

Consciousness Molded or the Re-identification of Torture

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INTRODUCTION

The Palestinian prisoner in the prisons of Israel's occupation is experiencing a state of impotence which is a result of the difficulty in describing the state of oppression he has been in since the beginning of the second Intifada. In adapting to current human rights discourse, oppression and torture have become modern and complex. This discourse, employed by human rights organizations, concentrates its special efforts in order to prove specific violations considered by the Israeli judiciary and media as the exception to the rule, which is respect for human and prisoners' rights. The result is that contrary to the pretense of exposing and being transparent, in reality this discourse hides facts and obscures the truth.

Modern oppression is hidden. It is a shapeless oppression, indefinable by a single picture. It is composed of hundreds of small isolated actions and thousands of details, none of which appears as a tool of torture, unless the whole picture and the logic underlying the system are understood. It is comparable to exploitation in free market economies under globalization, which is always presented as necessary to raise the rate of economic growth. Your exploiter is devoid of face, homeland, or address. Its monopolist arms reach into every corner of the world, into every detail of your life, while you, oppressed as a worker or a consumer, may concomitantly become a shareholder in the same cartel which exploits you. When the borders

between exploiter and exploited are thus erased, understanding exploitation becomes almost impossible.

Oppression and torture in Israeli prisons are not similar to the cases of oppression and torture known from prison literature. There is no serious denial of food or medicine; no one is buried underground, denied sunlight. Prisoners are not chained in irons. In our postmodern era, the prisoner's body is no longer the direct target; the spirit and the mind are. Our conditions are neither what Fučík faced under fascism, described in his *Notes from the Gallows*, nor those in Tazmamart Prison depicted in Taher Ben Jelloun's *This Blinding Absence of Light*. You shall not find here anything like Malika Oufkir's description of Moroccan prisons. We are not in Abu Zaabal, not even in Abu Ghraib, or Guantanamo. In those prisons, one knows one's torturer, the form of torture and the tools used; one has the certainty acquired in experiencing physical torture. But in Israeli prisons, you face a harder torture, because it is civilized; it turns your own senses and mind into tools of daily torture, quietly creeping without any club, without making any noise. It is part of your life, together with the cell, the time, the sunny courtyard and the relative material abundance.

Prison as an example is the subject of this study: the state of losing the ability to interpret reality, the feeling of impotence and the loss of initiative are not only the fate of prisoners; this description applies to *all* Palestinians. The similarity of the conditions of Palestinian citizens to those of prisoners is not restricted to the form of oppression, in which the citizens are closed off in separate geographic enclaves, just as prisoners are isolated from one another in wings and in sectors, totally dependent upon the will of the jailer. The essential similarity relates to the purpose of the jailer: to remold them according to an Israeli vision, by means of molding their consciousness, and especially by molding the consciousness of that fighting elite locked in prison. Therefore, 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 Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).

Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons complain of a condition that does not exist. And they are incapable of describing what does exist. They face torture whose form and source they are incapable of defining. The following pages do not pretend to be a scientific study; they were written in prison where there are no available research sources. They are based mostly on my memory, at least in that part of my discussion that deals with the reality in the enclaves created by Israel, since I have been detained and isolated from the world outside prison for almost a quarter of a century. My principal purpose is to explain that what happens in the smaller prisons is not just detention and isolation of people considered to be a security risk for Israel, but is part of a general, scientifically planned and calculated scheme to remold the Palestinian consciousness. The success or failure of this scheme depends on our ability to uncover and understand it and its details, without falling into self-delusion and self-deceit. What we need are clarity and honest scientific research rather than enthusiastic speeches glorifying the prisoners, their struggles and their sacrifices.

POLITICIDE: DEGRADATION WITHOUT ANNIHILATION

The South African delegation that visited Palestine¹ was astonished by the extent and nature of the measures imposed by Israel on the Palestinians and described them as having far surpassed the measures taken by the governments of South Africa during the Apartheid period. In the worst times of racial segregation in South Africa, there were never segregated roads for blacks and whites like the existing segregation in the OPT between roads for Jews and for Arabs. The segregation was never as total and absolute as it is here now; there always remained certain zones where whites and blacks met. The one thing which astonished the South African delegation and rendered the term “racial segregation” insufficient for describing and defining the Palestinians under the Occupation, was the system of roadblocks separating not only Palestinians and Israelis, but also Palestinians from each other. Israel, as we know, divided the OPT

and cut them into small enclaves, which has made life unbearable for the inhabitants.

There is a difference between the final goal of the Israeli governments since the second year of the Intifada and the goals of the South African governments in their Apartheid policies. This difference is the reason for the totality and depth of the Israeli measures and for Israel's absolute control over Palestinian lives. In this latter case, racism is basically the means of achieving the remolding of Palestinian consciousness, in accordance with the plan of the Jewish state. Racism in this context is not a popular, spontaneous and illogical phenomenon, but an organized racism, initiated by the entire Israeli establishment, with its logic, legal and moral justification. The Israeli idea is that the real problem does not lie with the official Palestinian leadership; it is the Palestinian community which rejects the Israeli maximalist solution and expresses its readiness to oppose it, supplying an endless flow of fighters to the resistance organizations and rendering every possibility of agreement with the Palestinian negotiators impossible to implement. The former Israeli chief of staff, Moshe (Bogey) Ya'alon, declared several times, clearly and openly, that the Palestinian consciousness must be remolded,² and that this goal dictated his army's military plans. The division of the OPT into enclaves must be understood in this context, that is, as part of the Israeli plan of molding Palestinian consciousness.

Initially, the Israeli Army targeted its actions against the material infrastructure of the resistance, seeking to reach the point of "consciousness molding" by making the very idea of resistance too costly for individuals and society as a whole. But eventually, those actions strengthened the moral infrastructure of the resistance, leading to the opposite result: the production of large numbers of resistance fighters. When this became clear to the Israeli leaders and the army command, they reevaluated the ways and means used for "consciousness molding." The new targets were the elements of the moral infrastructure of the resistance, that is, the system of collective values that embodies the concept of one unified people,

with a purpose shared by the majority of its members. I tend to think that, since 2004, Israel has created a strict system, based on the most updated theories of human engineering and social psychology, in order to mold Palestinian consciousness by shattering its collective values. Thus, this Israeli system in its totality constitutes a case of what Baruch Kimmerling defined as “politicide.”³ The reason is that it consists of plans, schemes and positions which appear to the observer as chaotic, confused and contradictory components of the Israeli policy; however, in reality, this “chaos” aims at the following purposes:

1. Breaking up Palestinian economic, cultural and civil society structures and organizations. These should reach a level below full organization, but not devolving into total chaos.
2. Adhering to ongoing political negotiations, thus creating an illusion that a solution is within reach, right around the corner. At the same time, creating facts on the ground, so that the situation always remains unsolved but not a stalemate.
3. Breaking up the self-image of a people by destroying Palestinian collective values. An emphasis is on destroying central forces and groups representing these values, such as the prisoners, the front line of the struggle. Thus the Palestinian people are reduced to something less than a nation, but safe from material annihilation.

Israeli prisons are the laboratory where policies targeting the Palestinian moral and social situations are tested. It is in this sense that what happens in prison represents the policy implemented by the Israeli Army in the enclaves of the OPT. The similarity might be helpful in solving the conceptual problem of describing the Palestinian reality, sometimes depicted as apartheid and sometimes as a ghetto. But these interpretations describe only parts of the Palestinian situation. For example, the segregation between the Palestinians themselves cannot be described as apartheid; the Palestinian enclaves are not provisional ghettos. They consist of

the final solution, whose target is not the body, not collective extermination, but rather the soul—the extermination of the Palestinian culture and civilization.⁴

THE HUNGER STRIKE AS A SECOND SHOCK: MOLDING PRISONERS' CONSCIOUSNESS

When Israel repeatedly invaded and bombed Palestinian cities and populated areas with F-16 airplanes and Apache helicopter gunships, when it attacked populated neighborhoods with its tanks, entering each and every lane and alley in Nablus, Jenin and Ramallah, when it destroyed houses along with their inhabitants with its huge D-9 Caterpillar bulldozers—its purpose was not to pursue and annihilate those little fighter bands, armed at best with AK-47 rifles, who lacked any military training or experience worth mention.

As its leaders incessantly declared, Israel sought to extract “a high price tag,” that is, to bring the Palestinians to a state of deep shock, which could be used to mold their consciousness after the moral infrastructure of the resistance was destroyed. The basic objective of the shock situation Israel tried to induce in the minds and souls of Palestinian citizens was to replace national values with pre-national ones and to render Palestinian society and elites incapable of rational and balanced thinking. This explains the dismemberment of the OPT into enclaves, so that ordinary Palestinians would be incapable of grasping the national scene and immerse themselves in the concerns and details of the part of the homeland in which they lived. The next stage was that of the implantation of new values. This is the role of the Dayton Plan, whose danger lies in the values taught to hundreds of young people enrolled in the security apparatuses. Just as the “Palestinian Revolution” was replaced by the “Palestinian Authority,” the mobilization of these young people signals the replacement of “struggle” with the “rule of law” and “resistance” with the “prevention of armed chaos.” The slogan “Fighting corruption” became the focus of political discourse, instead of “Liberty and independence.” These new slogans do not belong to a discourse of

a liberation movement; they were invoked in order to make the movement disappear.

I cannot elaborate here on the implementation of the shock doctrine in the OPT. I do wish to describe that aspect of the shock doctrine that has to do with the Palestinian prisoners, during and after the second Intifada. Waves of prisoners arrived daily, and the IPS officers regarded them as a dangerous mass which needed to be absorbed quickly and brought under tight control. There were two options:

1. To deny the new prisoners the possibility of pulling themselves together, by creating a state of instability through their constant transfers between the prisons. This option prevents their transformation from individuals into a body or a group obeying certain rules, yet such a transformation would make it easier to predict their future steps and control them.
2. To enable the prisoners' movement to absorb this mass of new prisoners into its existing framework. They would thus continue relations with the jailers, as before. Now on one hand, the IPS thus immunizes itself to unexpected behavior by the prisoners, but on the other, it encounters an organized body, a struggling moral force not only within prison but also for the Palestinian people and its political leadership.

From the end of 2003 to mid-2004, the IPS handled the prisoners according to the second option; but during this period it paved the road for implementing the first one. Outside the prisons, Israeli public opinion pushed to create an alternative Palestinian leadership, a "Palestinian partner" who could sign the right agreement. Inside the prisons, the idea of building an alternative leadership for the prisoners was implemented by separating the symbolic leaders of the various organizations and isolating them from the other prisoners. Except for a few cases, this wasn't achieved by solitary confinement, and hence wasn't limited in time. Rather than a punitive

measure, it was a step towards creating a vacuum in the leadership. After the prisoners' hunger strike of 2004, a similar logic to that of breaking the OPT into enclaves operated within the prisons. By the time Yaakov Ganot, the new head of the IPS, took office, our prisoners' national movement—as we used to call it—was no longer what it used to be.

The current situation is described by older prisoners as “materially high,” but “morally low.” This is not the familiar nostalgia of older people, a mere longing for the past. Indeed, prisoners are not exceptional in this regard. Yet it is true, as one prisoner once described it, that “in the past we were one with each other, now we are one against each other.” The contrast between the relatively good material conditions and the prisoners' feeling of moral deterioration is hard to grasp: since oppression does not appear in its rude, explicit and familiar physical form, prisoners cannot diagnose it and develop ways of coping with it.

Prime Minister Sharon's government sought to mold prisoners' consciousness in coordination with the general plan to mold Palestinian consciousness. For this purpose, the following steps were taken:

1. In mid-2003, the blatant racist Yaakov Ganot was appointed as head of the IPS, enjoying personal support from Prime Minister Sharon. This personal connection removed all the bureaucratic obstacles which could have hindered the restructuring of the IPS to fit its new functions. Sharon gave Ganot the freedom to act as he wished; his budget was increased, enabling him to equip old prisons with modern control technology and to build new prisons for the thousands of new prisoners arrested daily by the Israeli Army.
2. Ganot imposed a unified policy in running the prison, applicable from the lowest warden to the highest official. It was made clear that there is only one master, one decision maker. No room was left for spontaneity, improvisation, or different interpretations of the rules.

3. From his first minutes in office, Ganot sought conflict with the prisoners in several prisons. The first clash was in Ashkelon [Asqalan] Prison; its prisoners were harshly suppressed, with tear gas and batons, which resulted in many injuries. These clashes were followed by further steps which were premeditated, I now believe, with benefit of hindsight. These steps were designed to push the prisoners into the corner of an open-ended hunger strike. Ganot prepared everything required to turn the hunger strike into a turning point in the prisoners' lives. He wanted the strike to turn into a second, stronger shock (after the shock of the mass invasions and arrests), which would be followed by consciousness molding and brainwashing.
4. The IPS started to put into practice frequent strip searches upon prisoners' bodies, using physical and mental violence. The IPS also used dogs to search prisoners and their possessions, and while transporting them between prisons, in order to humiliate them and hurt their religious feelings. In Islamic culture, dogs represent pollution, which requires purification. This policy left very grave moral and mental scars upon the prisoners, and was one of the main reasons that they adopted the tactic of the open-ended hunger strike.⁵
5. Isolating plate glass was fitted in the visiting rooms. Prisoners weren't capable of touching their families, including their children; contact with them was limited to hearing. This measure was implemented right before the strike: Ganot knew that the introduction of the plate glass barriers would make the prisoners respond by canceling their visits. This led to the prisoners' isolation from their most important and supportive social circle: family visits, which help the prisoners recover their mental balance and self-esteem and help them survive.

Never before, in the history of Israeli prisons, had the IPS provoked the prisoners to start an open-ended hunger strike. Because of the

large number of inexperienced prisoners, the leadership of the National Prisoner Movement tried to cooperate with the new policy in return for easing the harsh measures which targeted human dignity and religious feelings. The prisoners delivered several messages in this vein, but they were all rejected. A hunger strike seemed like the only option available.

Throughout the preceding year, Ganot had prepared the means for breaking the strikers, as if he was facing a great army, rather than incarcerated prisoners whose only weapon was their empty stomachs. He relied on modern theories in social psychology, psychological warfare and demagoguery, and mobilized for that purpose professionals and experts from outside the system. Together, they processed the plan to the finest details, down to the daily actions of the lowliest warden, leaving nothing to chance or individual interpretation. It was clear that we were facing an aggregation of oppressive measures, frightening in their rationality, implemented together in every prison, from Gilboa [Jalbu'a] Prison in the north to al-Nafha in the south. These measures received total support from the highest ranks in the Israeli government. Internal Security Minister Tzahi Hanegbi declared in the Israeli media: "As far as I'm concerned, they can strike for a day, a month, until death," since he had no intention of relaxing the new rules.⁶

These rules, which taken separately do not amount to an unusual and unbearable level of torture, together created mental stress, since they were used against weak and exhausted prisoners. Let me cite just several among them:

1. Lights were left on in the rooms, day and night.
2. Anything that could function as a means of physical comfort was expropriated: from pillows to plastic containers and cups that could be filled with water and put beside the prisoners' beds. This prevented the simple means of manifesting mutual solidarity by giving water to the most exhausted prisoners.
3. Table salt was confiscated: prisoners used to take in salt during hunger strikes, in order to prevent permanent health

damage. The IPS won an appeal submitted by prisoners to the High Court of Justice (HCJ) regarding this matter. Cigarettes were also confiscated; this indeed was the first means of pressure against the striking prisoners.

4. Prisoners were often taken out of their rooms in order to “search for forbidden items,” although the rooms had already been emptied of all their contents and left with only a bed for each prisoner. Prisoners were transferred between the prison’s rooms and wards constantly, sometimes twice a day. In addition to the physical exhaustion caused by all this to the hunger-striking prisoners, the aim was to break up their circles of acquaintance and friendships which were formed during years of detention, and thus to weaken their moral and mental support.
5. Loudspeakers sounded incessant calls and fliers were distributed, in order to weaken prisoners’ confidence in the strike and the leadership. Rumors were spread that the strike was initiated by Hamas in order to serve its own political agenda, or that a certain leader of Fatah had broken the strike and eaten, and so on.
6. Daily barbecue parties were held for the wardens. In every ward, a room was allocated for regular criminal prisoners, whose role was to cook, eat, and play loud music, day and night.
7. When prisoners were transferred from one prison to another, to the prison’s clinic, or to a hospital, violence and electric cattle prods were used to make them move faster. Metal detectors (manometers) were used to search for sharp objects hidden on the prisoners’ naked bodies.
8. Lawyers were prevented from visiting prisoners and making contact with them in any way, throughout the strike. Thus prisoners were totally isolated from the outside world, deprived of any information on the solidarity campaigns and mass demonstrations supporting them.

The IPS adjusted its actions during the strike to the developments in each prison and each ward individually, yet these adjustments were calculated, rather than mere bursts of anger towards the prisoners. The IPS based its actions—both the means used to crush the strike and the overall goals—on international experience, for example, that of US Intelligence and its clients in Latin America during the 1970s. Prisoners arrested and tortured by the military junta in Argentina testified later that the objective of their torture wasn't primarily to extort information from them, but to force them to betray a basic principle—the principle of solidarity and empathy for their comrades. In prisons like Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, prisoners were broken and their personality and mental makeup crushed through the use of Islam and religious convictions against Muslim prisoners. Two forms of torture recur in their testimonies: being stripped naked, and harassment regarding their religious beliefs.⁷

Stripping the Palestinian prisoners naked was customary before and during the hunger strike, and was actually one of the main reasons for the strike. But most of the measures taken in order to crush the prisoners targeted their feelings of solidarity and the values of collective national action. Solidarity had the ability of turning the prisoners from a group of individuals and diverse factions, with various beliefs and ideologies, into one force. Destroying this solidarity, which had developed throughout decades of Palestinian prisoners' struggle, was crucial not just in order to end the hunger strike, but to end the idea of collective action in any strike in the future.⁸

It was impossible to implement the new policy desired by the IPS without the shock of the strike and its results. Only thus could the prisoners be molded according to the role prepared for them. Before the strike, Palestinian prisoners used to appeal to such concepts as the National Prisoner Movement, the Dialogue Committees, a general strike, and so on. These terms represented the values of the collective national prisoner struggle. A shock was necessary in order to crush the framework of nationalist committees, to undermine these collective ideas.

The prisoners failed to achieve their goals through the hunger strike; however, the crucial failure, whose consequences will persist for years to come, was the success of the IPS in breaking up the striking body. The strike didn't end in the way that it had been first declared—that is, in a unified manner, through the decision of one collective leadership—but instead in an individual and chaotic fashion, without any plan or agreement. As a former military officer, Ganot knew that it is not enough to conquer the enemy's strongholds and make it retreat; withdrawal and defeat must be chaotic. In practice, the end of the strike resembled chaos more than orderly retreat. The disorderly manner in which the hunger strike was ended ensured the total collapse of the leadership structure in prison, as well as the set of shared values which turned soldiers from individuals into fighting units. The Palestinian prisoners were now ready for consciousness molding.

STEPS TAKEN AFTER THE STRIKE: MATERIAL ABUNDANCE AS A TOOL OF TORTURE

Just as Israel dismantled the Palestinian national struggle through the divisive measures taken in the OPT, the prisoners were also individualized. Thus, for instance, there's a parallel in demands by the groups of the prisoners from, say, the Nablus area, regarding an increase in the number of visitors and visiting time, and the demands of the inhabitants of Nablus fighting to improve their particular living conditions, like opening roadblocks, or similar issues. Palestinian suffering, just as the Palestinian prisoners' suffering, was broken apart into local scenes, each focused on particular sections divided according to geographic region. The individual is not allowed to see or be concerned with the larger scene; his visual field is blocked, either by the wall and the checkpoints, or through control over his time, so he will collapse under the yoke of daily trouble and constant oppression.

To achieve the surveillance and control of the prisoners after the hunger strike, the IPS sought to exploit the ensuing post-hunger

strike depression and the disappointment with the leadership. The most important steps taken then were:

1. Segregating the different divisions among prisons and within the same prison according to geographic considerations. Thus, Gilboa [Jalbu'a] prison now holds prisoners from the northern West Bank, from Nablus to Jenin, and two divisions where prisoners holding Israeli identity cards are detained: one mostly for people from Jerusalem and the other for Palestinians of '48.⁹ This division is usually presented as a benefit to the prisoners, complying with the demands of human rights committees to detain prisoners close to their homes. However, this cannot account for the inner divisions among the wards, according to smaller geographic units. For example, there is a special ward for the inhabitants of the town of Jenin, and another for prisoners from Jenin's refugee camp; there is a ward for prisoners from Qabatiyya and the surrounding villages, one for Tulkarm, and another for Qalqiliya and its villages. These separations coincide with the closed enclaves that Israel created in the OPT. Thus, geographical divisions yield geographical affiliations, replacing the national one.
2. The IPS stopped working with the Dialogue Committees. Before the strike, each prison had an elected committee representing all the political factions, whose role was to present to the authorities the common problems and demands of all prisoners in that prison. This mechanism has now been replaced by a spokesman from each ward, who in practice represents a geographic region. This representative is chosen by the prison administration, out of two or three names suggested by the prisoners. Meetings are held with each representative separately. He is only allowed to discuss problems regarding his division/region alone, usually personal ones; he also carries the warnings and regulations of the prison's administration back to the prisoners. Thus, the IPS emptied the representational function of its national content.

3. Heavy punishments, personal or collective, are given in response to any sign of struggle, even one as small and symbolic as refusing a meal.
4. Any collective gesture, such as consolation in the case of death, reception of a new prisoner, or a farewell party to a released prisoner, is strictly forbidden. Although Friday prayers are still allowed, they may not transcend religious matters. Discussion of the Palestinian situation, or even the mention of Palestine, is counted as expressing an opinion, and freedom of expression is denied.
5. Prisoners keeping photographs of Palestinian leaders or of *shaheeds* are heavily punished; for example, by solitary confinement, prohibition of visits and monetary fines. Such photographs, not exhibited in public, are usually taken from a Hebrew newspaper, and the *shaheed* could even be the prisoner's next of kin. The significance of this prohibition is that freedom of thought is denied, especially when it involves feelings of affiliation with the struggle or belonging to a nation.
6. During decades of detention, the National Prisoner Movement shaped organizational traditions for solving internal conflicts. Those traditions were based on the principle of fair representation of the political factions and sought to strengthen the democratic spirit. There were codes of conduct regarding rotation in leadership and its renewal, submissions of periodical reports to assure transparency, and so on. To counter this reality and hinder the democratic process, the IPS started to transfer activists on a national and organizational level.
7. The IPS favored personal contact with the prisoners, through personal appeals. Prisoners' appeals are no longer submitted collectively, except for rare and insignificant cases. Most of the problems presented and the solutions reached pertain to individual prisoners. As a result, differences in living conditions and treatment by the authorities developed. However, collective punishments are

given in cases of individual violations. This “collectivization” is aimed at directing prisoners’ pressure against one another; prisoners thus become agents of the jailing authority, rather than comrades.

All these measures were taken in order to transform the Palestinian prisoner from an active subject, with his own personality and convictions, into a passive, receptive object, immersed in his basic material needs which are met according to his jailers’ wish. These needs gradually turn into his main concern. The IPS enables the Palestinian prisoners to purchase food and even makes it necessary.¹⁰ It is as if they tell the Palestinian prisoner: eat, drink, stay busy with such needs, as long as you don’t become a subject, who understands and interprets his reality and thinks of his own destiny as well as that of his comrades.

The relatively reasonable material life turned into a trap for us, the Palestinian prisoners. This trap must be analyzed and its mechanism exposed: how material abundance turned into torture, while Israel presents it as an example of enlightened occupation responding to human rights discourse. Palestinian prisoners are probably the only prisoners in the history of the liberation movements, receiving monthly pensions to cover their expenses in prison, as if they were employees of the Palestinian Authority.¹¹ What makes the money transferred to the prisoners doubly suspicious is that Israel always takes great caution to track finances under the pretext of persecuting “terrorism-supporting finances”; yet it does not object to the transfer of these huge sums delivered to the prisoners. This calls into question the role of the money transfer and its consequences upon the prisoners and their role in the struggle.

The sums spent on the prisoners currently in custody¹²—for canteen expenses and monthly pensions—reach millions of dollars per month. To this we should add the financial fines imposed upon prisoners, which are also covered by the Palestinian Authority.¹³ These are large sums in Palestinian terms. The problem is not that money is spent on prisoners and their families, so that their dignified

living is secured. There is also nothing wrong with the prisoners having some material means. But when half of this sum is spent on the prisoners inside prison, this actually means that we are financing our own detention—we even make it profitable for Israel. The companies that provide the prisoners with food and cleaning supplies, according to the agreement signed with the Palestinian Ministry for Detainees Affairs, are Israeli. There are items consumed by the prisoner that they do not buy themselves, at their own expense; the IPS only supplies token quantities of those goods. The Palestinian Authority subsidizes the detention of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons and is subsidized for this purpose by special grants coming from the European Union and the Donor Countries.¹⁴ Not only is Israel thus relieved from the financial burden of the detention of the Palestinians, its detention policy is actually acknowledged. Moreover, the Palestinian Authority also covers the special needs of prisoners who are inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, because their families are prohibited from visiting them. It does this, instead of making Israel bear the responsibility of its detention policy, instead of prosecuting it in international courts and blaming it for violations of international accords.

The Palestinian prisoner, whose sole interest was the struggle for liberation, becomes a member of a sector, like the sector of government employees, with its own financial interests and demands. His struggle, thus, is no longer directed against the occupation government and its Prison Service, but against the Palestinian Authority, as his “employer”! In other words, we finance willingly an Israeli plan to transform the prisoners—the Palestinian struggle’s hard core—from a unified force with national concerns and shared values into individuals immersed in their private demands and concerns.

In addition, the material reality in which the prisoners live produces in them a state of social and mental disorder, for several prisoners live in much better material conditions than their families in the OPT, and certainly than that of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip under the siege. The ordinary person becomes confused, because it is no

longer clear where prison ends and freedom begins: outside, where the cantons and the enclaves are—or here, in the Israeli detention centers. When this reality is part of an intentional policy to empty the prisoners of vital content and to individualize them, shattering anything that might make them a collective, the chances to exploit the material abundance in order to raise the level of national consciousness are low. Still, this is not to be taken as an excuse.

The target is no longer the body of the prisoner, the torture is no longer material; it is the spirit, the mind, which is disfigured. In the postmodern era, material abundance is another tool, among others, in terms of torture. It is therefore necessary to re-identify torture and oppression and to expose their new complex components. The changes which occurred during a year in prison—in places, culture and people—are infinitely less than the changes occurring during a year *outside* of prison, in the present period. The loss of contact with reality outside prison, even after several months of imprisonment, becomes catastrophic. Nowadays, prisoners quickly lose contact with civilization, with values and social relations. After a few years in prison, they become relatively primitive in terms of outside reality. This loss of contact with reality is exploited by the Occupation and its mechanisms, including the IPS, in order to even deepen the disengagement, to sever the prisoners from any national project or collective thinking and push them into a state of exile, to a rejection of the struggle, or, at best, a situation of being a burden upon their national cause.

MODERN CONTROL: DANGEROUS ASPECTS OF THE NEW VALUES IN THE LIVES OF PALESTINIAN PRISONERS

The essence of modernity is the ability of the person to separate time from place. In the past, in order to have power over people, one had to control their locations; in modern times, this is no longer necessary: it is enough to control their time.¹⁵ Prisoners no longer can organize their schedule according to their own plans. They cannot pass the time inside their cells, without interruption. Their days are broken up into units: apart from the slot for a courtyard

walk, the prisoner in the Israeli prison is required to come out of his cell three times a day for security checks. Seven times a day, for an hour each, he must not use the bathroom: during the three security searches and four other role calls for counting prisoners.

This form of control bears many consequences over prisoners' lives, their self-esteem and their self-perception. It also reshapes the wardens' conduct and their understanding of their role within a bureaucratic mechanism such as the IPS. Control in the prisons of the Israeli Occupation is no longer direct, through wardens who are physically present, in the prison's courtyard, opening and closing doors. There are no more daily intensive encounters between prisoners and wardens. Such encounters became the exception, while the rule is that the warden is absent, and it is only his shadow that is present, by means of modern appliances and new technologies. There are cameras everywhere; doors and locks are controlled electronically. Thus one warden is enough for controlling a ward with 120 prisoners. Now this makes it appear as if prisoners control their own lives without interruption—they even close their cell doors themselves; yet in fact, the contrary is the case. Visible control was clear; it was possible to “cheat” it, “negotiate” with it and humanize it. Now even the wardens are under total surveillance and thus devoid of influence; there's no use in reasoning with them and all spontaneity is lost. Prisoners' individual skills and their social agility are useless and devoid of practical value. Dehumanization of the prisoner is easier, because the distance created by the technology of surveillance turns prisoners from subjects to objects on the screens.

The contradiction between the physical absence of wardens and the total control of any aspect in the prisoners' lives yields a cognitive dissonance between their wish to maintain their feeling of “control” and the fact that this control is nothing but an illusion. But dissonances, tensions and contradictions do not end here. The way prison's reality is depicted in literature, poetry and in the media, especially the Arab media, is taken from a different period altogether and is far from the present experience of the Palestinian prisoners. Although I believe reality now is harsher, there is no resemblance

between the typical barbaric warden in the earlier literature and the 20-year-old girl who now sits in the surveillance center, controlling the lives of 120 prisoners. The language of literature and poetry cannot describe the present suffering and torture. There is a need for new tools for interpreting modern and complex torture, tools which might be taken from the science of sociology and philosophy. The resulting analysis should bestow on the Palestinian prisoners some certainty regarding the real source of their suffering. Given the political contradictions in which we live since the signing of the Oslo Accords, and especially after the second Intifada was crushed, this task is even harder. In the absence of such a scientific explanation, committed to the Palestinian cause, we are subject to Israeli interpretations, seeking to shatter our collective values and make consciousness molding easier.

It is crucial to understand the IPS strategy which centers on the enhancement of pre-national frameworks, that is, on primary affiliations like towns and cities, blood relations and geography. Until the mid 1990s, thinking and acting along the lines of local interests was considered shameful, something to be fought against, having no place among nationalists. Today, on the other hand, anyone who tries to think and act outside this pre-nationalistic framework is ostracized as a rebel against the authority of the faction, understood geographically. The power of this local authority is drawn from the IPS on one hand, through transfers of prisoners according to its interests, but on the other hand, it is also drawn from the Palestinian Authority, which gives power to the representatives of this local thinking, by turning them into the channel through which financial and social support flows. In this way, the Palestinian Authority strengthens, knowingly or unknowingly, the plan to break up the collective values of the prisoners.

As a result of this substantial change, some important behavioral patterns have emerged. Violence as a tool for resolving disputes is widespread, after having been taboo for many years. Some prisoners avoid politics altogether and concentrate on relaxing pastimes: there is a significant increase in the number of prisoners who are busy with physical fitness, while many watch television

programs, as long as these have nothing to do with political affairs. In general, Palestinian prisoners read less and are now much less productive intellectually, compared to the past. Meetings, study circles, ideological discussions about national problems are much less frequent. Indeed, there is an increasing number of prisoners who take up academic studies (through the Israeli Open University), but their motivation is self-development and preparation for their own future after their release, rather than collective values and national concerns. It is simply one form of escape from reality.

As part of its control of the prisoners' consciousness, the IPS has limited the amount of books, with restrictions of contents, that prisoners are allowed to keep in their cells. Only religious books and some fictional works are allowed, but scientific, social and political studies are prohibited under the pretext of "agitation materials." Recently, among the popular books that one can find are astrology and trivia books. The IPS prohibits the consumption of Arab newspapers, especially political ones, such as *Fasl al-Maqal*, *Al-Ittihad* and *Sawt al-Haq*, the only exception being *Al-Quds* which only reaches the prisoners weeks after its publication. On the other hand, prisoners are allowed to read daily Hebrew newspapers. Only Israeli radio stations are allowed. Arab satellite channels are also limited: Al-Jazeera was banned, and only those channels which are considered as adhering to the "moderate Arab line" are now allowed.

The military takeover by Hamas in the Gaza strip complicated the situation further. Intelligence officers spread news and disinformation among the prisoners, in order to stir up conflicts and blast apart any national idea or collective value. As a result, there were several clashes between representatives of the two sides within prison. Although these were limited in scope, they were enough to inflate the security aspect, as a pretext to implementing the decision to separate the prisoners of the Islamic movements from those of the Fatah movement, especially in the southern prisons. One of the "fruits" of this Israeli policy was the silence with which the war against Gaza was received—a total silence throughout the prisons. Palestinian prisoners were sitting in front of television screens, watching the bloodbath on the Arab satellite channels (back then, Al-

Jazeera was still allowed), but acting less than any Arab citizen, or any foreigner showing solidarity with the Palestinian people. No protest, nothing. The rudeness of the IPS reached a peak when it dared to order the prisoners to avoid mentioning the events in Gaza during the Friday sermons, because this might cause "agitation." This silence is salient, in particular, when considered against the historical background of the Palestinian National Prisoner Movement, which had always manifested its solidarity with every struggle for freedom around the world. In the past, prisoners protested in solidarity with Kurdish fighters on hunger strike in Turkish prison, or with Mandela and the ANC members in the prisons of racist South Africa. But now they sat there helpless, with neither a word nor deed, albeit symbolic, during the whole war against Gaza. Immediately after the war against Gaza, the IPS ordered the raising of the Israeli flag in every prison's courtyard. Such a step is closely connected with the prisoners' obvious helplessness during the war.

I point at this helplessness not in order to disgrace the fighters, or to castigate them. My purpose is to give objective proof to the extent of Israeli control over the prisoners through the whole system of policies, measures, arrangements and regulations, all constituting the process of consciousness molding. Though each of these actions is not critically significant, their totality is horrifying. The prison reality with all its complexities, the Israeli modern scientific effort to remold the consciousness of a whole generation, together with the political problems and crises in the Palestinian arena, made it impossible for the prisoners to emerge, on their own, from their state of helplessness and to act differently than they did during the war against Gaza. The responsibility to break out of this crisis is not that of the prisoners alone; it is primarily the responsibility of the political forces, the prisoners' committees and human rights committees.

At any rate, what happened during the war against Gaza is not the main issue; the principal problem is the contradiction and the inner conflict immanent to the prisoners' lives that were revealed then. The conflict is between the way the prisoner conceives of himself and his struggle and the inexplicability of the absence of that conception in

his daily conduct. No one can assess the extent of moral and psychological damage resulting from this contradiction: the loss of self-esteem and its future repercussions on the national struggle. What we can feel today is the extent of the misery caused by this kind of mental torture.

In speaking about torture and the need for its re-identification, I refer among other things to the policies and non-sensual, indirect systems, which were mentioned above—the purpose of which is the gradual, creeping, coordinated brainwashing of the political collective, which is to be controlled. Yaakov Ganot, the former head of the IPS, expressed this desire to control in a speech he gave in 2006, in a courtyard of the Jalbu'a prison, after Minister of Internal Security Gideon Ezra took office. Addressing the minister—while he knew the prisoners could hear him—he said: “Don’t worry, you can trust me that I’ll make them raise the Israeli flag and sing Hatikva, Israel’s national anthem.”

NOTES

1. G. Levy, “Worse than Apartheid,” *Ha’aretz*, July 10, 2008.
2. The declaration appeared in Israeli newspapers more than once; see, for example, an interview with Ari Shavit, *Ha’aretz*, 6 July, 2006.
3. B. Kimmerling, *Politicide: Ariel Sharon’s War against the Palestinians*, London: Verso, 2003.
4. The following analysis draws on such seminal works as Jeremy Bentham’s *Panopticon*, Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, Naomi Klein’s *Shock Doctrine* and several writings by Zygmunt Bauman.
5. Strip searches and violating religious feelings were also used in Guantanamo and in Abu Ghraib, especially the use of dogs. See Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine – The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Canada: Knopf, 2007, p. 140.
6. The story was reported widely in the Hebrew papers on August 15, 2004.
7. See Klein, *Shock Doctrine*.
8. The head of the IPS, Yaacov Ganot, said often that his goal was to make that strike the last one.
9. This term refers to the minority of Palestinians who remained in their

homes during the 1947–49 war and eventually acquired Israeli citizenship in order to remain inside what then became Israel.

- [10.](#) In addition to the prison's food, the prisoners are allowed to buy 2.5 kg per month of vegetables and fruit, and an identical quantity of chicken, meat and fish.
- [11.](#) Each prisoner receives 500 NIS per month for his canteen expenses, on top of his monthly pension, which amounts to 1,500–6,000 Shekels (according to the numbers of years in prison, marital status, and so on).
- [12.](#) There is a specific budget for released prisoners.
- [13.](#) The fines imposed by Israeli courts upon the prisoners reached 2 million shekels in one of the payments transferred by the Palestinian Authority to Israel, according to the report of the Palestinian Ministry of Detainees Affairs, *Al-Quds*, no. 14378, p. 12.
- [14.](#) Ibid.
- [15.](#) See Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000, p. 117f.