Arab Government schools through the Government Department of Education,

⁵⁴⁰ See Marco Demichelis, "From Nahda to Nakba: the Governmental Arab College of Jerusalem and its Palestinian historical heritage in the first half of the twentieth century," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Summer 2015), pp. 264-281

⁵⁴¹ Sarah Graham Brown, 19 and Totah 1931, 156.

⁵⁴² Totah cites the Annual Report of the Department of Education, 1930-1 in Totah, 156.

whose role it was to inspect, schools, distribute grants, collect statistical information, supervise examinations, and to employ teachers.⁵⁴³ This was in stark contrast, he points out, to the role of this agency in the Jewish public system; interaction was limited, with schools undergoing only occasional inspection in exchange for receiving a modest public grant. When it came to Arab schools during the Mandate period, Totah clearly states that “the control of the policy is in British hands.”⁵⁴⁴ This was critical since the British believed that the administration of Palestine necessitated British-trained individuals (i.e. loyal subjects of the empire).⁵⁴⁵

After the foundation of the state of Israel, those who remained within 1948 borders attended state schools in Hebrew or missionary-run or other private schools in French, German, English, and Arabic. Other Palestinians requiring access to the educational system lived as refugees in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, or in the Diaspora. The literature reflects the large number of these individuals, considering questions about curriculum, educational leadership and control, as well as the role of NGOs and UNRWA. Given that the bulk of the literature is interested in internationally funded and controlled projects, many writers are NGO/UN workers, political commentators, or journalists, with texts tracing the impact of external structures and funding on Palestinians. There are many considerations for a population in exile. The question of what it means to educate extends beyond reading, writing and arithmetic and means that education also grapples with educating towards a goal of national liberation.

⁵⁴³ Khalil Totah, Education in Palestine, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 164, Nov 1932, 155-166, 155.

⁵⁴⁴ Khalil Totah, Education in Palestine, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 164, Nov 1932, 155-166, 155.

⁵⁴⁵ Totah also discusses this on p. 164.

Analyses of Diaspora education focused on its striking social and cultural impacts on the various Palestinian communities. One common approach is to examine the restorative power of education. An early article by Kent Pillsbury and Abdul Malik Nashef argues that the UNRWA school system “unobtrusively” played its part in the “Arab world’s socio-economic revolution... by contributing to the social reconstruction of a disturbed people who have not lost confidence in their inherent potentialities.”⁵⁴⁶ Likewise, researcher Sarah Graham-Brown also shows how education contributed to the shifting social structures that resulted from Palestinian dispersion. With the 1948 rupture in a social order attached to land ownership, she argues that education became a “lifeline” amongst the refugee populations, where unemployment was very high.⁵⁴⁷ Within this literature lies another approach: an analysis of education’s limited power. Stressing the Palestinian education’s “unusual development” inside host countries Ibrahim Abu-Lughod argues that social and economic mobility via education in the Diaspora meant a loss of traditions and cultural trappings that often accompany the educational process. Graham-Brown also notes education’s failing by pointing out that it did not significantly shift the situation for refugees; most remained socially and economically marginalized within their host countries. Rather, the significance of education was that it was a “battleground with the Israelis over cultural identity, socio-economic discrimination and political oppression.”⁵⁴⁸

In the post-1967 period, the Palestinian university occupies no small place in the literature. Many scholars examine the university as a site of the cultivation of a “national”

⁵⁴⁶ Pillsbury and Malik.

⁵⁴⁷ Graham-Brown, 11.

⁵⁴⁸ Graham-Brown, 12.

identity and conceptualization of resistance. At the time of the 1967 Occupation, only junior colleges and teacher training institutions existed as Palestinian institutions.⁵⁴⁹ Bir Zeit, al Najah, Beit Lehem, Gaza and other universities were established after 1967. As two scholars point out, Israel *permitted* the creation of Palestinian universities because they would support the Israeli strategy of forced emigration: a highly-educated population with no access to work, combined with Israel's strong grip on the economy so as to ensure that the Palestinian population was an outlet for products rather than innovators, would mean that this population would have to go abroad in order to find work.⁵⁵⁰ Other scholars focus on the struggle of creating and maintaining these educational institutions, as well as the benefits they offer. In the 1980s, Gabi Baramki, former president and scholar at Bit Zeit University, traces the rapid expansion of higher education in the wake of increasing impediments to Palestinians studying abroad. His argument revolves around the fact that educational efforts are proof that "Palestinians in the Territories have been preparing for peace and independence over the last two decades."⁵⁵¹ Likewise, Penny Johnson, focusing on the slightly later Intifada period, emphasizes Palestinian commitment and flexibility in the "context of sustained rebellion crisis."⁵⁵² As she points out, education was so important that entire communities launched grassroots efforts to organize classes in the wake of closures. So, too, Andrew Rigby's 1995 report portrays education as reflective of the "collective struggle" of Palestinians, as

⁵⁴⁹ This is discussed in "Alternative Ed Under the Intifada: the Pal Response to Israeli Policy in the The Territories." Abdalla al-Kurd and Barton R. Herrscher, 299. This remains a widely held belief today, although there are no English-language Israeli sources to support this argument.

⁵⁵⁰ "Alternative Education Under the Intifada: the Palestinian Response to Israeli Policy in the The Territories." Abdalla al-Kurd and Barton R. Herrscher, 302. The fact that Palestinians who study abroad risk losing their Israeli identification cards means that this educational and emigration planning is highly problematic.

⁵⁵¹ Baramki, 20.

⁵⁵² Penny Johnson, "Palestinian Universities Under Occupation," *Journal of Palestine Studies* (February-May) 117.

evidenced by the neighborhood school systems put in place. His argument, however, is that the struggle to maintain some educational continuity also helped to “crystallize their concerns about the nature of schooling in the Territories,” establishing the reform agenda.⁵⁵³ Ted Swedenburg and Christa Bruhn both emphasize the importance of Palestinian universities as sites of cultural and revolutionary imagination. Swedenburg examines universities’ symbols, such as Bir Zeit’s use of the olive tree as a logo, as a way to show that institutions promoted the local “attachment to the land and a timeless indigenous culture.”⁵⁵⁴ More recently, Christa Bruhn (2006) argued that the Palestinian university was a “vehicle of community empowerment” for social and political change.⁵⁵⁵ The first third of her article deals with the period in question in this project, 1967-1986, during which period she says that the early university was the “bearer of national consciousness.”⁵⁵⁶ She suggests that the university was part of the post-Occupation trend of establishing new educational, research, charitable and human rights organizations to “provide badly needed services to Palestinian communities.”⁵⁵⁷

Ironically, the Israeli prison can be seen as the answer to several of the educational challenges Palestinians faced with the Occupation’s onset. First, because the large Diaspora population meant that Palestinian education became “an essentially expatriate phenomenon” of individuals who in large numbers continued to identify as Palestinian refugees, education outside historic Palestine came to be inseparable from the

⁵⁵³ Andrew Rigby, *Palestinian Education: the Future Challenge*, PASSIA, 1995

⁵⁵⁴ Swedenburg, 1990.

⁵⁵⁵ Christa Bruhn, 1125.

⁵⁵⁶ She further segments Palestinian history into 1987-92, calling universities centers of resistance, and 1993-2000, when she argues they were contributors to state formation.

⁵⁵⁷ Bruhn, 1126.

implied goal of returning to and building an independent nation.⁵⁵⁸ Diverse educational systems in the Diaspora, however, led to an absence of the “imperative” for nation building, a unified cultural base.⁵⁵⁹ The prison as educational locale disrupted this dispersion, providing the missing “base” and centralizing the educational process within confined sites. Second, these prisons provided a central site for concentrated learning, both self-directed and instructor led, and was exempt from Jordanian, Egyptian and Israeli curricular influence. Rather, inside prison walls was the only place where a curriculum was under the complete supervision of educated Palestinians, without ministry, board, or governmental considerations. Finally, prison education was uninterrupted by political events. As mentioned earlier, UNRWA schools and universities faced the threat of closure when political tensions mounted.⁵⁶⁰ Educational efforts inside the prisons were continuous and uninterrupted.

Given the potential and real significance of education of Palestinians prisoners, these efforts have been largely neglected by scholarship. And yet, the ways in which prisoners access educational material and what kind of impact such learning has is not a new topic beyond Palestine. From the inception of the penitentiary in the eighteenth century, prison administrators and reformers alike have considered how education could help them reform convicts by inducing “ethical and moral change” in them.⁵⁶¹ Focusing on the eighteenth century, Jodi Schorb argues that “literacy remained a minor refrain in reformist discourse and the public debates over the purposes, best practices, and social

⁵⁵⁸ Hallaj, 111.

⁵⁵⁹ Hallaj, 111.

⁵⁶⁰ Schiff points out that in 1984 the Israelis told UNRWA officials that they would close the schools if they did not stop Palestinian youths from stoning army vehicles from locations near to the schools. Although these kids were not even necessarily UNRWA students, the UN was faced with two “undesirable alternatives:” to face accusations of collaborating with Israeli security in preventing stone throwing, or interrupted education due to closures (67).

⁵⁶¹ Larry Sullivan and Brenda Voegal discuss this in their *Encyclopedia of Library History*, 2000.

good that might come out of the prison,” while many reformers grappled with prison corruption and excessive filth.⁵⁶² She says the century witnessed increased interest in and emphasis on the literate prisoner, albeit with questions surrounding the importance of literacy education. In his volume *Libraries in Prisons*, William Coyle argues that what he calls “bibliotherapy” was key to the penitentiary’s operation from its inception. According to his analysis, the nineteenth century reformer carefully selected non-sectarian texts, in order to emphasize general moral improvement rather than religious indoctrination, and intentionally developed controlled reading environments: the prison library. In the twentieth century, non-western penitentiaries also engaged in attempted indoctrination of prisoners via reading material.⁵⁶³ For example, in the case of American POWs captured by Chinese Communists during the Korean War, material included statistical analyses of their positive economic growth, or tales such as *Black Beauty*, which prisoners reportedly realized the Communists included in order to demonstrate exploitation in other cultures.⁵⁶⁴ By the second half of the twentieth century, access to reading material during incarceration was something of a “norm” in places modeled after the western penitentiary system. Prisoners came to expect basic access to newspapers and books, with expectations evolving to include the space to organize lessons, and even to enroll in accredited distance learning programs. In the United States today, prison literacy programs strive for rehabilitation through books and writing,⁵⁶⁵ while other programs in

⁵⁶² Jodi Schorb, 3.

⁵⁶³ In “Reading Materials in Chinese Communist Indoctrination Attempts Against American Prisoners of War,” Albert D. Biderman, Louis M. Herman, and Harwell Howard write about Chinese Communists’ use of reading materials in attempts to indoctrinate Americans captured during the Korean War.

⁵⁶⁴ *IBID*, 190.

⁵⁶⁵ Consider, for example, Massachusetts’ Prison Book Program, the Seattle Books to Prisoners program and the Pennsylvania’s Books Through Bars program.

the United States, United Kingdom and across Europe grant university degrees.⁵⁶⁶

Notable former prisoners have made their educational journey a theme in their post-prison autobiographies.⁵⁶⁷

This chapter will build on recent scholarship that focuses on the “prison as university” in colonial and occupation environments. To date, most texts focus on political prisoners in South Africa, especially Robben Island during Mandela’s time. Fran Lisa Buntman describes the reading programs prisoners designed to educate their peers for political resistance. She says “the determination with which prisoners forged and fought for meaning in their lives in prison was a remarkable act of resistance,” adding that education symbolized “a refusal to let the state destroy their minds, bodies or spirits.”⁵⁶⁸ According to her assessment, Robben Island prisoners were part of a “positive act of remaking and reconstructing the dominant world.”⁵⁶⁹ Likewise, Jonathan Charteris-Black also asserts that the prison education was “a way of usurping and challenging the state’s intention that it should be a place of confinement.”⁵⁷⁰ Aaron Bady shows how Robben Island University,⁵⁷¹ with prisoners allowed to take correspondence courses across the disciplines and at multiple universities,⁵⁷² became something of a prerequisite for holding a political role post-imprisonment. All three of these scholars emphasize the transformative impact of education on political prisoners, especially in emphasizing lifelong learning. Charteris-Black quotes one former inmate eloquently capturing this

⁵⁶⁶ For example, Bard College offers their Bachelor Degree to prisoners in New York State prisons who get accepted to the highly competitive program; Cornell offers college credits for courses the prisoners take.

⁵⁶⁷ *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *The Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela are just two examples.

⁵⁶⁸ Buntman, 2006, 70.

⁵⁶⁹ Buntman, 2006, 12.

⁵⁷⁰ Jonathan Charteris-Black, *The Communication of Leadership: The Design of Leadership Style*, 2006.

⁵⁷¹ As I will show later in the chapter, this educational endeavor was more widely publicized than that developed by Palestinian prisoners in Israeli occupation jails.

⁵⁷² Aaron Bady, “Robben Island University,” *Transition*, no. 116, 2014, 106-119, p. 108. According to his account, Mandela was enrolled in over 50 courses at four universities during his imprisonment.

commitment: “they can take us out of Robben Island, but they can’t take Robben Island out of us.”⁵⁷³

As this chapter will show, what emerged inside Israeli prisons intended for political prisoners was unprecedented in other contexts, going far beyond that which grew in places like South Africa. In the remaining pages, I will trace how an educational system and specific pedagogy evolved on the inside, describing how individual efforts during the 1970s unfolded an organized, productive, and intellectually inspired system and curriculum that was codified on paper in the 1980s.

“Faculty Development:” The Birth of a Prison School

The educational program that evolved inside Israeli prisons amongst political prisoners was a remarkable achievement. By the mid-1980s, clear programs with established but ever-evolving curricula, a daily structure, and a defined vision, existed across the prison system as well as across the full spectrum of factions. Given the complex history of education in Palestine, with multiple stakeholders determining goals and outcomes, what is most remarkable about the story of how this system came to be is the way in which it was entirely driven by the prisoners themselves; they were the impetus behind the concept and its development, thus endowing the imprisoned with a real sense of autonomy. Intellectual interest and critical engagement were widely encouraged via private and group study, as well as guided dialogue and debate. With written documentation not available until the turn of the 1980s, understanding how these initiatives unfolded necessitates relying on the oral testimony of former prisoners. The

⁵⁷³ Jonathan Charteris-Black, *The Communication of Leadership: The Design of Leadership Style*

first half of this section will draw on that of Abu Bakr, Ata Qaymery, Ghassan Khatib, and Yacoub Odeh, chosen because they speak to the educational experience across faction lines.⁵⁷⁴ Not only are these individuals interesting for their role in helping to formulate educational programming, they also enable a conversation about how the educational experience inside the prison was a key contributing factor to post-prison employment and political views. Their testimonies, corroborated by other oral accounts, help fill a gap in the history of the Palestinian prisoner movement: how the educational structures inside the prisons evolved and what drove the creation of such expertly structured, non-degree granting academic programs.

The prison experience, albeit offering a full complement of trying and torturous treatment, featured two advantages for embarking on educational endeavors: space and time. As referenced in earlier chapters, the confined space of the prison allowed members of the highly secretive underground political movements a certain degree of freedom when it came to revealing their identities. The prison allowed them to know individuals from beyond their pre-prison locales and to engage in sustained conversation. Thus, these spaces of constraint and punishment were transformed into places for remarkably open discussions and debate, which in turn led to a systematization of conversations into formal lessons. The prisons also offered the highly coveted luxury of time. As referenced in earlier chapters, the political prisoner's day required the fulfillment of very few tasks. Required working hours were short, and by the early 1980s acts of resistance, particularly hunger strikes, had resulted in prisoners' control over their own tasks and schedule. The

⁵⁷⁴ Although the educational programming that emerged was divided by faction, the period of organization did not involve physical separation of individuals by political affiliation.

combination of these two factors meant that from the very beginning of the Occupation, with the immediate uptick in the number of prisoners interned in Israeli jails, these open conversations eventually translated into informally organized educational sessions.

Prisoners had to overcome a host of challenges in order to build the highly structured educational model in place by the 1980s.⁵⁷⁵ Interview subjects speak to these challenges and how the desire to overcome them propelled the prisoners towards formalizing the curricula, a process inextricably linked to the evolution of general political structures. In the first years of the Occupation, political prisoners did not have regular access to books, paper or writing implements.⁵⁷⁶ Also, illiteracy was rampant, with many not having reached 12 years of schooling prior to their arrest, an unsurprising fact given the state of education beyond prison walls discussed earlier in this chapter.⁵⁷⁷ According to testimony, the high rate of illiteracy was augmented by a profound cultural knowledge vacuum, with an almost complete absence of understanding of history, literature, and most significantly, given their political prisoner status, politics.⁵⁷⁸ Furthermore, especially in the first years of the Occupation, many were still in school at the time of their arrest and had not yet completed their secondary education. Khatib recalls that in 1974, his cell consisted almost entirely of high school students, who had not yet matured intellectually or socially.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁵ The documents establishing this model will be discussed in the next section.

⁵⁷⁶ According to Radi Jara'ai, some prisons had a limited supply of carefully curated reading material, consisting of books on religious topics and Marxism. Books will be discussed later in the chapter.

⁵⁷⁷ Qaymery interview. The problem with illiteracy is apparent even in documentation dating to the early 1990s. For example, in one Fatah document outlining the plans and requirements for political education, the requirement for joining the required Arabic grammar course is only "high school level, *or middle school*" (italics are mine). This indicates that the expectation of solid linguistic education for the vast majority of prisoners was quite low. For more on this see document AG 13-3-133 [section 3, points 2 and 3, insert pg].

⁵⁷⁸ Qaymery and Odeh speak to this in interviews.

⁵⁷⁹ Ghassan Khatib interview, Bir Zeit University, September 2012

In these early years, the educated amongst the scores of prisoners quickly realized that they had something to offer the less scholastically attuned prisoners. The same individuals who constituted the “individual leadership” discussed in Chapter Three also took charge of encouraging self-improvement through reading and discussion. Thus, those who were the “most educated outside,”⁵⁸⁰ such as Jara’ ai and Odeh, were key to encouraging inmates to embark on self-study.⁵⁸¹ The absence of actual materials with which to work meant the leaders who had something beyond a basic education had to figure out a way to share their knowledge with their comrades. The first efforts were unofficial, not framed as “study,” but as a way to bring individuals together to share ideas, as something to do with one’s abundance of down time. Ex-prisoners report that the informal lectures and discussions began to take shape within months of the Occupation, reflecting both need and interest. Palestinian history and politics, as well as conflict itself were the primary subjects of discussion, with educated prisoners facilitating and providing context. In these early years, prisoners were not strictly divided according to factions since this privilege had not been won via hunger striking. Moreover, these early discussions were entirely secret, often conducted in hushed whispers, shielding the prisoners’ voices from the prison administration.⁵⁸² This urge to exchange information and learn from each other was so strong that it overshadowed the threat of punishment associated with discovery.

⁵⁸⁰ Radi Jara’ ai interview

⁵⁸¹ Ghassan Khatib, Ata Qaymery , Radi Jara’ ai, and Yacoub Odeh all speak to this during their interviews.

⁵⁸² Odeh interview, Jerusalem Hotel, November 6, 2012.

From the very beginning of the Occupation, learning was embraced as a form of active resistance.⁵⁸³ An interesting example of this lies in the linguistic dexterity prisoners cultivated on their own as a way to access the limited material allowed in by the Israeli administration. Before repeated hunger strikes secured the admittance of reading material in Arabic, only Hebrew language materials were permitted, intended as a way to hinder prisoner access to the subject matter. Remarkably, ex-prisoners report that the administration's intentions had an effect opposite to that which was intended: they were inspired to gain new knowledge and skills in the form of language acquisition rather than being rendered helpless in the face of linguistic opacity. The year 1973 was a turning point in terms of an influx of information from the outside world, which in turn served as a spark for widespread language study. It was in this year, with the onset of the Yom Kippur War in October, that television news was allowed inside many of the prisons. Inmates were allowed to gather three or four times a day in "a central location,"⁵⁸⁴ with the administration's likely goal to put on display Israel's successes and power, perhaps even as an intimidation tactic. Given that the only available news coverage was in Hebrew, there was a clear impetus for individuals to develop translation skills. According to Qaymery's account, the one individual in Ramle prison in 1973 who was capable of such translation refused to be part of the process, thus compelling him to prepare himself for that role.⁵⁸⁵ Without any existing Hebrew language skills, he had to learn the language from scratch, a task made just slightly easier by the similar root systems of Arabic and Hebrew. This required a great deal of diligence and self-motivation on the part of those

⁵⁸³ In the documents discussed in the next section, it is clear that study was explicitly framed as an act of resistance inside the prisons.

⁵⁸⁴ Odeh and Qaymery speak to this.

⁵⁸⁵ Qaymery, Second interview

who undertook such self-study. Qaymery describes the process as laborious, moving from translating short articles from the Hebrew newspapers.⁵⁸⁶ At first, he recalls, it would take him over two hours to translate a few paragraphs, but within two months he was issuing a daily news bulletin and was also proficient enough to verbally translate the gist of television news.

In addition to limited access to media, around this same time the Red Cross negotiated permission for political prisoners to have books. Not unlike news programming, prisoners did not get a say in the initial influx of books, the end result of which was that most were not in Arabic. What this meant is that if they wanted to read, they had to expand their language capabilities. Rather than being discouraged by this impediment, many prisoners have reported learning the available texts' languages, with the urge to know propelling them through this challenging process of self-education.⁵⁸⁷ In Qaymery's case, in addition to Hebrew, he reminisces about studying French "by my own for eleven months," while also attaining a level of reading proficiency in Spanish and Russian, since he wanted to cultivate a "diversity" of his own "awareness."⁵⁸⁸ Those who had or developed the necessary linguistic skills translated available reading material into Arabic for the widest possible access. As Qaymery recollects, he "became a publishing center" of sorts, claiming to have translated thousands of pages of text during his imprisonment. In the years before the evolution of formal political organization inside the prisons, people like Qaymery, who were responsible for translating and sharing information, did not discriminate according to political faction. Without formal programs

⁵⁸⁶ As will be discussed later, Ramle had a plethora of Hebrew sources, given the mixed prison population, Israelis criminals and Palestinian political prisoners.

⁵⁸⁷ Ghassan Khatib, Jabril Rajoub, Ata Qaymery, Adel Samara, and others all learned Hebrew and English inside prison.

⁵⁸⁸ Qaymery interview.

in place designed by political factions, material was shared and actively circulated across faction lines. As these two examples show, political prisoners undermined Israeli attempts to control their access to knowledge. Learning languages was one act of resistance couched in an educational frame.

Beyond training themselves to comprehend and learn from permitted materials, prisoners also resisted Israeli mind control by undermining the rules and regulations for accessing reading material. Even with Red Cross-assisted access to books and newspapers, the Israelis invoked strict censorship rules. Texts perceived as politically incendiary were blocked from official entry and required smuggling. When Arabic newspapers were allowed in, they, too, were censored. Odeh recalls that even when a prisoner managed to get a hold of copies, entire articles were excised, leaving gaping holes.⁵⁸⁹ During the 1970s, prisoners devised clever ways of getting access to the written material they most desired. One method was seemingly above board: prisoners would provide lists to their family and friends of books that they wanted delivered to the Red Cross, since the organization was the only official channel for moving intellectual materials; then, prior to drop off, book covers that might invite censorship would be carefully and expertly swapped out for less inflammatory covers. According to prisoner accounts, the Israelis did not even bother opening Arabic books, paying attention only to the cover.⁵⁹⁰ As Jara'ai reminisced, it was through this method that they managed to bring in a book entitled "Palestinian without an Identity Card," by a well-known Fatah leader

⁵⁸⁹ One anonymous prisoner, who was imprisoned in Nablus Central prison in the early 1970s, told a similar story about these butchered papers. His brother reportedly saved one Arabic paper for each day he was imprisoned. When he was released, he went back and read the years of papers he had missed, noting how much more politically related material could be found in the uncensored papers.

⁵⁹⁰ Jara'ai interview.

who was later assassinated in Tunis. Had the Israelis paid attention, they would have found the text incendiary, he said. Another way around censorship was via Ramle, key to the effort of moving intellectual material, representing a kind of book laundering site. Because Ramle housed Israeli criminal prisoners in the same complex as Palestinian “security” prisoners, two systems of treatment operated simultaneously, but not impenetrably. As Qaymery noted in one conversation, “Ramle was 10 years advanced in everything” because of this fact.⁵⁹¹ The presence of the criminal prisoners meant that Ramle had an Israeli Cultural Officer, who was the point of contact for books requests and was responsible for stocking the library intended for the criminals’ use. Although unintentional, this access benefited the Palestinian detainees as well. As mentioned earlier, Ramle was also a “transit prison,” through which every political prisoner passed either en route to the prison to which he was sentenced or when transferred to the hospital for medical treatment. According to prisoner testimony, the more sneaky and convincing amongst them sometimes managed to smuggle books out intact: those who were sent to the hospital at Ramle would convince the guards they had brought a particular book with them, and would then take it back to their point of origin after being discharged. According to Jara’ai, so long as the books were not related to security or political nationalism, the authorities tended to turn the other cheek. A more reliable method of transport, as discussed at length in Chapter Three, was via *kabsulih*. With Ramle’s diverse collection, Palestinian prisoners copied out entire books in microscopic handwriting, tightly wrapped individual pages in plastic and swallowed them to be transported via bodies leaving the hospital bound for other prisons. Books by notable

⁵⁹¹ Qaymery interview.

political prisoners, such as *Twelve Years in Prison* by William Naguib Nassar, were smuggled out piecemeal in this way.⁵⁹²

Prisoners' ultimate act of resistance was not allowing the Israelis to break their spirits; education was key to this effort. From the moment reading and writing materials began to appear, intellectual preoccupations became the saving grace of the prison experience. For starters, books were a means of escape. Many prisoners embraced knowledge acquisition as a distraction from the miserable circumstances of the prison, and as a way to, even fleetingly, undermine the deprivation that comes with curtailed freedom of movement, severely limited rights, and regular physical suffering. In Qaymery's case, language learning was a salve. Reflecting back on the process of learning Hebrew, French, English, Spanish, and Russian, he asserts: "every language I learn will add another Ata, so I can live more and be happier." Although a simple statement, when I probed him on this, it was clear that Qaymery sought something more than escape through this linguistic layering. Hebrew, for example, allowed him to "see" the Occupier more clearly. Reading has a similar effect on him. Qaymery recalls Alex Haley's novel *Roots: the Saga of an American Family* as particularly poignant. He says this book "so affected and enchanted" him that he felt he was a part of this slave drama, living the experience. Through language study and enthusiastic and constant reading, Qaymery says he was "re-educated" to have "no hatred towards the occupier because [he] can put [himself] in his shoes."⁵⁹³ Likewise, Jabril Rajoub, now a member of Fatah's Central Committee, a PA minister, and faculty at Al Quds University, studied Israeli

⁵⁹² Radi speaks about this; Nassar is also referred to in Al Fatah's publication "The Freedom Fighters," published in English sometime in the first half of the 1970s and intended for an international audience.

⁵⁹³ Interview with Ata Qaymery, American Colony Hotel.

politics through an in-prison degree program as a way to “know” his enemy.⁵⁹⁴ Qaymery addressed the complications afoot when study breeds understanding of something seemingly foreign and even evil, such as the Occupation. He notes that such learning leads to one’s own evolution and change. Although some might mourn the loss of their own “identity,” he convincingly argues that by cultivating empathy “you double your humanity.” He believes that by learning the language of the occupier, he learned to understand more about Israel and what it represents, relieving him of many of his own oppressive feelings: “if you understand your enemy, you can’t hate.” From Qaymery’s perspective, this gift of comprehension, given to him by the prison system is unprecedented, unrivaled and precious. Not only was his spirit unbroken, he grew as an individual.

As the 1970s wore on and the individual leadership was replaced by an organized and elected group leadership, educational programming also came to be more formal, structured, and widespread. It morphed from an individually motivated mission to learn, such as we saw with Qaymery’s acquisition of multiple languages, into agreed upon faction-specific programs in which all members were expected to participate. The physical isolation from the outside Fatah movement, among other influences, led to relative intellectual freedom for those who designed and oversaw the educational program; factors influencing and politicizing education, discussed in the previous section, were rendered irrelevant inside the prisons. Thus, the prison as an educational site allowed for clear definition and easy oversight of the evolving written curricula. The next

⁵⁹⁴ Rajoub’s study was formal, post-Oslo and involved a MA and eventually a PhD. Interview with Jabril Rajoub, Ramallah, October 2013

section will analyze in detail the curriculum and the committee behind it, both of which speak to remarkable prisoner innovation and agency.

The Cultural Committees' Guidelines: Shaping Political Actors

By the early 1980s, formal educational programs were in place in many prisons across Israel and the West Bank, having evolved in tandem with the defined political hierarchies for each faction discussed in Chapter Three. Fatah, the PFLP, and the Communists oversaw their own programs, educating members according to their own principles and agendas.⁵⁹⁵ Fatah members actively inscribed clear curricular guidelines and participation expectations into available copybooks, intended for circulation amongst all members. Surviving documents, many of which were products of prison Cultural Committees and date to around the First Intifada, illuminate codified cultural-educational structures that emerged over the course of two decades. Although this project's cut-off date of 1985 precedes some of these writings, the material is valuable for understanding the scope of the system the prisoners were able to create. This chapter will examine three of Fatah's Cultural Committee documents in detail, while referencing other documents as well as interviews to corroborate the writings' assertions. Of the three documents under consideration, their points of origin are not attributable to a particular prison or person, and only two out of the three can be dated. However, all three represent a culmination of over a decade of cooperative work and planning conversations. Similar to the documents concerning political structures discussed in Chapter Three, anonymity and obscured

⁵⁹⁵ Built alongside the unfolding political organization, educational programs were also formalized in the large prisons intended for long sentences, especially Beer Saba' and Asqalon. After its 1980 inauguration, Nafha became a key site of educational advancement, especially since the initial cohort of prisoners consisted of those who had become powerful leaders inside the prisons during the 1970s. Ata Qaymery, Sami al Jundi, and Radi Jara'ai all speak to this.

publication dates hint at a kind of timelessness and the intention to frame these writings as active and in continuous use. A textured reading reveals the following about the prisoners belonging to the Fatah movement inside the prisons: a deep commitment to education as a form of resistance inside the prisons; a desire to cultivate and propagate a Fatah world view amongst members, which was centered on resistance; and an urge to produce a generation of revolutionaries deeply and broadly educated in politics, history, culture, economics, among other subjects, who would continue Fatah's mission after their release. In examining these sources, it is also clear that education was a site of control and self-preservation for the prisoners. The resulting curriculum and cultural programs were intellectually rigorous, physically and mentally intense, and highly regimented. By the 1980s, the system answered the call of Fatah's Central Committee for imprisoned brothers to "drink out of the glass of education."⁵⁹⁶

The importance prisoners placed on knowledge acquisition is evident in the defined structures they advanced to support education, as reflected in Cultural Committees' publications, including "Fatah, The Palestinian National Liberation Movement: The General Cultural System" (GCS) and an untitled pamphlet addressed to "Revolutionary Brothers" (RB).⁵⁹⁷ Both of these texts speak to a clearly outlined leadership structure overseeing educational programming. As briefly discussed in Chapter Three, RB confirmed that the Cultural Committee, a sub-committee of the

⁵⁹⁶ AG 13-3-1-151, p. 3.

⁵⁹⁷ The first document is archived as AG 13-3-1-133; the second AG 13-3-151. According to oral sources (Radi Jara'ai and Ata Qaymery), the document I subsequently refer to as RB (AG 13-3-151) was preceded by earlier versions, similar in tone and intention. This suggests to us that documents outlining regulations were regularly updated.

Central Committee, was responsible for administering educational endeavors.⁵⁹⁸ Headed by a designated member of the Central Committee, he would in turn propose a list of three to five individuals with whom he would like to cooperate on executing the group's tasks, selected according to skill sets and individual strengths. The head of the committee's role was to act as a kind of stage manager of sorts; to oversee the continuous development of the curriculum and to maintain general participation in what emerged as a complex system geared towards a broad education and cultural engagement inside each prison. This list would be submitted to the Central Committee for approval.⁵⁹⁹ Within the Cultural Committee, each member occupied a particular sub-post, which included the following positions: one person coordinated issuing the monthly magazine, including calling for articles, selecting the most fitting proposals, inviting individuals to help edit, and ensuring the production of two to three copies that are then distributed to each section of the jail; a second coordinated the classes and the teaching in the cells; a third selected the pamphlets for the curriculum and oversaw the drafting of new curricular materials for inclusion; and a fourth individual was responsible for "keeping up with daily political events, extracting them, and rephrasing them with the right, beneficial form," including translating from Hebrew and English language newspapers and books admitted to the prison via the Red Cross.⁶⁰⁰ Because each of the individuals in these sub-committees must coordinate with others in the prison in order to carry out their jobs, this pyramid-style organization invites both formal and informal participation, and thus the

⁵⁹⁸ See pages one and two of AG 13-3-1-151. Interestingly, the writers assume the reader knows something about Fatah's general structure inside the prison and thus doesn't address how this committee is formed. This is not surprising given the pamphlet's likely date of "publication," more than a decade after structures were put in place.

⁵⁹⁹ Interview subjects spoke to this process since it is not outlined in detail in documents. As discussed in Chapter Three, one can understand the basic committee breakdown from the prisoners' Constitution.

⁶⁰⁰ AG 13-3-1-133, p. 3. Interview subjects allow for cross-referencing, especially Radi Jara'ai, who was an important contributor having been at different times the head of the Central Committee, the Cultural Committee, and of the Fatah faction inside Beer Saba'a.

buy-in, of a large number of prisoners. The writers asked that “our brothers who are responsible in the program to look over the details of the program and its mechanisms, so they can understand the bigger picture” and act accordingly.⁶⁰¹ Thus, it is clear that these documents were not merely for historical record. Rather, they were intended to be an instructional guide for those who would lead and participate in the educational program.

Documents unmistakably suggest that partaking in the various in-prison educational offerings was not optional; rather it was key to being a member of the resistance and the Fatah movement inside the prisons. As the General Cultural Plan (GCP) says: “working on the cultural awareness of the prisoner is an essential part of the prisoner’s life; it is the spiritual supplement, and the essence of our daily life inside these closed doors.”⁶⁰² All Fatah members were expected to participate fully in the lessons as a way to demonstrate commitment to self-improvement. The language of the Cultural Committee’s writings is both invitational and insistent, underscoring the importance, or even the necessity, of active and mindful involvement. To that end, the opening passage asserts the group’s commitment to “integrating the biggest number of brothers...within different and various programs.”⁶⁰³ There is a performative flair to the writing style of many of the documents: long sentences, language that is imbued with invitations to greatness, references to something far larger than that which is contained within prison walls. For example, RB opens by addressing Fatah’s “glorified” and “revolutionist brothers” as “knights of generosity and sacrifice” for the “revolution” writ large.⁶⁰⁴ It is clear from the beginning of the text that the reader is directly invoked and expected to be

⁶⁰¹ AG 13-3-1-151, p. 3.

⁶⁰² AG 13-1-149, p. 1.

⁶⁰³ AG 13-3-1-133, p. 1.

⁶⁰⁴ AG 13-3-1-151, p. 1.

working towards and sacrificing for “great victory” within the frame of the revolution. The pamphlet’s motivation seems to be to explain the evolution and purpose of the system, but more significantly and urgently to compel participation. When it describes the importance of the educational program, the writer(s) directly address the reader: “we see you as the cornerstone” of the “project” and “its success.” It goes on to say that through “your creative response and constructive commitment” the project will be a success.⁶⁰⁵ One can read this use of language as setting up an expectation of participation as key to the success of creating a prisoner movement inside the jails. Full participation means being able to “give back” to the Fatah movement by being part of the “ongoing development” of the movement’s organization, as well as supporting the maintenance of order inside the prisons.⁶⁰⁶ The educational program and a Fatah member’s participation in it is “a service,” says the document. The pressure is on the individual to make a “conscious commitment” to the educational program with the intention of leaving “positive traces” on the organization by contributing to the faction’s political evolution. Such assumed participation of everyone in the prison was one of the strengths of the movement in the first two decades after the beginning of the Occupation.

Former members of Cultural Committees stress that as leaders they believed rigorous education was the only way to ensure meaningful participation of their peers in the highly organized political system, and thus was essential to maintaining inter-faction calm in the face of prison administrators and the Zionist government. Like the documents discussed in Chapter Three, these, too, emphasize unity as key to Fatah’s worldview and

⁶⁰⁵ AG 13-3-1-151, p. 2.

⁶⁰⁶ AG 13-3-1-151, p. 1.

agenda. Anonymity, for example, speaks to the prisoners striving for unity. Also, these writers employ the collective plural, “our” and “we,” also a nod towards collectivity and shared responsibility for the program. Indeed, the document emphasizes “we decided within the framework of the Central Committee to begin the process of planning and setting up a tactical cultural program.”⁶⁰⁷ In defense of the programming, and of the Central Committee’s need to walk a very fine line between leading and inviting wide participation, the pamphlet’s drafters emphasize that the plans come from a deep seated belief in the “the importance of managing our time, studies, and being consciously invested” in Fatah. Thus, they say, the Central Committee’s urge to establish an educational plan allowed all staff to work together to cultivate an “atmosphere filled with productive vividness and energy,” moving prisoners “away from an atmosphere of laziness.”⁶⁰⁸ The educational program is thus framed as having been developed by consensus, and also overseen by those chosen by the majority.

Beyond emphasizing inter- and intra-faction unity, the Cultural Committee propounded to be a key player in “construct(ing) the Fatawi character,” which in turn would have an impact on individuals beyond prison walls.⁶⁰⁹ The documents describe the Fatawi and his mission in general terms: he should be “capable of getting into the forms of united struggle with a distinguished, confident and clear way” including tackling “any circumstances, conditions or obstacles that might come up through the path of struggle.”⁶¹⁰ In short, he should be a revolutionary, committed to the resistance and to fighting the Occupation and the Israeli state. In order to fight against this oppression, the

⁶⁰⁷ AG 13-3-1-151, p. 1.

⁶⁰⁸ AG 13-3-1-151, p. 2.

⁶⁰⁹ AG 13-3-1-133, p. 1.

⁶¹⁰ AGE 13-3-133, p. 1.

individual required education/cultural awareness, which led to what the writers call “revolutionary awareness,” the “strongest weapon to face the enemy” since it is “very essential and it is a basic weapon for the fighters outside the prison in their battles.”⁶¹¹ Being a good Fatah member inside the prison also meant building one’s character in preparation for post-prison existence. Thus, a primary goal of the Cultural Committee was to prepare men to “carry the great Fatah message...and to lead the Palestinian public by the struggle experience and the consciousness that [they] accumulate through long years of struggle.”⁶¹² Educational efforts should “build cadre of qualified fighters who have the energy and the capability to fight and survive in any confrontation.” Interestingly, however, since “fighters” are studying behind prison walls, this power comes not from military training, but from knowledge acquisition. Documents clearly indicate that building a fighter’s character includes cultivating some of the following characteristics through education:

- 1) A deep understanding of the Arab-Israeli conflict, “[reinforcing] the revolutionary culture by learning from the experiences of the Palestinian people in all levels and all times, and the experiences of other struggling nations,” and “[applying] the Fatah mentality to treat and analyze all of the Arab and Palestinian developments and issues;”⁶¹³
- 2) To “solidify and reinforce the politically committee participation to our organization with what agrees with the political movement’s positions;”⁶¹⁴

⁶¹¹ AG 1-13-149, p. 1.

⁶¹² AG 13-1-149, P. 2.

⁶¹³ AG 13-1-149, p. 2.

⁶¹⁴ AG 13-3-1-133, p. 3.

- 3) “The organizational, political, mental, and cultural nature of the organizational base, based on the rule of total commitment to the movement and its regulations and laws based on total respect and discipline to achieve a united body that can represent and serve all the members of the movement.”

The goal of this “cultural revolution” was to “construct the Fatawi Struggler into an individual who was constantly able to give back, supported by his practical and solid experience” and based on “the well built foundation that is framed within specific standards and conditions that the nature of Fatah’s organizing and practical work demands.”⁶¹⁵ And thus, the major aims of education were “to immunize the fighters in the revolutionary movement with the beliefs and principles of Fatah,” and to prepare prisoners to be productive community members in their lives outside prison, as well as to understand proper resistance and how to build it.⁶¹⁶

According to these documents, shaping Fatah prisoners into political actors and resistance fighters meant having a solid leadership structure in place, which could establish markers of intellectual and cultural achievement. Creating revolutionary cadres resembling those to which the documents referred required a great deal of commitment on the part of the leadership and the prisoners alike. This commitment manifested itself in the complex and multi-faceted educational system that emerged by the 1980s, the subject of the next section.

The Prison as School House

⁶¹⁵ AG 13-3-1-151, p. 2.

⁶¹⁶ AG 13-1-149, p. 1.

Most prisoners entered the system without a working knowledge of Fatah, its history, belief system and outlined goals. Moreover, the average understanding of an individual proclaiming to be a member of the faction did not go beyond the very surface understanding of a desire to fight Israel as part of the resistance.⁶¹⁷ Without deep knowledge of the faction, how could individuals truly be part of a resistance movement? And with what, precisely, were they identifying, if anything at all? To make matters worse, as mentioned earlier, many came in with only the most basic education, while reportedly a significant number were even illiterate. Given the ambitious goals discussed in the previous section, of building a cadre of intellectually and culturally prepared fighters, those individuals who did have a strong educational background believed that systematically acquiring knowledge was urgent to Fatah's mission, but also to maintaining calm within the prisons by keeping prisoners' time occupied. To achieve the aforementioned goals, those spearheading the making of an educational system had their work cut out for them. Thus, a pressing desire to politically and intellectually prepare Fatah members was a primary driving force for the evolution of the faction's formalized educational program inside prisons.⁶¹⁸

To support the construction of solid Fatah members, the Cultural Committee formalized a complex, detailed, multi-level curriculum. They created courses that lasted six months each, with accompanying book lists.⁶¹⁹ The first level, the starting point for the prisoner's education, was a delicate balance of general historical background on

⁶¹⁷ Both Wassef and Sami Jundi admitted to knowing nothing about Fatah's political positions beyond armed resistance to Israel, although they carried out operations on the faction's behalf that landed them in prison. Ibrahim Khrishi was also apolitical and had no deep knowledge of the faction's ideology.

⁶¹⁸ This is in stark contrast with the outside movement, where individuals studied neither Fatah's principles nor movements beyond Palestine. See Yazid Sayigh for a discussion of Fatah's political platforms and publications available to members.

⁶¹⁹ AG 13-3-1-133 (section 2, cross reference with handwritten vs typed versions); Also see AG 13-3-1-151, footnote on p. 4; Radi Jara'ai and Sami Al Jundi also discussed this defined time in interviews.

Palestine and “great books” with a razor sharp focus on the particularities of Fatah’s movement (see photo on page 206).⁶²⁰ Indeed, Sami al Jundi recalls in his biography that Fatah leaders would first assign something tedious and demanding followed by poetry or a novel as a reward.⁶²¹ One Fatah document lists the curricular topics in the following order: internal prison regulations and Fatah’s regulations;⁶²² the Fatah movement’s pamphlets, as well as related ideological, political and regulatory pamphlets; “useful security materials;” cultural, literary, ideological, and political publications chosen by the cultural committee; and “a collection of valuable and books deemed purposeful on many levels.”⁶²³ Another document, likely from a different prison, speaks to a similar breakdown, noting that the materials included in the first level should address the following topics:

- 1) The origin of the movement
- 2) The internal system
- 3) The Fatah revolutionary theory
- 4) The fifth movement conference
- 5) The Revolution path roles
- 6) Palestine throughout history
- 7) Palestinian geography
- 8) The security of the Intifada⁶²⁴

Notably, these two lists of topics from different documents, likely taken from different prisons, allowed for a great deal of curricular flexibility. There are several reasons for several this: first, the lists gave space for the curriculum to evolve based upon the production of new political materials in the Diaspora and inside the prisons;

⁶²⁰ See also AG 13-1-149 (insert p. section A, General aims of the first level), which emphasizes the importance of “understanding the historical events and circumstances that led to the birth of the Fatah movement; the beginnings, the founders, the challenges, and the stages that Fatah went through.”

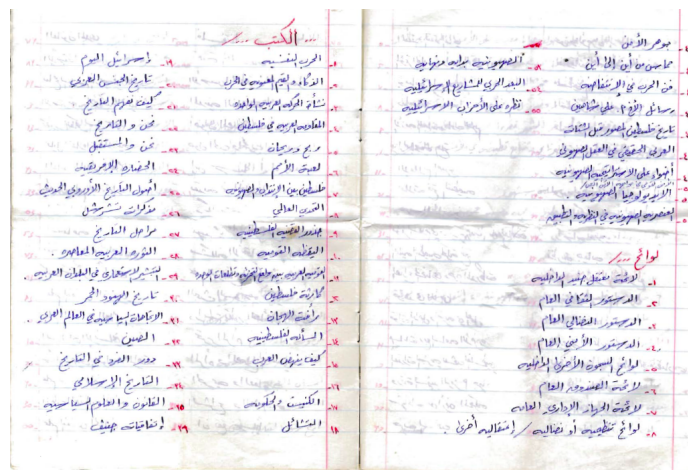
⁶²¹ Sami Al Jundi, *The Hour of Sunlight*, 126.

⁶²² See 13-3-1-151 and AG 13-1-149 (General aims of the first level)

⁶²³ AG 13-3-1-151, p. 4.

⁶²⁴ AG 13-1-149, p. 5.

secondly, they permitted the shaping of the curriculum based on what was accessible via smuggling, the Red Cross, and book requests; third, categories such as “books deemed purposeful” allowed for adjustment according to the evolving political situation, in terms of the conflict, the eruption of wars, and even the ever changing international context especially in relation to Third World movements. Fatah’s regulations are also broadly mentioned, in large part because resolutions from the outside took a circuitous path to the prisoners. The main point of entry for these formal Fatah publications was the Ramle prison library. Interestingly, the documents were admitted to the stacks in Hebrew, having been translated from the Arabic outside prison walls. Once inside, political prisoners literate in Hebrew gained access and translated them back into Arabic, after which other prisoners copied them in near microscopic handwriting onto flimsy paper that was then folded and transported via *kabsulih* to other prisons. The aforementioned William Nassar was key to this translation project in the first part of the 1970s.⁶²⁵



⁶²⁵ Radi Jara'ai interview.

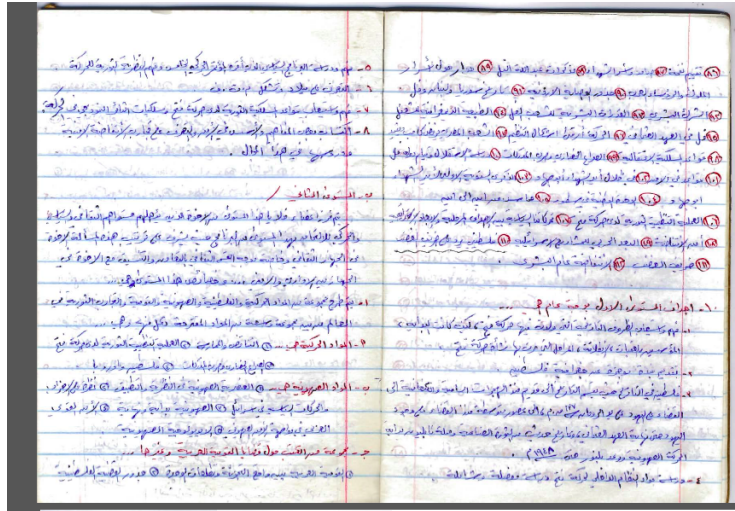
Once prisoners were “qualified enough culturally and politically” to join the second level, the curriculum expanded beyond Fatah and its features, while continuing to emphasize the importance of keeping up with the movement.⁶²⁷ As the below list of topics shows, prisoners were expected to delve deeper into topics, and also to think beyond Palestine. Materials are divided into three categories: “Movement materials,” “Zionism materials,” “A group of books about Arabic nationalism and other topics,” and “Revolutionary experiences and movements.”⁶²⁸ With a solid base in the Fatah movement as well as Palestinian history, prisoners had to expand their study into lesser-known areas. Beyond the prescribed topics, both the first and second levels list book titles available for self-study. These lists are lengthy, with the second level alone featuring 63 titles, ranging from *The Democratic Yemen* to “The Geneva Agreements.”⁶²⁹

⁶²⁶ AG 13-3-1-151

⁶²⁷ AG 13-1-149, section B.

⁶²⁸ AG 13-1-149, section C.

⁶²⁹ AG 13-1-149.



The Second Level list of “movement materials”⁶³⁰

Several prisoners spoke to the breakdown of the curriculum in terms that complement the available documentation. Some reflected that the reading list was grouped into regional concerns and issues, with Palestinian history and politics being the first focus.⁶³¹ Jara’ai described the educational program to me using visuals; he drew a series of “circles.” According to his description, the prisoners studied texts that were grouped according to the following breakdown: the Palestinian circle, the Arab circle, the international circle (focused on international revolutions) and the Israeli circle.⁶³² All prisoners reportedly began with months of texts, questions, and discussions related to the Palestinian circle. Within Fatah’s rooms, this also included studying the movement’s beliefs, structures, and ideological underpinnings in detail. Then they moved onto the wider Arab circle, which invited discussions of topics such as Baathism, Nasserism, the nation state, among other topics related to the Arab world. According to Jara’ai, these circles featured defined goals, which included theoretical background and enough

⁶³⁰ AG 13-1-149.

⁶³¹ In their joint interview Wasef and Sami Al Jundi discuss this.

⁶³² Radi Jara’ai interview.

evidence and other material to “enable one to be able to defend his thoughts to other groups.”⁶³³ Ultimately, framing the curriculum as circles allowed for the Cultural Committee to select from the material available at the time. These circles also allowed for an interesting intellectual innovation. According to one Cultural Committee’s “work plans,” by beginning with the Palestinian circle and Fatah’s ideology, the intention was to “employ the movement’s literature in analyzing the political oscillations that are going on in the region in particular, and in the world generally.”⁶³⁴

Curricula extended beyond political and historical texts to include books dealing with a wide range of subjects, from sociology and psychology to prose and poetry. The above image shows a selection of texts and is followed by additional pages that include texts ranging from *The Prince*, *The Iliad*, *Crime and Punishment* to Descartes and *Introduction to Sociology*.⁶³⁵ Many texts on the extensive reading list reflect a respect for cultural production beyond the Arab world, an interest in places that will provide a view into worlds that don’t face comparable challenges of occupation.⁶³⁶ The entire curricula is divided into three sections: first, fifty-two “Pamphlets” composed by prisoners and widely circulated, with some even making it to other prisons. Some of the titles include: “The Fifth General Conference and the Committee’s Work,” focused on the 1989 Fatah gathering; “The Zionist’s Media,” “Palestinian-Jordanian Relations,” “Palestine and

⁶³³ Jara’ai interview.

⁶³⁴ AG 13-3-1-133, point 7, page 2.

⁶³⁵ This text dates to the First Intifada, relevant because the educational programming and planning was over a decade in the making. Book lists continued to evolve, but the plans for how to structure the educational system were laid in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and are reflected in these later surviving documents.

⁶³⁶ This variety is also noted in the case of China, whose prison curricula under communism included books by George Eliot, Emily Bronte and Jane Austen, “attributed to the Communists’ respect for ‘culture.’” This is discussed in “Reading Materials in Chinese Communist Indoctrination Attempts Against American Prisoners of War,” Albert D. Biderman, Louis M. Herman, and Harwell Howard, *The Library Quarterly*, 28:3, July 1948, 187-193, 189. Although some of these texts were likely written around the beginning of the First Intifada, they reflect over a decade of planning and also represent the curriculum to which prisoners were subscribing from the early 1980s.

Europe,” and “This is How the Vietcong Prevailed.” The second group of texts included eight notebooks of Regulations, with which prisoners must familiarize themselves as part of their education. These include “Jneid Prison’s Internal Regulations,” “Other Prisons’ Internal Regulations,” and Constitutions for the Cultural, Struggle and Security Committees. The educational system encouraged the development of rule abiding prisoners who were committed to the agreed upon and politically motivated prison regulations, as opposed to familiarizing themselves with outside rules. The full book list, which follows the lists of pamphlets and regulations, includes 100 books, drawn from a variety of disciplines. Although undoubtedly shaped by the availability of titles, book requests were frequently honored by the late 1980s.⁶³⁷ This list reflects an internationally minded prisoner mindset, with a hunger for both comparative contexts as well as cultural experience.⁶³⁸

The formal educational program has been described verbally and in writing as highly organized and scheduled; one plan opens with the claim that the it is “a comprehensive cultural program that consists of a group of aims, tools and mechanisms in order to organize the prisoners’ lives in detention by programming and organizing their daily lives in the prison...”⁶³⁹ Within a given curriculum, prisoners had six months to complete each level, before moving onto the next, with each level beginning on a six-month rotation.⁶⁴⁰ According to surviving documentation, as well as interviews, the decision to operate according to semesters was intentional and well thought through. A document circulated amongst the prisoners from 1992 explained the importance of

⁶³⁷ This access was a result of repeated hunger strikes and resistance inside the prisons.

⁶³⁸ This book list is found in AG 13-3-1-151.

⁶³⁹ AG 13-1-149, p. 1.

⁶⁴⁰ Jara’ai interview and AG 13-3-1-151

sticking to this schedule that had evolved since the late 1970s “so we won’t be standing still without feeling the clear outcomes of every program, activity, or any course that we do.”⁶⁴¹ In the case of this particular year, the semester dates are set: “the first course starts 1-7-1992 and ends 1-1-1993. At the end of it we will graduate all brothers who participated in the program...the break between the two courses will be 15 days for the brothers to catch their breath and to be mentally prepared for the new course that will start 15-1-1994 and end 15-6-1993.”⁶⁴² Not only does this offer consistency to the prisoners, the writers also emphasized that clear semesters allowed the teachers and the Cultural Committee a sense of “where to begin and where to end” with the material, as well as to later reflect on the course’s obstacles, how to overcome them, and how the course can be expanded in the future.⁶⁴³ Because neither the Cultural Committee nor instructors could account for when new prisoners would enter a given prison, one could join the appropriate level even in its midst.⁶⁴⁴ In order to pass onto the next, however, the individual had to compensate for what had already been covered through individual study and additional writing assignments, or else repeat the level when the next round began. According to Sami Al Jundi, in the 1980s it took about three years to complete the entire curriculum, a short amount of time in comparison with most prison sentences of that era.

Discipline was critical to building good Fatah revolutionaries, emphasized via defined curricula and segmented days. In one prison, prisoners published a “weekly table

⁶⁴¹ AG 13-3-1-133, section 2. Jara’ai and Khrishi both confirmed that clear scheduling of when courses began and ended was in place by the early 1980s, although I could not locate a document with dates listed like this one from 1992.

⁶⁴² AG 13-3-1-133, section 2.

⁶⁴³ AG 13-3-1-133, section 2.

⁶⁴⁴ A prisoner might complete a level at one prison before being moved to another prison, hence the need for flexibility.

for the session and the suggested material” for each curricular level.⁶⁴⁵ For the first level, the six-day per week schedule foregrounded sessions on the Fatah movement, with two sessions per day, three days per week. On the other three days, prisoners participated in “an administration or struggle session,” a Palestinian history/geography class, and one open session during which prisoners lead the discussion on what they had read during the week.⁶⁴⁶

Upon reaching the second level, sessions were only once per day, five days per week, allowing for more time for individual and self-guided study.

⁶⁴⁵ AG 13-1-149.

although perhaps with less flourish. With grand sweeping hand gestures, he reported to me that he read every single book and newspaper the Red Cross brought in, “one by one, hundreds and hundreds of books.” Al Jundi also declared that he always had a book in his hand. During an interview he reeled off a diverse and extensive list of challenging texts he read in prison, many of which he recreates at the back of his co-authored book, *The Hour of Sunlight*. Once there were five or so prisoners interested in a subject, the head of the Cultural Committee would find a lecturer capable of overseeing the reading and guiding the discussion. The Committee also needed to bring books in related to the subject so that the lecturer could prepare. For example, Jara’ai recalls that when he was head of the Cultural Committee, many prisoners were interested in economics as well as psychology; he helped create daily study groups for both topics.⁶⁴⁹ Even after completing the formal curriculum, ex-prisoners report reading hundreds of pages per day, devouring books as quickly as they entered the prison. This is a testament to the Cultural Committee’s success in developing a program that not only established a baseline education, but also sparked genuine interest in and enthusiasm for knowledge acquisition. A remarkable aspect of this education in contrast with that outside the prisons is the very text-based approach. Palestinian high schools and universities are not known for cultivating a love of reading, and certainly not for stimulating individually driven study.

The establishment of a structured educational plan meant that the instructor’s role was also defined in writing. Guidelines encouraged careful observation and tracking, as well as a more nuanced advising role. On one hand, he is required to proctor exams, gather, edit and submit to the Cultural Committee all newly written material produced by

⁶⁴⁹ Radi Jara’ai interview.

his “students,” and put in place “self-study materials,”⁶⁵⁰ walking a line between oversight and flexibility.⁶⁵¹ On the other hand, instructors supervise the course and the “productivity of the brothers’ work,” “offer advice and help in supporting the success of the course, and take initiative for any creative step that would help,” to look for ways to “serve the process of education in a more positive context,” to “benefit as much as possible from the first experiment,” and to “employ any and every potential energy to serve the course and its members.”⁶⁵² Documents indicate that oversight was needed to encourage a commitment to reading and study. Cell supervisors, reporting to the Cultural Committee, played key roles in encouragement: they worked to create a “quiet and competitive atmosphere to encourage the members to read and participate more in the cultural activities.”⁶⁵³ Furthermore, Cultural Committee plans make it abundantly clear that education was not a choice. As one document emphasizes:

The morning reading time starts after the end of the counting process. The last prisoner wakes up at 8:00 in the morning and then the self-reading time starts without laziness. No excuses are acceptable. Breakfast and sports times are all independent from the reading time and no one can skip this reading time. The process should go smoothly without creating tension or disruption in the cell.⁶⁵⁴

Scholarly and cultural engagement was framed as a prisoner obligation, as part of the resistance. Indeed, the leadership, and the drafters of the documents, argued that “the

⁶⁵⁰ See AG 13-1-149 (section, “the times for self readings”).

⁶⁵¹ AG 13-3-1-133 (section a, point 1)

⁶⁵² AG 13-3-1-133 (section a, points 6-10)

⁶⁵³ AG 13-1-149.

⁶⁵⁴ AG 13-1-149.

time spent in prison is not considered an excuse to ignore the cultural activities or to exclude oneself from the daily readings.”⁶⁵⁵

Beyond general education to which the entire prison population had access, Fatah also organized courses to better prepare their “brothers” to take on committee tasks. By the 1980s, the “political education section” of the Cultural Committee oversaw the preparation of Fatah members for political leadership within the prisons. Like other Fatah endeavors, this, too, is highly structured and well documented in writing. Prison writings point to expectations for both instructors and participants, outlining the tasks for both in a way that balances between clearly defined markers of achievement and enough vagueness and flexibility to allow for changes according to access to texts, as well as for individual influence and shaping. In particular, this “section” oversaw what Fatah calls the “political cadre course.” This course, and others like it, was advanced, intended for those who passed all of the general education courses. In documentation referencing this course, it explains how it worked in a particular prison in 1992. The course consisted of 15 brothers, five from each of the “three wings in the eastern hall,” undergoing education towards “specific political qualification.”⁶⁵⁶ Mimicking a university, there is a pre-requisite for this course; a footnote in the document states that all of the participants must have graduated from the “pedagogical cadre course.”⁶⁵⁷ What this indicates is that they must have prepared to be instructors, to be capable of being a functioning member of the Cultural Committee, before moving onto formal political training. As part of this program, Fatah members also had to brush up on their formal Arabic language skills.

⁶⁵⁵ AG 13-1-149.

⁶⁵⁶ AG 13-3-1-133, section 5.

⁶⁵⁷ AG 13-3-1-133, notes section.

Interestingly, the explicit emphasis in this course is on “quality, not quantity;” although participants “will be taking regular exams,” a greater emphasis is placed on participants being capable of “literary invention” than on only being able “to understand the knowledge of the course.”⁶⁵⁸

Similar to other prison courses, this, too, necessitates a great deal of motivation and individual study, including: keeping up with political events “on every level and through all the available resources;” rephrasing in writing the week’s main events; written summaries of published political materials and the main ideas of past and present circulated political pamphlets; and producing regular written commentary, editorial in nature, on political topics selected by the instructors.⁶⁵⁹ Although these requirements are fulfilled through self-study, they are also monitored by instructors and accompanied by regular deadlines, established in the written guidelines. For example, in the prison referenced in this document the overview of the week’s main events was due at the end of each week, while the summaries of published political materials were due within the first three days of each week. Like an independent study course in a contemporary university setting, these deadlines ensure regular check-ins with a leader from the political education section. Furthermore, the course sets regular exams, which the prisoners must pass in order to continue their study. A third component of monitoring was the major milestone for the advanced level: the production of a lengthy “written project” that was “examined by a special committee to grade it and to graduate the member of the

⁶⁵⁸ AG 13-3-1-133, point G.

⁶⁵⁹ AG 13-3-1-133, section entitled “The Plan.”

course.”⁶⁶⁰ This research project was framed as similar to a Masters thesis in that participants would write about subjects that were not yet studied, as identified by the “section,” and must include as thorough of a review of outside sources and opinions that was possible within the constraints of the prison.⁶⁶¹ Indeed, the guidelines suggest that a comparison between authors would be an appropriate framework for the project, hinting at a kind of literature review or historiography.

As with the foundational curricula, these Fatah guidelines balance between directed study and a degree of flexibility. Unlike a MA thesis, the political awareness section would identify the gaps about which advanced prisoners should write, limiting choice and the freedom to explore. In part, this is because a key requirement was that the research must be a “conscious representation of the movement’s perspective of a certain subject.” Thus, this advanced research was not solely for individual development, but for a purpose beyond the self, that of the movement.⁶⁶² Also, regulation of the project was important because this written material, once evaluated, became part of the library, putting it into circulation, possibly across the prison system. Given the eventual public nature of this material, the political awareness section edited and “certified” the final product, underscoring the group dynamic of the process. Significantly, this project was intended to go beyond an exercise in demonstrating research and writing skills to innovation and a contribution to the ongoing dialogue inside the prison. After finishing this course, a Fatah member would be fully prepared to engage with complicated political material for the purposes of analysis and commentary.

⁶⁶⁰ AG 13-3-1-133, point 10 in section “The Plan.”

⁶⁶¹ AG 13-3-1-133, section 4, point a.

⁶⁶² AG 13-3-1-133, p. 5, point 1.

To advance the general mission, the Cultural Committee's sub-committee "political awareness section," a "specialized team within the field of political education" was critical to cultivating a Fatah vision and view.⁶⁶³ This group consists of "three brothers who are politically qualified with the ability of keeping up with the daily political events," including the news in multiple languages. They were chosen according to their ability to extract and rephrase the political materials without "exaggeration, emotions, or condescension," and to do so by "ignor(ing) the influence of the media's war against political distortion by rephrasing the material, filtering it and including it within the context of the general national struggle or the Fatah movement's struggle."⁶⁶⁴ This analysis was used in several ways: for the circulated weekly new analysis, to formulate and edit articles on political questions for the monthly magazine, *Fajr al Asefah* (The Dawn of the Storm), and to write articles on political issues to include in courses. In addition, these individuals helped oversee the political cadre course, including following up on the proper use of materials to ensure the course's success. Finally, this team was responsible for ensuring that all official material coming from Fatah's institutions was properly incorporated into their analysis, articles, seminars, and lectures.⁶⁶⁵ Thus, those involved in issues surrounding political awareness had a great deal of power.

By the late 1970s, in addition to implementing a structured plan for completing the "courses," the day itself was also high regimented and dominated by educational endeavors. Each block of time was intended for different activities. Mornings were spent

⁶⁶³ AG 13-3-1-133, p. 3.

⁶⁶⁴ AG 13-3-1-133, p. 3 – 4.

⁶⁶⁵ AG 13-3-1-133, section 4.

in “classes,” with prisoners moving between different rooms within their section according to the class they were attending. By the 1980s, prisoners had won the right through hunger strikes to move between rooms within prisons. Former prisoners give different accounts of the amount of time spent in these classes, with some indicating that there were two three hour classes per day and others indicating that the classes were around two hours each.⁶⁶⁶ The specifics are less important than the fact that multiple hours per day were spent in deep and engaged discussion amongst the prisoners over a particular text and topic. Even outside teaching hours, education and cultural improvement was woven into the fabric of the prisoner’s life. Prisoners across the system had been granted an hour of Arabic language news and the radio’s daily Um Kulthum hour of song, broadcast over a prison intercom system of sorts, and to which rooms would listen together as a group. Many days concluded with an evening lecture on a subject determined by the cell leader. According to oral accounts, Palestinian resistance and cultural questions were the most popular topics, with the political awareness section organizing seminars about “the most distinguished political events that are happening on the local, Arab world or international levels.”⁶⁶⁷ Apart from this, there were weekly news analysis meetings, based on the summaries and commentaries prepared by the political awareness section. In addition, the prisoners engaged in what was called the “weekly criticism circle.” This activity took place within each room, the smallest unit in the prison. As interview subjects described it, each person would publicly reflect on their general performance, behavior, and actions that week, pointing to weaknesses and areas

⁶⁶⁶ Sami Al Jundi, Radi Jara’ ai and Ata Qaymery all speak to the number of hours in class.

⁶⁶⁷ AG 13-3-1-133, section 3. In the prison under discussion in this document, this political discussion was scheduled for every Saturday.

in need of improvement. Once an individual had engaged in the process of self-reflection, the others would contribute by pointing to the individual's positive character developments over the course of the week, as well as places in need of improvement. For example, the group might note that the prisoner engaged in self-reflection was not attentive to his studies during the week. Alternately, they might comment on how the person in question did not do a good job of cleaning the room or did not wake early enough to make the tea.⁶⁶⁸ This activity often served as a jumping off point for wider discussion about how the prisoners could continue to cultivate positive personality traits, dedication to educational achievement, and proper treatment of their cell and section mates in the spirit of unity.

Over the course of the decade and a half during which prisoners were actively building the prison organization and developing their educational system, they wrote hundreds of pamphlets intended to supplement the books allowed or smuggled into the prisons. They built their own library of prisoner produced materials, focusing on historical, political and cultural topics. Like other prison documents, the majority of these educational texts are undated and anonymous, keeping the authors safe, but also underscoring the fact that content rather than authorship was the determining factor. This system was meant to be faceless, to locate success broadly in rooms and cells, in the movement rather than individuals. According to interview subjects, many educated prisoners wrote material about the political context of Palestine, which was then used in the general education courses. One surviving document recaps the political context in Palestine between 1848 and 1967, with an emphasis on the relationship between Palestine

⁶⁶⁸ Radi Jara'ai discusses the weekly criticism circle in detail, while Sami Al Jundi discusses the example of the tea in his book, 128.

and the rest of the Arab world. The pamphlet asserts that the “Arabic military” – or the entire Arab world – failed the Palestinians. To expound upon this point, the pamphlet gives an overview of the formation of the PLO and the Arab world’s part in that, the Suez crisis, and the relationship between Ahmad al Shaqairy and Egypt’s Nassar.⁶⁶⁹

Supplementing writings on the Palestinian context and history were pamphlets intended to teach prisoners about Fatah’s history, goals, and approach to executing the revolution.

One such pamphlet gives a detailed account of the “rules of the revolutionary path,” emphasizing Fatah’s conviction that “faith in victory and a willingness to sacrifice” are among the most important.⁶⁷⁰ This text also touches on the public aspect of the

revolution, reminding prisoners that their movement was not, and should not, remain isolated within prisons, but should be in dialogue with the outside movement ensuring that those beyond prison; it was the prisoners’ responsibility to communicate this, since “the weapon of the revolution is humans themselves.”⁶⁷¹ Likewise, the prisoners

regularly produced and circulated “magazines.” One such magazine, dating to the First Intifada, commemorates the anniversary of the founding of the Fatah movement, through prose, poems, and an interview with a Fatah prisoner who participated in the Intifada.⁶⁷²

This particular magazine also addresses the relationships forged between Fatah prisoners with newly acquired access to television.⁶⁷³ Other pamphlets still summarized complicated texts, serving as a kind of cliff notes version of them. For example, one pamphlet recaps a book written about Mossad by Victor Ostovsky. The writer gives an

⁶⁶⁹ AG 9-1-13.

⁶⁷⁰ AG 13-3-1-111.

⁶⁷¹ AG 13-3-1-111.

⁶⁷² AG14/31/17.

⁶⁷³ AG14/31/17.

overview of how Mossad recruits, trains, and executes its plans by stationing agents around the world and operating according to the motto “shoot first, ask questions later.” The writer also emphasizes the agency’s academic preparation, which includes studying Islamic theology and reading the Arabic press. The pamphlet is intended to give prisoners insight into the enemy intelligence organization, which they are up against outside the prison.⁶⁷⁴

Educational Programs: Impact and Response

The educational endeavors of Palestinian prisoners during the 1970s and 1980s made a significant impact on the inmates, as well as a somewhat complicated impact on Palestinian society writ large. Gaining access to cultural and intellectual materials and developing curricula were hands down the most all-consuming activities of the prisoners during these two decades. As demonstrated, learning from morning to night was all in a day’s work.

Criticism of the prison’s informal school by interview subjects was completely absent. Rather, ex-prisoners recall engagement with ideas, texts, and each other via conversation about various topics with an emotional outpouring of pure pleasure. Moreover, Prisoners were so absorbed by what they were studying and mulling that it often appeared in their letters home.⁶⁷⁵ Not one interview subject spoke negatively about the ways in which prisoners helped each other gain access to ideas, and supported one another in acquisition of new knowledge. In contrast, many prisoners referred to the

⁶⁷⁴ AG 9-1-11.

⁶⁷⁵ Mohammad Ibrahim Abu Ali’s wife reports that his letters were filled with references to his learning, although she has since destroyed all of the letters for security reasons. Sami Al Jundi also notes in his memoir that his postcards to his mother were often about what he was studying.

prison experience as the “best time” in their lives when the topic of education came up.⁶⁷⁶

Given the challenges Palestinians faced obtaining education across the West Bank, Gaza, and within the 1948 borders, it is not entirely surprising to hear such positive reviews.

Qaymery, who was 20 years old in 1971 when he was sentenced to 14 years in Ramle, beamed when asked about prison, nearly gushing: “You can’t imagine how rich my experience was in prison...I was happier then than I am now. I indulged in cultural and educational experiences that shape me now.”⁶⁷⁷ Prisoners lobbed critiques against Israeli censorship of books, as well as lack of access to degree-granting programs for political prisoners, but never did they criticize the informal system.

Education inside the prisons transformed the prisoners and in many cases determined what they would do in the wake of imprisonment. Today, Qaymery is a professional translator, moving between Arabic, English, Hebrew and French, having taught himself these languages during his confinement. As he proudly recounted, “my profession came from prison.”⁶⁷⁸ Qaymery also continues to exercise the skill he learned during his prison education: he still issues a regular news bulletin with translated Hebrew language news for Arabic readers.

Thus, prison education allowed for social mobility in a way that outside education did not. As mentioned earlier, many individuals entered prison illiterate, having had very limited access to primary or secondary education, and were released having achieved a high level of intellectual engagement with ideas and texts. In some cases the educational achievements of prison translated into outside professions. Qaymery’s inmate-cultivated

⁶⁷⁶ These are Qaymery’s words, but many others also referred to this experience using similar language.

⁶⁷⁷ Qaymery interview, American Colony Hotel, September 2012.

⁶⁷⁸ Qaymery interview.

language skills led to robust Jerusalem-based translation business, still in operation in 2015. Other individuals who “graduated” from the prison curricula moved into political appointments. Interview subjects Jabril Rajoub, Ahmed Shirin, Rabiha Diab, and Ibrahim Khrishi are today all active members of Fatah and the Palestinian Authority. Rajoub and Diab hold ministry posts, Sports and Women respectively, while all of them are members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). The education received in prison was the key factor contributing to their election to the PLC. These individuals brought with them the political lessons learned in prison, as well as deep cultural preparation, positioning them as potential well-prepared contributors to the creation of a functioning Palestinian state.

All that said, however, for the vast majority of prisoners, educational accomplishments within prison did not translate to the outside. For starters, when the PLO returned to the West Bank after the Oslo Accords, the new governing body of the Palestinian Authority did not absorb these highly educated prisoners into the upper echelons of leadership, although as I have shown they joined the middling ranks.⁶⁷⁹ Secondly, the West Bank and East Jerusalem economy was not equipped to absorb large numbers of educated ex-prisoners. Just like education in the Diaspora meant that post-secondary education was oriented to satisfy non-Palestinian job market requirements, the prison also prepared Palestinians for a particular kind of engagement with the world: one which was almost entirely political. Jobs outside of the Palestinian Authority were few

⁶⁷⁹ This is beyond the scope of this project, but will serve as the main pinnacle of the book that will come out of this dissertation. I will return to this briefly in my concluding remarks.

and far between, with ex-prisoners discriminated against. Jundi, for example, currently works at a supermarket in the Old City.

The Israeli Administration's Response to Prisoner Education

As mentioned earlier, in the first years of the Occupation, prisoners conducted their discussions in whispers, out of earshot of the administration. With time, however, prisoner organization was impossible to hide, and education was conducted with the full knowledge of the administration. Given the supposed threat level of these individuals, why would the administration have allowed such highly structured and organized educational programs to develop and persist? Why, for example, did they not more frequently employ techniques of solitary confinement to keep potential leaders out of the fray?

Since the foundation of the state of Israel, the authorities have employed techniques that dehumanize Palestinians and widen the cultural gulf between Israelis and Palestinians.⁶⁸⁰ Israel employed Palestinian “spies” inside the prisons, who, when it came educational programming, could relay information about the political lectures and discussions. Prison authorities also sought to circumscribe intellectual autonomy at various times during the 1970s and 1980s. During the early years of the Occupation, before the Red Cross starting carrying in books, prisoners report that the Israelis used reading materials as a way to cultivate conflict between prisoners by only allowing books

⁶⁸⁰ Examples today are plentiful. Take, for example, the slow erosion of Arabic teaching inside Israeli schools, or the fact that in mixed cities like Jerusalem the school systems are largely segregated. The very real and pronounced presence of snaking concrete separation/security fence creates a physical and thus cultural separation, too.

on religious subjects or Marxism. Thus, one way of seeing the prison “school” was “an extension of the prison regime’s technologies of coercion and bodily violence.”⁶⁸¹

Interestingly, however, Palestinian educational efforts upended such constructs.

Education empowered and humanized prisons, while also enabling greater complex understandings amongst the prisoners of Israeli culture, through the Hebrew language and extensive reading on Zionism and the Israeli political system. The prison educational system of the 1970s and 1980s yielded a generation of mid-level leaders employed by the Palestinian Authority of the post-Oslo period

This attempt at sowing division reached fruition with the Israeli-supported creation of Hamas in the late 1980s. The Israeli prison administration used reading material as a carrot and stick, suspending access to book when prisoners went on hunger strike or rebelled in other ways. During this period, Palestinians reportedly sought access to degree-granting programs, especially since criminal prisoners had been allowed to study in Israeli prisons since 1978. Qaymery recounts working hard in Ramle prison during that same year to secure similar privileges for his compatriots. Although Bir Zeit agreed to be the degree-granting partner in absentia, and although Qaymery had tens of interested individuals, the Israelis first reportedly pondered and then rejected the plan.⁶⁸²

It was not until 1994, beyond the scope of this dissertation’s archival material, that Israel granted their “security prisoners” the right to study inside their prisons, following a 14-day hunger strike in 1992 and the Oslo Agreements.⁶⁸³ Criminal prisoners already had this access, and Palestinian prisoners sought it. The Tel Aviv Open

⁶⁸¹ In discussing the US penal system in *Forced Passages*, Dylan Rodriguez discusses this idea.

⁶⁸² Qaymery interview, American Colony Hotel, September 2012.

⁶⁸³ Asaf Shtull-Trauring, “In Israeli Jails, Palestinian Prisoners Prove the Most Studious,” *Ha’aretz*, June 27, 2011; Mohammed Daraghme, “In Israeli jails, Palestinians still earning degrees,” *Times of Israel*, January 28, 2014.

University and Hebrew University of Jerusalem were the most popular choices for prisoners. There was a limit to what the prisoners could study, for security reasons and lack of facilities: banned subjects included the sciences, such as physics, chemistry and biology, as well as political nationalism. With the opening of access to open university systems⁶⁸⁴, most prisoners chose to study political science/international relations, Israeli society or Israeli Arab Society, Islamic studies, history of the Middle East, genocide history, although “all courses of study must be approved by the prison service.”⁶⁸⁵ In the early 2000s, prisoners were restricted to studying in Hebrew so the Israeli Prison services could be monitored.

According to a June 2011 article, just two months before access to formal education was halted for Palestinian prisoners, the Open University of Tel Aviv’s degree granting program was extremely popular amongst Palestinian prisoners, with 270 studying for degrees as opposed to just 60 criminal prisoners.⁶⁸⁶ It helps that the Palestinian Authority covered the prisoners’ tuition, with the goal of building an educated society. The Israeli Prison Service halted this program in 2011, according to newspaper reports “as part of a series of sanctions against prisoners,” in particular for Gilad Shalit’s continued captivity in Gaza.⁶⁸⁷ In spite of his release, the programs have not restarted. Still, Palestinians have demonstrated remarkable resilience, continuing to pursue their degrees in secret with universities in the West Bank and Gaza. Marwan Barghouti, according to his wife Fadwa Barghouti, completed his doctorate entitled “The Legislative

⁶⁸⁴ The Tel Aviv Open University and the Al Quds Open University were the most popular. With rolling admissions and remote study options, these were the ideal choices for prisoners.

⁶⁸⁵ Shtull-Trauring discusses this. Abu El Haj and Jabril Rajoub obtained their PhDs through this system, both of them focused on Israel Studies.

⁶⁸⁶ Asaf Shtull-Trauring.

⁶⁸⁷ Mohammed Daraghme, “In Israeli jails, Palestinians still earning degrees,” *Times of Israel*, January 28, 2014.

and Political Performance of the Palestinian Legislative Council and its Contribution to the Democratic Process in Palestine from 1996 to 2008,” at Cairo University in 2010. Although some might see the period of 1994 to 2011 as offering Palestinians ultimate educational access, this period witnessed the unraveling of the highly functioning, inspirational informal system.

Conclusion

As this chapter illustrated, the educational system developed inside Israeli prisons by the 1980s went far beyond that which emerged in the often-compared context of South Africa. What began as an informal effort by a small handful of individuals in the 1970s unfolded into an organized, productive and intellectually inspired system and curriculum that was codified in writing beginning in the early 1980s. A constantly evolving curriculum that encouraged careful reading and thought, alongside writing and guided discussion, offered thousands of Palestinian political prisoners an education unrivaled by that which they could have obtained on the outside. Offering a confined site free of political interruptions, alongside a stable, immovable population, the prison as educational site fell under the auspices of educated Palestinians rather than buckling under the weight of outside influences. The prison as site of education is remarkable, too, from the perspective of politicization. Although the Israeli prisons of the 1970s and 1980s were intended to mitigate security risks, in practice they grouped together hundreds of politically active individuals within spaces where they shared and developed ideas. Through struggle, dedication and a belief in the necessity of education for the benefit of

the maintaining prison resistance and for the wider struggle, these spaces intended for punishment were transformed into sites where prisoners learned about the ideological underpinnings, structure and the goals of the Fatah movement and the resistance more generally; they served as laboratories for sprouting political thought and plans. Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, this evolution in political ideology and plans is best exemplified by the stoking of the First Intifada flames inside the prisons. Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, it was during the early 1980s, behind these oppressive walls, when the group that came to be known as the Unified Leadership began to coalesce.⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁸ This topic will be taken up in part in the conclusion, but more substantially when the dissertation is revised into a book.

Chapter Five

The Dissolving Collective

As illustrated in the previous chapters, Israeli prisons in which Palestinian political prisoners were held are more notable as sites where collectivity reigned than as places of punishment. Political structures that promoted democratic elections and decision-making, as well as an educational system that inspired collaborative learning and vibrant dialogue, existed in the wider Palestinian resistance movement as a model and/or ideal rather than a widespread trend. And yet, it was this cooperative spirit that the Diaspora-based resistance movement promoted in order to garner international attention and respect. Through political poster art, the PLO, with Fatah at its helm, sought to internationally legitimize the Palestinian resistance as both part of a global liberation movement and also as representing all Palestinians, both throughout the Diaspora and within Palestine's historic borders. As this chapter will show, political posters were key to promoting this message of collectivity and cooperation. Moreover, both the PLO and Fatah appropriated the political prisoner experience to showcase these ideals in lieu of highlighting their top-down functioning. Through a range of political poster examples, this chapter shows how the visual shift from collective to individual representation reflects a significant change in the spirit of the prisoner movement since the 1980s, as well as a shift in the political goals of the PLO and Fatah.

The Aesthetics of the Palestinian Global Resistance

From the PLO's inception, the leaders pursued international legitimacy for the Palestinian resistance. According to the 1968 Palestinian National Charter, armed struggle was the only true path, however the political poster tells a slightly amended story: while violent resistance was key, so too was Palestinian incorporation into the international liberation network.⁶⁸⁹ Political posters were a critical medium through which Fatah and the PLO pursued this goal. As early as 1964, Fatah is said to have opened a small printing press in Amman with the intention of producing revolutionary imagery, however there are no accessible surviving examples.⁶⁹⁰ One scholar surmises that this press was intended to produce leaflets and posters for the purposes of recruiting new members to the faction, while another, artist and Fatah member Shafiq Radwan, claims posters were distributed across the Diaspora community, especially in Jordanian and Lebanese refugee camps. Underscoring the importance of this political art as part of an effort to internationalize the resistance movement, by the early 1970s, posters were produced in centralized offices that were overseen by individual factions, the PLO, or other unions.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁸⁹ Although images have been critical to advancing the resistance movement, there is noticeable scholarship vacuum. This is in spite of the fact that hundreds of political posters survive today from the 1970s and 1980s when the medium was alive and vibrant. Sources that do exist are published by the PLO themselves, such as Shafiq Radwan's *The Palestinian Poster*, are related to one of the exhibitions that have been held since the late 1960s, or are passing examples in other texts on the political poster (The catalogue *Forces of Change: Artists in the Arab World*, by Salwa Nashashibi, Etel Adnan and Laura Nader also mentions Palestinian poster art). As Anthony Downey, editor of *Dissonant Archives: Contemporary Visual Culture and Competing Narratives*, points out, for those interested in the portrayal of the Palestinian resistance, there are excellent collections available to the viewer, albeit incomplete. Like much of Palestine's historical material, political posters are scattered around the world, throughout the Diaspora, as well as at the Abu Jihad Museum in Abu Dis, the American University of Beirut, the British Museum and the Library of Congress. The most organized and complete collection is available online at the Palestinian Poster Project Archive (PPPA).

⁶⁹⁰ Jonathan Schanzer, "The Challenge of Hamas to Fatah," *Middle East Quarterly*, 10:2, Spring 2003, 29-38, p.30. International press also refers to the 1960s as an active period in poster making. See, for example, the *New York Times*, "P.L.O. to use posters to get its message across," June 29, 1989. According to the curator of the PPPA, this vacuum could be attributed to the fact that early posters were untrimmed, indicating they were printed on a newspaper press using newsprint rather than a poster press with higher quality paper. See Walsh, unpublished MA thesis, 38.

⁶⁹¹ This is significant since other resistance and activist communities were not always as centralized when it came to their poster art. The 1968 uprising in France was promoted largely by student posters made from simple materials including homemade silkscreen

One way that Fatah spoke to an international community was by promoting their military victories against their Israeli oppressors. Among the posters surviving from the early Occupation, a spate of those featuring combat scenes publically commemorated the resistance fighters' successes. Such images were clearly intended to spur on recruitment by glorifying the expanding revolutionary movement. According to the Palestinian Poster Project Archive (PPPA), tens of posters were published between 1967 and 1971, for the express purpose of raising regional interest in the movement. As Radwan confirms, a Fatah series was almost entirely focused on glorifying al Karamah.⁶⁹²



The above poster, dating to 1968 and the first in the series, illustrates characteristics common with other images from this time: simple, yet overt symbolism of struggle and victory, with the fighter charging forward, weapon in hand, the only word on the poster

frames, paint and paper (see Gary Yanker, "The political poster: a worldwide phenomenon," *World affairs*, 133:3, December 1970, 215-223). In the 1970s, for example, efforts to free political prisoners in the US resulted in thousands of "hand-scrawled" posters appearing around California (see for example Tom Wilson, Chapter One in *West of Center: Art and Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965-1977*, University of Minnesota Press, 2012). Likewise, Chicano posters were created by community-based artists and activists at the grassroots (see Chapter 7 by George Lipsitz of *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*, published as part of the Critical American Studies Series by the University of Minnesota Press in 2001).

⁶⁹² Radwan, *The Palestinian Poster*.

positioned inside the sun, *al assifa*⁶⁹³, marking it as Fatah's work. As in many posters, bullets are iconic; they underscore preparedness and professionalism of the male *fedayeen*, portrayed as extraordinarily powerful. Especially in the first two decades of poster production, featured individuals are nameless, which speaks to intentional anonymity similar to that of Fatah's written documents in the same period.⁶⁹⁴

The PLO and Fatah pursued international recognition through public displays of such poster art. Fatah, with PLO backing, hosted the first event in 1968 at the Beirut Arab University entitled "The International Exhibition for Palestine." This was the first of many shows intended to accomplish the goal of raising awareness and spreading the resistance message. Coming in the wake of the 1967 war, it was "specifically intended to display the range of global support enjoyed by the Palestinians,"⁶⁹⁵ and also to invite additional involvement. Just one year later, the Baghdad International Poster Exhibition focused on two themes: "The Struggle of the Third World For Cultural and Political Liberation" and "Palestine: A Homeland Denied." The Iraqi Cultural Centre in London hosted, allowing for wide audience viewing.⁶⁹⁶ Many exhibits followed over the years, around Europe and the Middle East. What is unacknowledged but striking about these exhibits is that they were intended for Diaspora Palestinians and foreigners, a kind of public relations for the resistance.⁶⁹⁷ Efforts to increase international notoriety were not

⁶⁹³ This refers to Fatah's military wing.

⁶⁹⁴ As I will discuss later in the chapter, it is not until the 1990s that individuals are regularly transformed into icons of the movement.

⁶⁹⁵ Charles Tripp, *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East* (London: Cambridge University Press), 267.

Tripp included a short analysis of Palestinian poster art in order to illustrate that resistance art tends to emanate from places where the established authority is weak. Thus, his three page entry is primarily focused on posters produced in Beirut and serves as a comparison for his description of late 1970s Iranian poster art.

⁶⁹⁶ Radwan talks about this event in his book. Beirut was considered local given that it was hosted by Fatah leaders. The London exhibit is also referenced in a footnote in Anthony Downey, ed., *Dissonant Archives: Contemporary Visual Culture and Competing Narratives*. Tripp also mentions it on p. 267 in his short discussion of Palestinian posters.

⁶⁹⁷ Interestingly, the winner of the Baghdad competition was not even a Palestinian, but Polish artist Jacek Kowalski. Kowalski and his winning piece are mentioned in many contemporary reviews of the PPPA, including one by Karen Olson, "Exhibition Denied," *Utne*

without success. Indeed, the 1980 National Council of the PLO included representatives from Palestinian communities across the Diaspora, including approximately 60 individuals residing in places as far apart as Saudi Arabia and the United States; the job of these 60 individuals was to represent the approximately 2.5 million diasporic Palestinians living in their home countries.

Like the exhibited posters, other public relations materials intended for international consumption were produced in the Diaspora and geared towards highlighting a faceless collectivity. The PLO launched public relations-style offices to help shape their image. For example, the Palestine Information Office in Washington D.C. was opened in the late 1970s to distribute news releases and pamphlets, spreading the word about the PLO and its goings on.⁶⁹⁸ By this time, the PLO had achieved two milestones: first, widespread formal acknowledgement as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and secondly, status as an observer mission in the United Nations. Moreover, as of 1981, over 100 nation states had recognized the PLO, and 60 countries had welcomed the opening of Palestinian diplomatic missions. Poster art helped support these efforts.

The sheer number of refugees beyond the historic borders meant that a liberation movement would confront a range of national and colonial policies across the globe. As one scholar has argued, “The PLO was thus, from the outset, conditioned to imagine a

Reader, March/April 2001. It can be viewed here: <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/palestine-a-homeland-denied-kowalski-original>.

⁶⁹⁸ This office was closed in 1988 during the First Intifada. See Rajai M. Abu-Khadra, “The Closure of the PLO Offices,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* (vol. 17, no. 3), Spring 1988, 51-62.

political community that was dispersed globally.”⁶⁹⁹ To that end, the PLO actively “capitalized on an international network for anti-imperialist activists in order to expand the terrain of its anti-imperialist agenda;”⁷⁰⁰ they were committed to a “global offensive” against Israeli imperialism.⁷⁰¹ This commitment dated to the public statement of 1973, when the Palestinian National Congress submitted a 10-Point Program to the United Nations, declaring their solidarity with anti-imperialist groups worldwide.⁷⁰² This was followed by Arafat’s 1974 visit to the U.N., which catapulted the Palestinian issue to center stage, including in Latin American society, which was rife with resistance movements.⁷⁰³ The PLO forged relationships with other liberation movements across the globe, such as the Black Panthers, groups in Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America.⁷⁰⁴ From Fatah’s first formal visit to China in 1964 through the mid-1970s, it was “the most consistent big power supporter of the Palestinian guerrilla organizations, arming them, criticizing them, seeking to unify them and... providing moral and material support.”⁷⁰⁵

Political posters point to a desire to be part of a global liberation movement, which Charles Tripp notes were focused on “extolling Palestinian resistance...mainly

⁶⁹⁹ Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary*, University of North Carolina Press, 2014, 114 “10-Point Program of the PLO (1974).” See the site for the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, <http://www.un.int/wcm/content/site/palestine/cache/offonce/pid/12354;jsessionid=ED2AC7E70A82F5C7CCB42BC6357FCDEC>.

⁷⁰⁰ Lubin, 114.

⁷⁰¹ Paul Chamberlain, 3.

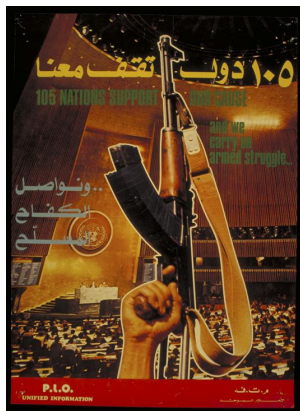
⁷⁰² Palestine Liberation Organization, “10-Point Program of the PLO (1974).” Accessible at the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, <http://www.un.int/wcm/content/site/palestine/cache/offonce/pid/12354;jsessionid=ED2AC7E70A82F5C7CCB42BC6357FCDEC>

⁷⁰³ See Juan Abugattas, “The Perception of the Palestinian Question in Latin America,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Spring 1982, 117-128.

⁷⁰⁴ For more on the PLO’s international relationships, see Augustus Richard Norton and Martin H. Greenberg, *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organization* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press), 1989. For more on ties to Latin America, see Cecilia Baeza, “Palestinians in Latin America: Between Assimilation and Long-Distance Nationalism,” *Journal for Palestine Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2013/14.

⁷⁰⁵ Lillian Craig Harris, “China’s Relations with the PLO,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, autumn 1977, 123-54, p. 123. See also John K. Cooley, “China and the Palestinians,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (winter 1972), 19-34, 25.

outside Palestinian territory.”⁷⁰⁶ Such posters promoted a dual purpose: to appeal to an international audience, but also to remind Palestinians that they were part of a global resistance movement. Thus, wide accessibility was key, in terms of imagery and accompanying language. According to Walsh’s broad assessment of posters from his work with PPPA, from around 1974 posters began to carry faction logos and/or artist signatures, but also captions in many languages. He notes that one of the earliest posters directly speaking to the international community was a Fatah poster entitled “105 Nations Stand with Us,” shown here:



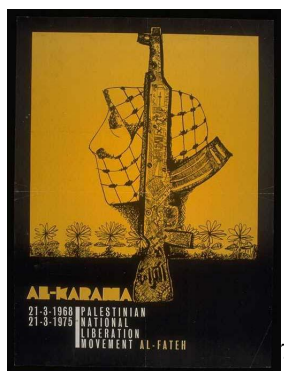
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From that point forward, many surviving Fatah posters speak to this outward-facing urge. For example, this poster designed by well-known poster artists Hosni Radwan, who worked out of Beirut in the 1970s and 1980s.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁶ Tripp, 262.

⁷⁰⁷ <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/105-nations-stand-with-us>. This poster is also cited on p. 38 of Walsh’s unpublished thesis.

⁷⁰⁸ He has no relation to Shafiq Radwan whose work is referenced earlier in the chapter.



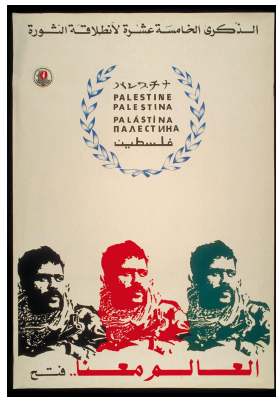
709

Published in 1975 by the Fatah movement, it commemorates their successful battle at al Karameh seven years earlier. For the purposes of this chapter, there are two points of interest in this poster. First, the commemoration is intended for an international audience, to promote the Fatah faction's victory against the Israelis. The only Arabic on the entire poster are the words "*al Karameh*" lightly inscribed on the base of the weapon. Secondly, this poster features a man with a *keffiyeh* obscuring his face, which is not even directed towards the viewer. This anonymous fighter can thus take on any identity. As Tripp points out in regards to Palestinian poster art, they "show through their languages and their iconography, the intention was to create international awareness of the plight of the Palestinians, stressing the need for global solidarity in the ongoing struggle with Israel."⁷¹⁰ This poster also reflects Fatah's urge to commemorate and seek connection through such remembrance. PPPA features countless examples of artistic commemorations of the beginning of the Revolution (January, 1965), Land Day (March 30th) and the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People (November 29th).

⁷⁰⁹ This poster can be viewed at: <http://www.palestineposterproject.org>

⁷¹⁰ Tripp, 267. Gary Yanker also makes one passing reference to this international agenda in "The political poster: a worldwide phenomenon," *World affairs*, 133:3, December 1970, 215-223, p. 220.

Similarly targeting an international audience, but also speaking directly to diaspora Palestinians is the below poster designed by the artist Muwaffak Matta in 1980.



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Like the al Karamah poster, this, too, seeks to commemorate, however does not invite the international audience to participate in that aspect. Rather, remembering the 15th anniversary of the Revolution’s launch is called for in Arabic at the top of the poster. The bottom text also speaks to a Palestinian audience, reminding them that “the world is with us... Fatah.” And yet, the middle of the poster draws one’s immediate attention, featuring multiple languages encased by branches that represent an internationally recognized symbol of peace. A face adorns the poster – nameless and unidentifiable, a common theme in early posters– humanizing the revolutionary effort. Posters such as this one were not intended only to recruit new *fedayeen*. Rather, they can be read as reaching out beyond the borders of Palestine to emphasize belonging to a worldwide resistance. As Tripp says, posters “affirmed the existence of community and the presence not simply of an abstract Palestinian nation but also of the organization claiming to speak in its name.”⁷¹²

⁷¹¹ This poster can be viewed at: <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/>.

⁷¹² Tripp, 264.

This kind of dual messaging appears in many posters from the mid-1970s through the 1980s. Dating to 1980, designed by the popular artist Radwan, and published by both Fatah and the PLO, this poster reminds the international community that Palestine is seeking Arab solidarity.



The Arabic text is more interesting, however, proclaiming “Palestine needs the weapons of all of the Arabs.” By sending a softer message to the international community, Fatah and the PLO speak a language of international resistance to oppression and colonialism, rather than violence.

Augmenting efforts to raise their global profile, the PLO and Fatah also engaged in public relations within the Occupied Territories. Leaflets were produced by local affiliates of the Diaspora-based movement, and distributed around the West Bank and Gaza Strip to recruit and promote the work of the leadership.⁷¹⁴ From the mid-1970s, some attention was directed towards building infrastructure for the purposes of promoting the PLO’s ability to provide state-like services. One example is the establishment of the

⁷¹³ This poster can be viewed at: <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/palestine-needs-arab-solidarity>

⁷¹⁴ Such materials were monitored by the ruling powers, first by the Jordanians and the Egyptians and then by the Israelis. Plastering of such leaflets on walls or buildings would result in immediate removal upon discovery, or worse: until the Oslo Accords, as Toufic Haddad points out in “Martyrs and Markets: Exploring the Palestinian Visual Public Sphere,” “expressions of Palestinian nationalism were severely repressed by Israel through killings, beatings, imprisonment, torture, fines, and censorship” (see *Media and Political Contestation in the Contemporary Arab World*, Lena Jayyusi and Anne Sofie Roald, eds.). To this day, putting up political posters in the West Bank is defined by Israeli military law as a security threat and is therefore illegal (as is writing political slogans, taking part in demonstrations, or belonging to a political party). For more on this, see Addameer, “A report on the status of defense lawyers in Israeli military courts, (Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, April 2008), pg. 7

Palestine Red Crescent Society, which launched hospitals and clinics around the Middle East where Palestinians resided.⁷¹⁵ By the 1980s, Fatah realized that maintaining “its centrality in the Palestinian national movement” meant focusing on the Occupied Territories. To that end, the group spotlighted its “break with its previous emphasis on clandestine military action” and put its weight behind social programs and non-violent political activity, which “effectively transformed [it] from a shadowy network into a mass movement.”⁷¹⁶

Besides the use of leaflets to promote the diaspora-based movement within historic Palestine, some political posters were produced in Beirut, Jordan, and other locales specifically for an audience in the Territories. According to the Israeli Military Order 1010 of August 1967 entitled the “Order Concerning Prohibition of Incitement and Hostile Propaganda,” political posters were seen as a form of incitement for violent resistance. Thus posters produced in the Diaspora had to be smuggled in and cleverly employed metaphorical symbols with messages only locals could decode.⁷¹⁷ As one Ramallah-based commentator has rightly pointed out, “posters created for local consumption and part of the daily visual environment have a different role to play from that of the press and a different audience to address.”⁷¹⁸ For Fatah and the PLO, this meant recruitment to the movement, as evidenced by the below poster:

⁷¹⁵ See Cheryl Rubenberg, “The Civilian Infrastructure of the PLO: An Analysis for the PLO in Lebanon until June 1982,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, Spring 1983, 54-78.

⁷¹⁶ Sayigh, 256 - 257.

⁷¹⁷ One example, hung in the 1996 exhibit at the Contemporary Art Museum in Raleigh featured a painting of young daughter of a prisoner. The accompanying text interprets this poster as “a reminder of the Palestinian prisoners who were deprived of being with their families.” Contemporary Art Museum exhibition booklet, Raleigh, 20. Many of these posters became so well known by the Israelis that routine house searches that turned one up could result in confiscation or arrest.

⁷¹⁸ Mahmoud Abu Hashhash, “On the Visual Representation to Martyrdom in Palestine,” *Third Text*, 20:3/4, May/July, 2006. 391-406, p. 391.



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This is one example of a PLO poster that was reportedly smuggled into and widely circulated within the West Bank. Produced by an unknown artist, but entitled “We are the Revolutionaries,” it maintains the PLO/Fatah early commitment to anonymity. As a recruitment tool, this image reminds the viewer that the revolution is total, and needs the support and participation of women, children, and men. This is part of a poster trend that “took up the theme of steadfastness [*sumud*]. They used the common imagery of popular revolutionary and resistance movements to suggest that the people’s endurance and indeed their sheer numbers would win the struggle against occupation.”⁷²⁰ Each is looking in a different direction for the enemy and each is holding a weapon, with no exception for age or gender, underscoring *fedayeen* inclusiveness.

Thus, Fatah and PLO poster art vibrantly illustrates that the Palestinian Diaspora leadership was attentive to their public relations strategy. Drawing on the internationally recognizable medium of political poster art, the factions were able to join the discourse of global resistance.

⁷¹⁹ This poster was featured in the Raleigh exhibit, and recorded in the Contemporary Art Museum exhibition booklet, Raleigh, p. 52.

⁷²⁰ Tripp, 265.

The Political Prisoner: The Faceless Collectivity

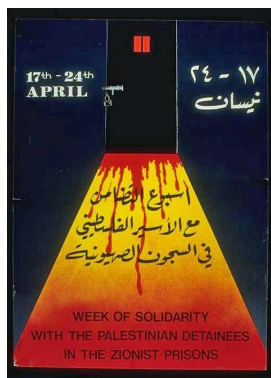
A survey of surviving images clearly demonstrated that political prisoners have been a trope in Palestinian poster art since the early 1970s.⁷²¹ Indeed, the PLO and Fatah mobilized the intentional anonymity and collectivity of the political prisoner experience of the 1970s to internationally project a particular image of the resistance movement.⁷²² This section will highlight a selection of these posters, illustrating how the faction appropriated the political prisoner for the purposes of international propaganda. It builds on Zeina Maasri's notion, expounded upon in her book on political posters during the Lebanese Civil War, that the poster does not record a fixed identity, but rather provides the canvas on which it is cultivated.⁷²³ In so doing, I trace the evolution of posters that reference Israeli prisons, the prison experience or the political prisoners themselves. The images of the 1970s and early 1980s, either completely faceless or featuring anonymous individuals, shifted dramatically by the second Intifada into those focusing on specific individuals who in turn became icons of the movement, a style that continues until today. As the majority of posters were not produced inside the Territories, and certainly not inside the prisons, images can be read as reflective of a changing relationship between the prisoner movement and the Palestinian resistance in the four decades after the beginning of the Occupation.

⁷²¹ Surprisingly, however, given their prominent presence, I have been unable to locate substantial scholarship that references these images.

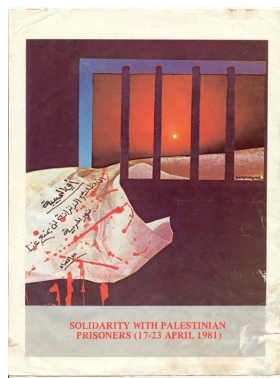
⁷²² Among the earliest posters featuring political prisoners were those focused on the experience at the hands of the Jordanians. Two such images, one 1971 PFLP poster, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/ reactionary-jordanian-prisons>, and another 1972 DFLP image, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/the-second-anniversary-of-the-september-massacre>, reacted to Jordanian treatment of Palestinian refugees who ended up in their detention centers, undoubtedly for the perceived threat Palestinian political factions posed to the royal family's power.

⁷²³ Zeina Maasri, *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War*, London: IB Tauris, 2009

For the Fatah faction of the 1970s, political posters highlighting the political prisoner issue were a common form of advertising. They fit into a category identified by art historian Alan Gowans called “persuasive art,” which he notes is intended to play on our ethics and morals to make a “psychological hard sell.”⁷²⁴ For Fatah, prisoners held in Zionist detention inside Israel or the Territories served as evocative tools to raise awareness of the conflict, as well a means of garnering sympathy for Palestinian suffering. Like other Fatah posters, those featuring prison issues tended to speak to both international and Palestinian audiences. Posters such as those featured below (left, circa 1975; right, 1981) also play on the Fatah/PLO narrative of commemoration. Fatah and the PLO created an annual day of solidarity with the prisoners, which they could then use as a platform for internationalizing the Palestinian issue.⁷²⁵ Like countless other posters, they include English and Arabic script, with the intention of speaking to two audiences: the Palestinian Diaspora, but also to an international audience.



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⁷²⁴ Alan Gowans, “Posters as Persuasive Arts in Society,” *Art Journal*, 44:1, Spring 1984, 9-10.

⁷²⁵ To this day, April 17th marks solidarity with Palestinian detainees.

⁷²⁶ <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/in-the-zionist-prisons>

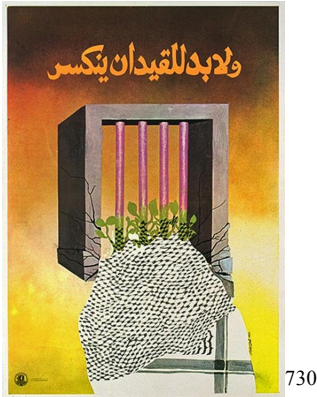
⁷²⁷ <http://palestineposterproject.org/poster/solidarity-with-palestinian-prisoners>

In both, the imagery is vivid: streaming blood evokes the torture and suffering of the prison; the locked door with only a small grated window common in many prisons of the 1970s speaks to isolation and restrictions; and the sun peeking through the bars, both of which are common in prison imagery. Also like other Fatah posters, in the 1981 image, the Arabic text sends a different message from the English: “To my love: the darkness of the prison cell will not hinder us from the light of freedom.” A message of this nature glorifies the prison experience as a kind of suffering that inspires rather than quashes political dreams and even action. The act of stoking a solidarity movement that is international in scope might evoke sympathy, but offers no call for an end for an end to the experience. The act of creating an annual day of solidarity speaks to a kind of perpetuity of the cause. For posters that intend to mobilize, that are “something that makes people march,”⁷²⁸ Fatah’s goal here is to augment the resistance movement writ large rather than supporting specific prisoner-born initiatives. By viewing the prison experience through the bars and/or the door of a solitary confinement cell, as featured on these posters, the international audience sees nothing of the weapons and violence involved in Palestinian resistance. The international viewer would see the cruelty of such punishment, while the Palestinian resident within the Territories might view the blood differently: as blood spilled in an act of martyrdom inside political prisons.⁷²⁹

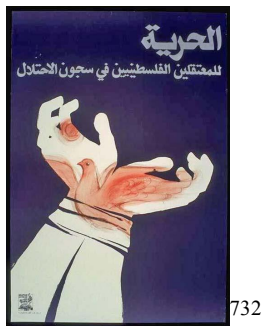
To support their mission, posters reflecting the prison experience drew on images that had been imbued with meaning by the Revolution. The *keffiyeh* and the olive branch appear in the Hosni Radwan’s 1981 Fatah poster below:

⁷²⁸ Gowans, “Posters as Persuasive Arts in Society,” *Art Journal*, 44:1, Spring 1984, 9-10, p. 10.

⁷²⁹ Poster circulation numbers, as well as the way in which they were received internationally, both demand further investigation, which is beyond the scope of this current project.



Speaking to an Arabic-reading audience, this poster proclaims “the chains must inevitably break,” provocative language that extends beyond prison walls to the Occupation more generally. In a similar vein, a 1985 Fatah poster incorporates the oft-used symbol of the dove, the universal symbol of purity, as well as of freedom and hope for Palestinians:⁷³¹



Floating above the two doves mapped onto bound hands, Arabic script calls for “Freedom for the Palestinian detainees in the prisons of the Occupation.” In both of these posters, one can see that the prisoner experience is a site for the cultivation of resistance identity,

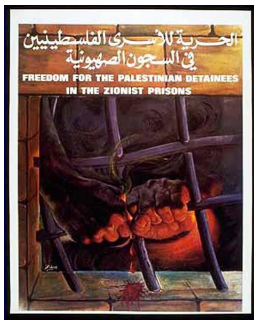
⁷³⁰ <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/the-chains-must-break-inevitably>

⁷³¹ Many Palestinian artists include the dove in their paintings and sculptures. For example, see Mohammed Rowkwe’s series of paintings completed during his time imprisoned in Asqalon in the late 1980s, or art by the well known artist Ismael Shammout. Interestingly, in Biblical mythology the dove also represents the ideal Israel, as the bird that was sent out of the Ark in the Noah story

⁷³² Contemporary Art Museum exhibition booklet, Raleigh, 63.

without speaking to the specifics of prison, both its horrors and the successes discussed in earlier chapters of this work.

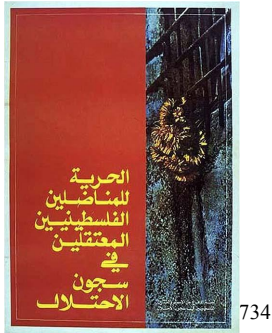
As the above posters illustrate, those produced in the 1970s and 1980s by Fatah were almost always faceless, as they were intended to promote the faction broadly. Such images spoke in generalities, including calling for “freedom,” such as in the below poster (left) published by Fatah in 1984:



733

Not unlike the four posters discussed thus far in this section, this one also uses vibrant imagery of prison bars cutting into an inmate’s hand, demanding “freedom” and all its accompaniments. Such posters speak to the way in which Fatah as a Diaspora-based organization connected itself with the suffering of those surviving the Occupation within the Territories. Indeed one can see how the political prisoner and the prison experience were used as tools to help achieve the blanket demands of organizations “fighting” for Palestinian freedom and rights. The prison as trope was popularized not only by Fatah’s many posters, but also by those produced by organizations, including The Committee for the Defense of Palestinian Prisoners and Detainees in the Prisons of the Occupation (below):

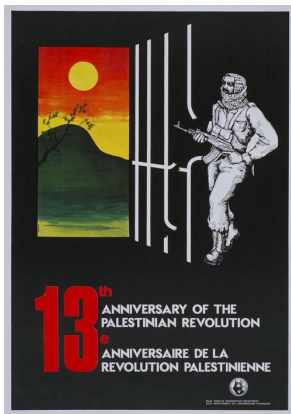
⁷³³ IBID, 57.



734

Adorned only with Arabic script, this 1985 image features the familiar prison bars, a rope, and language calling for “Freedom of Palestinian detainees in the Occupation’s prisons.”

Almost all posters before the First Intifada remained impersonal, even when they featured the image of a human being. In the three examples shown below, dating to 1978, 1981, and 1983 (from left to right), individual men are front and center.



735



736



737

All three of these posters are plainly commemorative. On the far left, the image of the startlingly beautiful landscape and the fighter breaking through the prison bars displays power in the 13th year of the Palestinian Revolution. The message is to both English and

⁷³⁴ <http://palestineposterproject.org/poster/prisons-of-the-occupation>

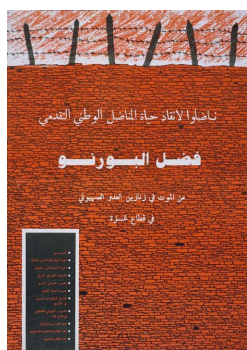
⁷³⁵ <http://palestineposterproject.org/poster/13e-anniversaire-de-la-revolution-palestinienne>

⁷³⁶ <http://palestineposterproject.org/poster/steadfast-in-the-prisons-of-the-enemy>

⁷³⁷ <http://palestineposterproject.org/poster/Fatah-18-années-de-lutte-armée>

French speaking audiences. The fighter's head is wrapped in the Palestinian *keffiyeh*, but he is without a particular identity. The middle poster also features an unknown man, extending the peace symbol beyond the oppressive bars. In contrast with his assertion, the text reads “steadfastness in the prisons of the enemy,” underscoring the fierce will of Palestinians to win through peaceful means, even whilst imprisoned. Finally, the poster on the right combines the symbol of determination and power – the raised fist – with the more passive two-fingered peace symbol. Commemorating 18 years of Fatah's armed struggle, this poster speaks to the many angles the faction claims to have taken in its efforts to liberate Palestine. By remaining anonymous and/or faceless, posters of the 1970s and 1980s did not cultivate human icons as representative of the resistance movement.

Although most posters continued to remain unidentified with particular people, the early 1980s witnessed the very beginning of a shift towards connecting individual stories with the movement. The 1983 poster below was designed for an Arabic-speaking audience to make public and resist one individual's experience inside an Israeli prison:



738

The text asserts reads: “We are struggling to save the life of the progressive, patriotic

⁷³⁸ See the Raleigh Exhibition Booklet.

fighter, Fadil Al Borno, from death in a prison cell in the Zionist prison in Gaza,” and the signatories of the effort were many, listed in the left hand black box of the poster, including:

“The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)

The Iraqi Socialist Front

The Egyptian Socialist Front

The Popular Struggle Front

Coalition of Egyptian nationals in foreign countries

The Palestinian Socialist Front in the Gaza Strip

The Union of Asian and African Writers

The Union of Palestinian Writers and Journalists

The Union of Lebanese Writers

Fatah”

This poster speaks to a united front against the Occupation, even though the factions encountered many moments of disagreement that sometimes turned violent. Punishment and torture were issues around which all of the movements could rally. They were also a direct line to other politically oppressed people around the world; the colonial prison was an internationally shared experience, not to mention a vibrant image that could speak to a wide audience via a political poster.

Thus, Fatah and the PLO employed the image of prisoners and prisons in the service of generating international interest in and support for the movement. The posters

addressing the Arabic-speaking audience were intended to help cultivate, shape and sustain a collective Palestinian identity. Via references to the prisoner experience, Fatah humanized their Diaspora-based movement by connecting it with the very poignant experience of those suffering inside the Territories on behalf of the resistance movement's cause. As the next section will illustrate, visual illustrations related to the prisoner experience produced by Fatah and the PLO slowly began to highlight the experience of specific individuals rather than that of a collective.

From the Collective to the Individual

In the early 1980s, the operations of the PLO and Fatah were impacted by the expulsion from Lebanon, its last foothold in a country adjacent to Israel, and a splintering of the resistance with a mutiny in Fatah's ranks. Both of these events had serious consequences for the leadership. First, they faced an erosion of the institutional infrastructure, and second, they had to struggle to maintain their power. As a result, the movement's self-conceptualization began to shift: Arafat and his fellow leaders to sharpen their focus on establishing a presence in the Occupied Territories; they "eschewed military action, focusing instead on voluntary work and socio-political mobilization and so gaining quasi-legality."⁷³⁹ So too, Arafat was increasingly emphasizing a diplomatic solution to the conflict, publicly embracing a two-state solution that would establish an independent Palestinian state alongside an Israeli one. By the time of the First Intifada, the PLO had clearly asserted itself as representing a state-in-waiting. This entailed not only downplaying guerrilla actions, but also opening dialogues with

⁷³⁹ Sayigh, 257.

various political powers. Reversing a 1975 ban on discussions with the US about the future of a Palestinian state, the PLO announced in late 1988 its decision to open a dialogue with the superpower in 1988.⁷⁴⁰ This move involved compromise and giving into certain international demands, including the acknowledgement of the right of Israel to exist, accepting UN resolution 242, renouncing guerrilla activity, and accepting the two-state solution along the 1947 partition lines.⁷⁴¹ By the time of the First Intifada, the PLO, with Fatah at its helm, were so focused on maintaining their own power from their seat in Tunis that projecting an image of unity was no longer the first priority.

The cracks in the wider resistance movement's image of unity were also reflected inside the prison movement. For starters, the unified leadership of the First Intifada, "graduates of Israel's prison system,"⁷⁴² did not work in total concert with Tunis. Internally, they maintained some semblance of collectivity through the First Intifada. As Khalidi pointed out, the "arrest of one person [led] to the immediate replacement by another representative of the group..." and thus the unified leadership was able to "avoid paralyzing differences" and to operate by "a rule of consensus."⁷⁴³ And yet, the competition between the local Intifada leaders and those in the Diaspora solidified with Oslo, when many of those leaders were ostracized in the wake of the establishment of the Palestinian Authority.

Contemporary political posters showcasing individual prisoners as icons of Palestinian resistance represent a radical departure from the collectivity of the 1970s and

⁷⁴⁰ See Mohamed Rabie, "The US-PLO Dialogue: the Swedish Connection," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 21, no. 4, Summer 1992, 54-66.

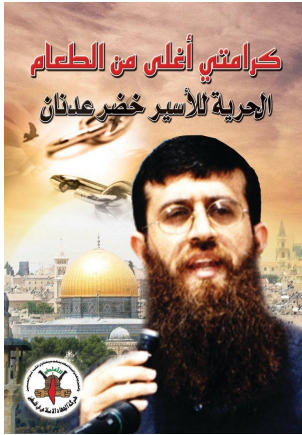
⁷⁴¹ See Yazid Sayigh, "Struggle Within, Struggle Without: the Transformation of PLO Politics since 1982," *International Affairs*, vol. 65, no. 2, Spring 1989, 247-71.

⁷⁴² Samman Khoury talked about this at length, as did Rabiha Diab. Also see Rashid Khalidi, "The PLO and the Uprising," *Middle East Report*, No. 154, September – October 1988, 21.

⁷⁴³ Khalidi, 23.

early 1980s. We see in these posters a dramatic shift towards an effort to “iconicize” the Palestinian prisoner, to give those inside ’48 and the Territories an image with which they can identify through an individual’s story. Much has changed since the Oslo Accords, including that posters are no longer published in a centralized locale in the Diaspora, but are produced inside the Territories, sometimes by factions, but more frequently by other organizations or via grassroots efforts. Significantly, the majority of prison/er-related posters that appear on walls and at rallies are related to ongoing *individual* hunger strikes; they are no longer faceless nods towards a collectivity. Rather, popular posters make a case on behalf of a particular person. This is deeply symbolic in terms of what has changed since the days of the highly organized and community-driven environment of the 1970s and 1980s.

As a result of this new tradition in poster making, individuals have become icons of the prisoner movement and Palestinian resistance more broadly. For example, Khader Adnan is a face that even the non-specialist is likely to recognize. Since his first hunger strike in 2012, he has come dangerously close to death several times by self-starvation inside Israeli prisons, with his struggle carefully followed by the local and international press. Moreover, his image has become a memorable icon. The posters featured below are two common images that have been circulated around the Territories.



The form and presentation of both is radically different from earlier posters addressing prisoner issues. For starters, the poster on the left more closely resembles a martyr poster than the poster art of the 1970s that called attention to Palestinian political posters. The poster on the right has often adorned signs at protests demanding his release, protests that are framed as anti-Occupation, but executed within a narrowly framed rhetoric. Indeed, Adnan's image has become such an icon, it has been turned into a stencil that is plastered around the West Bank, as shown below painted on the Separation Wall.



Another household name and image is that of Hana Shalabi, who was arrested from her home in Jenin for her alleged involvement with the Islamic Jihad movement. The now familiar hand drawn image featured below dates to a public rally calling for the

release of all Palestinian prisoners held inside Israeli jails, held on the 24th of March 2012 at the Damascus Gate of the Old City of Jerusalem.



At the time, Shalabi had been on hunger strike for 43 days. Her solitary hunger strike was translated into a visual representation of something much larger: what remains of the Palestinian resistance.

Arguably the most enduring image is that of Marwan Barghouti. Barghouti has a long relationship with the Israeli prison system, having initially been arrested during the First Intifada. However, it was not until after his 2002 arrest that his image became a symbol of Palestinian resistance and the fight against Israeli occupation. Barghouti's image is everywhere in Territories, and comes in various forms, from posters, to graffiti art, to frequent photographs in newspapers. The most well known painted image of him adorns the wall beside the Qalandiya checkpoint:



Below are three different kinds of images of Barghouti, including in poster form, a newspaper photo of his arrest, and a painting of him.



Barghouti has become a stylized icon: always shown with his shackled and clasped hands raised. As a symbol of the resistance, his now trademark standard pose simultaneously points to passive resistance and the strength of an eventual victory; the gentle hand clasp speaking to the former, while his hands held high in the air nod towards the latter.

The move towards iconic images in poster art and other images of the early 2000s reflects a radical shift away from the community and collectivity of the 1970s and the first half of 1980s to the fragmented resistance and prisoner movements evident today. The use of named individuals as the face of all political prisoners and/of of the resistance movement is a visual representation of other changes within the prisons themselves. Individuals like Adnan, Shalabi and Barghouti are household names. Their stories – or at least what is conveyed of their stories by the local press as well as their own writings – can be retold with precision. Resistance not only has a face, but a particular direction that is narrated through the stories. And yet, such images continue to function in an

interestingly similar way to those Fatah produced during the first two decades of Occupation: they still reflect an act of appropriation of the prisoner issue and cause for reasons other than prisoner well-being. In the case of the spate of hunger striker posters, the purpose is purely rhetorical; it acts as a replacement for real activism or resistance.⁷⁴⁴

Conclusion

Thus, since the Occupation's inception, the political poster has been a key means of communication with those beyond historic Palestine. As illustrated, the political prisoner and the prison experience have served as propagandistic tools for Fatah and the PLO in promoting the movement abroad by speaking to the determination and strength of the Palestinian people to continue their resistance.⁷⁴⁵ Notably, the prison experience was framed as a community experience, with anonymous faces, in posters produced in the 1970s. In so doing, the posters reflect the prison experience during this period, one that was driven by community rather than by individuals. By the turn of the twenty-first century, this had shifted radically, as evidenced by posters adorned with particular faces as a way to promote individual prisoners' struggles. Although a more in depth exploration of the period beyond the mid-1980s is beyond the scope of this project, it is a noteworthy shift, one that is deserving of further research. Indeed, it is my contention that the shift evident in political poster art reflects something far deeper about the political prisoner experience: systems that were once derived from and emphasized collectivity in

⁷⁴⁴ This shift demands far more analysis, but is beyond the scope of the current project. I hope to take this up in more details when I transition this project into a book proposal.

⁷⁴⁵ Assessing the impact of these posters on Diaspora communities is beyond the scope of this project, as it would likely have to be done via interviews outside of historic Palestine.

the 1970s and 1980s have broken down, leaving in their wake an individually focused and fragmented prisoner movement.

Conclusion

The Abu Jihad Museum for Prisoner Movement Affairs proudly rises from the edge of the Al Quds University Campus, set against the stark backdrop of the separation wall. Composed of traditional Jerusalem stone arranged in such a way that the building resembles a composite of interesting geometric shapes, it is an architecturally striking monument. Opened in 2007, with funding from the Kuwaitis, the Museum's self-declared aim is "to highlight the role of the Prisoner Movement in Palestinian life and to recreate the journey of the prisoner through stories and artifacts."⁷⁴⁶ Holding the largest available collection of Palestinian prisoner notebooks and books taken from prison libraries, in addition to political posters and photographs, the museum certainly contains all the right ingredients to tell a good story. And, the director, Abu El Haj, has this story down, telling it with great passion to anyone who will listen. Strikingly, however, the museum is almost always empty, visited rarely by the university's students and even more rarely by school students or other outsiders. The building echoes with one's footsteps upon entering, and even the lights are more often turned off than on. The emptiness and general disuse of this space speaks volumes: the role of the political prisoner today is merely a footnote in an already much abridged resistance discourse.

The individuals cited in this dissertation, and others who were imprisoned between 1967 and 1985, are relics of a time past. They tell stories of an era in Palestinian history when acts of resistance were celebrated by neighbors and colleagues, when families of those resisting were offered support by the leadership of political factions

⁷⁴⁶ <http://www.aj-museum.alquds.edu/en/about-us.html>.

when they fell victim to fighting or were imprisoned. Many of them are eager to tell these stories, once one gains their trust. Almost every interview subject emphasized a desire to get the story out there, to let the world know about what it means to live under Occupation. As noted, the story of imprisonment for participating in – or being perceived by the Israelis as part of – the Palestinian resistance has not been told widely, with the bulk of the available material on NGO websites, as blog posts, and as small press or self-published personal accounts. Scholarly resources pertaining to Israeli security prisons are few and far between, as is engagement with the rich resources available in the OPT, including oral, written and visual.

Capturing the oral stories is key to understanding the 1970s, as much of the history has little to no written material from which to draw. Furthermore, many of these men and women are aging – and fast.⁷⁴⁷ As discussed in Chapters One and Two, writing implements were extremely rare during much of the first decade of the Occupation, thus necessitating a reliance on individuals' memories to capture the period and tease out the finer points. After a concentrated semester of interviewing, as well as sporadic follow up during the subsequent years, I recognized a general atmosphere of wistfulness as subjects recollected the pre-First Intifada period as one in which they were all working towards something greater, as a period when the resistance was full-blooded, when there was a common belief that the armed struggle could have an impact. This nostalgia is best exemplified by how ex-prisoners talked about their time in captivity. Amongst former inmates, these decades are fondly remembered as “the Golden Years,” with many asserting it was the best time in their lives. As Chapters Three and Four illustrate, the

⁷⁴⁷ Two of my interview subjects died during the writing of this dissertation.

1970s through the first half of the 1980s was a period in which collectivity reigned. Regarding the 1970s, ex-prisoners told countless stories about how they came together within their factions to create and implement political, behavioral, and educational structures. Relying on memory for the planning stages, precise details of meetings and conversations are mostly lost. What remains behind, and what I captured in Chapters Three and Four, is the spirit and energy of the work they did to bring into existence a clear program, as well as discrete and powerful stories about moments of clash or inspiration.

By the late 1970s, prison programs were beginning to be codified in writing. As the largest faction inside the prisons, Fatah's systems, comprehensively outlined in documents discussed in detail in the second halves of Chapters Three and Four, represent a kind of well-oiled machine; a machine that was debated within rooms and sections, and then democratically approved by prison-wide voting. Fatah prisoners also worked beyond the group's parameters, reaching across faction lines through their elected representatives to settle inter-factional disputes and to contend with the Israeli administration. In addition to the level of cooperation amongst prisoners, what made this period inside Israeli prisons so noteworthy were the opportunities for social and political mobility. Unlike on the outside, political prisoners were not constrained by family or neighborhood connections, but were free – and also encouraged – to cultivate deep knowledge on a wide array of subjects as a means of advancement within the system. A remarkably strong educational curriculum invited these prisoners to take charge of their learning, and instilled intellectual growth, as well as ideological and political preparation. By the turn of the

1980s, these factors combined with a democratic election process to allow a previously illiterate or apolitical person the opportunity to advance through the ranks, even to the top level of leadership. As mentioned, some of those same people are now public figures, either as middle management within the Palestinian Authority or in other high-ranking positions, including senior administration at universities. This was a radical departure from the way in which one climbed the ladder on the outside, both within historic Palestine's local leadership, as well as within Fatah's hierarchy in the Diaspora; in both cases, connections, family, and pre-existing power were keys to success, rather than a cultivated knowledge, ability or competency.

By the late 1970s, one can clearly see evidence in both oral and written sources of a prisoner movement. As implied throughout the dissertation, but discussed specifically in Chapters Two and Five, a key characteristic of this movement was a faction wide, and even inter-faction, investment of all in a collective mission. Hunger strikes are an ideal manifestation of mass action. As noted, from the early years of the Occupation, strikes were negotiated actions, with agreed up and then publicly declared demands. The decision to wage a hunger strike was made across faction lines, with careful deliberations before launching it in recognition of the seriousness involved in staking lives for a cause. They were never individually waged, but always the result of wider decision, and in some cases, an actual vote. The organization that had evolved meant that strikes would often spread from one prison to another, also evidence of a prisoner movement. This project emphasizes that this movement's main features including promoting a kind of anonymous and collective identity. The anonymity of the prisoner movement is captured

in political poster art of the period. Although these posters were produced outside historic Palestine, they visually reflect the ways in which political prisoners were seen (and saw themselves) as a collective.

Ex-prisoners strive to tell their stories positively, framing their accounts in the context of their involvement in the period leading up to and then their experience of what they call the Golden Years. Almost without fail, the surface narrative was a story of glory, of success in motivating thousands of prisoners across the prison system to move towards a new kind of group mentality and functioning, different from what they were used to in their communities. It is clear that a major driver in this positioning is a desire to demonstrate strength in the face of sometimes overwhelming odds, whether it is the suffering one undergoes during interrogation or the material, familial, sexual, societal deprivation one lives for the duration of his sentence. Thus, lurking beneath the veneer is a much darker side to the wistful, nostalgic narrative. By the 1980s, there were clearly divisions within the wider Palestinian resistance, tensions between the arrested who evolved their own leadership structure and the official leadership in the Diaspora. One can see in Chapter Five the ways in which the prisoner movement was appropriated for propagandistic uses by Fatah (and the PLO), as a way to demonstrate strength in the face of suffering to the international community. But what, if any, positive role did the Fatah faction play in the lives of prisoners? One thing is certain: life after prison was difficult. The accolades that came while one was imprisoned, affirmation of one's bravery and assistance for the family, disappeared with one's release. Indeed, one aspect of the prison experience that is under researched is the reality of post-prison life. Difficulty readjusting

to life on the outside resulted in major psychological challenges, including destroying marriages and breaking up families. Many were unable to find employment, a fact alluded to in this project when I mentioned that Sami al Jundi now works in an Old City supermarket. The political leadership offered no assistance. Moreover, one can argue that the Diaspora leadership that returned with the Oslo Accords crushed the grassroots organization that had grown up inside the prisons in the pre-Intifada days. They either completely disempowered individuals or situated them in middle management positions within the newly formed Palestinian Authority, quashing any further expectations of mobility and societal and political accomplishment these ex-prisoners might have cultivated whilst on the inside. With all these losses, ex-prisoners harken back to the Golden Years, when places of punishment offered the organized movement certain degrees of freedom.

Another striking element of conversations with ex-prisoners is that it is clearly important for them to mourn the loss of this idyllic era, to emphasize that prisons are not what they once were. While the prison movement has fragmented, so too has the resistance writ large. It is this notion that I touch on in Chapter Five by illustrating a clear visual shift from collectivity to a focus on the individual, as evidenced by political posters. The chapter privileges the ex-prisoners' narratives in the sense that its tone somehow commemorates the end of these Golden Years and regrets the fragmentation. While a qualitative assessment of one era versus another is tricky – after all, what did collectivity produce? – it is clear that there has been a shift since the First Intifada, with subtle changes beginning to take root even before the onset of that uprising. It is true that

some aspects of the prison experience have carried over from the 1970s and 1980s, including the way Palestinians are arrested or detained. Intensive arrest activity was and still is carried out when special investigation teams conduct operations, especially at night, usually leaving behind a ransacked house or destroying large swaths of a village in their wake. But more has changed than not. The movement is no longer unified, democratic, or faceless. One might even say that to call it a movement is entirely inaccurate. As one ex-prisoner recently said to me: “now people are only using 3% of themselves for resistance and the other 97% for other things.”⁷⁴⁸ The reasons for this shift are beyond the scope of this project and will form the basis of the book project that will follow this dissertation. In short, though, one can point to the three historical events that led to a fracturing of the prison movement: the mass 1985 prisoner release, the formation of the Hamas movement in the late 1980s inside the prison, and the Oslo Accords when almost all political prisoners were released. Also, conditions improved slightly post-Oslo, thus collective mass actions, like hunger strikes, became far less frequent. What we do see an increase in is individual hunger strikes, usually to demand personal release or the end of indeterminate administrative detention. Even when others join the strikes, as has happened several times since 2000, there is a face to it. It is these questions of what changed and why that will be the subject of my future scholarship. As I embark on new research for the book that will come out of this dissertation, it is the question of why this sense of collectivity and these organized democratic structures did not take hold within the Palestinian Authority that interests me. Given the number of ex-prisoners occupying positions of middle management within the current government, the gap is striking.

⁷⁴⁸ Samman Khoury, March 2016.

Finally, another thing that has not changed is the near impossibility of encountering a Palestinian who has not had a brush with the prison system through a friend or family member. And so, today, individuals demonstrate with posters of well-known hunger striking prisoners; they build museums commemorating the prisoner's role in society; and they form associations and NGOs to deal with the prisoner issue. The political prisoner is today an actor in the conflict's wider performance.

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