

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The experience of incarceration impacts nearly all Palestinian communities<sup>i</sup> in some way, regardless of geographic location, socioeconomic standing, or political affiliation. Approximately 20 percent of the Palestinian population (and close to 40 percent of the Palestinian male population) have been detained or imprisoned at least once (Addameer 2016a, 4), including an estimated 500-700 minors every year (DCI). Some detainees have been in prison for decades, while others have been held for days or weeks at a time in detention, and others have been arrested on multiple occasions. Widespread incarceration began after the 1967 war, coinciding with the start of the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.<sup>ii</sup>

From the early days of imprisonment however, Palestinian prisoners have mobilized to claim rights and improve conditions by engaging in acts of resistance that challenge the status quo of the prison system. Actions have included the development of alternative institutions (such as political, financial, and educational systems within the prisons), noncooperation (such as refusing to comply with prison protocols or refusing to work), refusal of family or lawyer visits, refusal of meals, and individual and collective hunger strikes. Prisoners have used these tactics (in addition to judicial proceedings, international law, and other justice mechanisms) to secure rights within the prison, challenge their detention or incarceration, and further the Palestinian national movement. However, the story of the Palestinian prisoners movement has rarely been told. As one former prisoner stated, “The prisoners movement was not well documented. So we need to rewrite the story from the beginning to give it the attention it deserves. If we decide to do that, then we will realize the effect of the prisoners’ movement” (interview with author 2014).

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Gaining insight into the prisoners' experience in general, and the prisoners' role in activism and resistance in particular, is thus crucial for understanding the Palestinian national struggle, the relevance of prisoner releases in any future peace process, and the relation between prisoners' movements and political resistance in protracted conflicts. The aims of this book are twofold: first, to situate the Palestinian prisoners movement in the broader Palestinian national struggle, and second to understand the dynamics of political dissent in prison and detention spaces where opportunities for traditional resistance are severely limited. I begin however with a brief historical overview of prison-based resistance from an international perspective.

### **Prison-based Resistance from a Global Perspective**

Political resistance in prisons extends well beyond the Palestinian case, functioning as an integral element in various struggles, with tactics including hunger strikes, labor strikes, and other acts of refusal or disobedience.<sup>iii</sup> In the early twentieth century, hunger strikes were first employed by imprisoned suffragettes in Britain. Approximately 1,000 women were incarcerated between 1905 and 1914 for suffrage activities (Purvis 1995), with the first hunger strike employed in July 1909. In the following decade, hunger strikes and other forms of prison resistance, including refusal to wear prison clothing or do penal labor, were used by Irish prisoners in the Irish struggle for independence. Thomas Ashe, imprisoned for participating in the 1916 Easter Uprising, died after being force-fed during a hunger strike in Mountjoy Prison, and three years later, Terence MacSwiney was the first prisoner allowed to die after 73 days of hunger strike in Brixton Prison. There were at least 30 more hunger strikes in Ireland between August 1918 and October 1923, culminating with a collective strike involving approximately 8,000 Irish Republican Army (IRA) prisoners protesting the

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division of the island at the end of the civil war, as well as their continued detention under the new Irish Free State (Healy 1982).

The hunger strike tactic was reprised by Irish prisoners during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. In May 1972, republican prisoners in the Crumlin Road Gaol launched a hunger strike to demand political status, in addition to improving prison conditions. This hunger strike, initiated by prisoners independently of the IRA leadership outside, importantly influenced the inclusion of prisoner status as an IRA pre-condition for talks with the British, resulting in the granting of “Special Category Status.” Though less than the official political status sought by prisoners, Special Category Status allowed for de facto POW-style lifestyles in the prisons, including free association and abstention from prison work and prison uniforms.

The revocation of Special Category Status in 1976 eventually led to the 1981 hunger strike in the Maze/Long Kesh Prison, led by Bobby Sands, in which ten men died. The demands of the hunger strike were essentially to return to the conditions allowed by Special Category Status: the right not wear a prison uniform; the right not to do prison work; the right of free association with other prisoners for educational and recreational activities; the right to one visit, letter, and parcel per week; and the full restoration of remission lost through the protest. While the strike was called off before demands were met, partial concessions were granted soon after, although special status was never restored. Moreover, the hunger strike “attracted massive international and domestic political attention to the prisoners’ demands and led to a direct political gain” (BBC).

Other politically motivated hunger strikes in recent years include a “death fast” by hundreds of political prisoners in Turkey in 2000 (Bargu 2014); frequent hunger strikes by political dissidents in Cuban prisons, resulting in deaths in 2010 and 2012 (Amnesty International 2012); and intermittent hunger strikes by detainees at the United States’

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Guantanamo Bay Prison Camp. In most of these cases, the aims of the hunger strikes were two-fold; first, to gain specific rights for the detainees involved; and second, to call public attention to the issue of political imprisonment.

Along with hunger strikes, prisoners in Ireland, South Africa, Israel-Palestine, and elsewhere have used labor strikes from prison work as a form of resistance. Perhaps some of the most notable labor strikes were organized by prisoners in forced labor camps in Russia's gulag, when hunger strikes and other forms of resistance failed. One of the most prominent Soviet prison labor strikes took place in 1953, following the death of Joseph Stalin, when approximately 10,000 miners went on strike in Vorkuta Camp, one of the most notorious camps in the Gulag (Popa 2010). As Scholmer (1963) notes, "although the concessions eventually granted by the authorities were relatively minor... had the strike been emulated by other communities, industrial production would have declined drastically and with it might have come a collapse of the political system itself" (187). As it was, the strike achieved some minor concessions before it was quelled, and news of the strike spread through both the prison and civilian populations as a rare example of resistance against the regime.

Strikes are just one form of prison resistance. In the third volume of *The Gulag Archipelago*, Solzhenitsyn documents a number of prisoner actions, including protests, escapes, and mutinies, in addition to hunger strikes and labor strikes (1973). In Ireland, Palestine, and South Africa, a range of other tactics were usually used before a strike. In Northern Ireland for example, the 1981 hunger strike followed years of prison resistance including the blanket protest, which lasted from 1976-1981, in which prisoners refusing to wear the prisoner uniform wrapped themselves only in prison blankets; and the dirty protest, from 1978-1981, in which prisoners refused to wash, and, unable to leave their cells to empty their chamber pots, smeared their excrement on the cell walls. Other acts of protest ranged

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from simply refusing to comply with orders, such as refusing to be counted or refusing to address guards with honorifics, to prison riots and rebellions.

In addition to acts of refusal, prisoners have also resisted through creating their own systems of self-governance and education within prisons. Even in the Gulag, prisoners in the Soviet Kengir Camp managed to take control for 40 days in 1954 and establish their own provisional government as well as religious and cultural activities (Solzhenitsyn 1973; Kramer 1978). In Burma in the 1970s, as Fink (2011) notes, detainees made the prison into a “life university;” “despite the miserable living conditions, activists endeavor[ed] to find ways to engage in political debates and to learn from each other... to create a community, maintain their morale, and improve themselves” (171). Likewise, as Buntman (2003) writes, prisoners managed to transform South Africa’s Robben Island Prison from a “hell-hole to a university for political leaders,” including “a complex of educational and sporting institutions and practices,” as well as political organizations (5).

In these ways, resistance by politically motivated prisoners has taken many forms in many different contexts. However, most instances of political imprisonment since the start of the twentieth century have involved some form of prisoner resistance, even in cases of severe repression. In protracted conflicts like Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Israel-Palestine, prisoners’ movements have linked closely to the broader national struggles, and have functioned as microcosms of the wider conflicts.

### **Prison-based Resistance and Political Struggle in Israel-Palestine**

In Israel-Palestine, the issue of Palestinian imprisonment has deep historical, political, and social significance. Like elsewhere in the Middle East, prisons represent one element of state concentrated power (Khalili and Schwedler 2010), while also functioning as sites of resistance and dissent. Paralleling the broader Palestinian national struggle, prison-based

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resistance emerged soon after the start of the occupation in 1967, peaked in the 1970s and 1980s, and subsequently tapered after the Oslo peace accords and the replacement of traditional political factions with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in the 1990s. While lacking the organization and discipline of earlier years, prison-based resistance continued during and after the second intifada, most recently with the use of individual and collective hunger strikes to protest administrative detention (detention without charge or trial).

Initial first-hand accounts (in Arabic) of the prison experience and prison-based resistance include Qasim's *The Captivity Experience in the Zionist Jails* (1986), Khalyl's *The Imprisonment Experience in the Israeli Prisons* (1989), al Hindi's *The Democratic Practice of the Palestinian Prisoners Movement* (2000), and Qaraqe's *The Palestinian Political Prisoners in the Israeli Prisons after Oslo: 1993-1999* (2001). Further primary source documentation of prisoners' activities are archived in the library of the Abu Jihad Museum for Prisoner Movement Affairs at al Quds University in Abu Dis, and the Prisoners Section of the Nablus Public Library.

One of the first English-language analyses of the prisoners' movement appeared in Maya Rosenfeld's *Confronting the Occupation: Work, Education, and Political Activism of Palestinian Families in a Refugee Camp* (2004), offering groundbreaking insights into the experiences of former prisoners based on interviews with residents of Dheisheh Refugee Camp. Rosenfeld has also written on the interdependence of the prisoners movement in the national movement in Baker and Matar's comprehensive volume *Threat: Palestinian Political Prisoners in Israeli Jails* (2011), which examines the issue of Palestinian imprisonment from different angles. The Palestinian prisoners experience was further examined in Esmail Nashif's *Palestinian Political Prisoners: Identity and Community* (2008), which provides a rich analysis of the prisoners movement rooted in anthropological

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theory, especially on material and aesthetic dimensions and identity. Nahla Abdo's *Captive Revolution: Palestinian Women's Anti-Colonial Struggle Within the Israeli Prison System* (2014) offers essential background on the often overlooked experiences of female prisoners, while situating the prisoners movement in the context of anti-colonial struggle.

This book draws from these foundational sources, but focuses less on the broad ethnography of the Palestinian prisoner experience, and more on the element of resistance as part of that experience. Furthermore, this book looks beyond the specific space of the prison to explore how the prisoners issue and the prisoners movement influences and interacts with local, national, and international activism, as well as impacts long-term approaches to security policies and peace negotiations.

Indeed, rather than operating in isolation, the prisoners movement has demonstrated a synergy over time with the broader Palestinian national movement, sometimes influencing the outside political struggle, and sometimes being influenced by external factors. Like a double-helix, the prisoners movement and the national movement have been intertwined and subject to similar constraints and shocks. Historically, the prisoners movement managed to weather some constraints more effectively than the national movement, despite of, or perhaps because of, its isolated position. Nevertheless, in the post-Oslo period, shifting political organizing both inside and outside the prisons, combined with adaptive Israeli policies to manage the prisons, has changed the nature of activism and resistance in such a way that the prisoners movement mirrors the national movement in terms of its recent weakening and fragmentation.

Many of the former prisoners interviewed for this book viewed the prisoners movement and the national movement as one and the same. As noted above, the prisoners movement was strongest when it worked in close coordination with the Palestinian political factions that led external resistance in the 1970s, 1980s, and through the first intifada,

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including Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). These factions became much weaker in the 1990s however, with the decline of the Leftist PFLP and DFLP after the fall of the Soviet Union, and the shift of Fatah from a resistance faction to a moderate political party in the Palestinian Authority. Furthermore, the “resistance vacuum” left by the old parties allowed for the emergence of new parties like Hamas and Islamic Jihad, whose tensions with Fatah in particular would eventually split the Palestinian national movement, and also weaken solidarity inside and outside the prisons.

The relationship between the Palestinian prisoners movement and the national movement has not yet been fully explored in the academic or activist literature (though see Rosenfeld 2011). This book fills that gap by situating the prisoners movement in the context of both broader Palestinian politics and shifting Israeli policies. It also contributes to the literature on resistance in protracted conflicts which has overlooked the centrality of imprisonment in national struggles. As Buntman (2003) writes, “analyses of the place of political imprisonment in political structures and trajectories are rare... Political imprisonment plays a vital role in shaping resistance movements and their methods. The strategies and histories of political prisoners require investigation as a part of broader (national) resistance movements and as a contribution to theories of resistance” (2). Buntman (2003) masterfully illustrated the links between the prisoners movement and the national movement in South Africa, while McEvoy (2001) did the same in Northern Ireland. This book seeks to bring the same approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict, where prisons remain an epicenter of the conflict.

## **The Prisoners Movement and Civil Resistance**



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Just as in-depth analyses of prisoner movements can contribute to understandings of protracted conflict, so too can they inform theories of resistance, and theories of civil resistance in particular. In this book, I examine the Palestinian prisoner experience through a resistance approach, focusing less on the specific circumstances and grievances of incarceration and more on the actions taken by prisoners to improve conditions, reclaim prison spaces, and at times, challenge the established order and force changes by making the prison system unworkable. As such, I explore the extent to which prison-based resistance shares attributes with social/political movements, and also how it functions as a form of unarmed struggle and informs other “nonviolent” or civil-based resistance tactics in protracted conflicts.

### *The Prisoners Movement as Collective Action*

My use of the term prisoners *movement* is intentional, as it has indeed functioned as a movement, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, reflecting many elements of traditional social movements and collective action. According to Tarrow (1998), social movements typically include four empirical properties: 1) collective challenge, 2) common purpose, 3) solidarity and collective identity, and 4) sustained interaction with authorities (4-5), all evident in the Palestinian prisoners movement. First, the prisoners movement relied heavily on collective challenge, defined as “contentious... disruptive direct action against... authorities” (Tarrow 1998, 5). Second, while prisoners’ actions took different forms, and the movement shifted over time, prisoners historically demonstrated a common commitment to improving prison conditions, maintaining collective agency and dignity, and furthering the Palestinian national struggle. Third, prisoners maintained solidarity with each other, even across different factions and parties, and also developed strong solidarity networks with local and even international supporters and activists. Fourth, the prisoners movement managed to sustain challenges to

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authorities over time; resistance was not limited to one-off hunger strikes or riots, but rather was cultivated, organized, and enhanced over years of actions.

In these ways, the Palestinian prisoners' struggle can be considered a veritable movement. This approach allows us to study and understand prisoners' experiences through the lens of collective action and agency. Furthermore, the social movement literature provides analytical approaches to understanding why the prisoners' movement has been more successful at some times than others, including elements such as political opportunities and constraints, mobilizing structures, and framing processes (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996).

For example, regarding political opportunities, or the interaction of the movement with institutionalized politics, the relative strength of the prisoners movement has mirrored the strength of the Palestinian national movement, with prison resistance strongest when Palestinian political parties and factions were at their peak, and weakest after the Oslo Accords with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the decline of the national struggle. Likewise, in the years during and after the second intifada, the prisoners movement has been weakened by Israel's relative strength and "capacity and propensity for repression" (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 10). Second, the social movement literature's focus on mobilization structures (or resource mobilization) provides a framework for analyzing the Palestinian prisoners movement through its internal organization, with elements such as stated goals and objectives, tactical choices, and leadership notably stronger in the pre-Oslo period than after. Third, the social movement concept of "framing" (Snow and Benford 1992), or the social packaging or imaging of an issue, can be useful for understanding how the imprisonment issue has maintained its salience, and how that salience has been and might be leveraged.

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*Prisoners Movement as Civil Resistance*

Just as the social movement approach can offer insights into the Palestinian prisoners' movement, so too can the literature on civil disobedience and unarmed resistance. In *The Politics of Nonviolent Action, perhaps the seminal scholarly work on strategic nonviolence to date, Sharp (1973) bases his theory of nonviolence on the idea that "the exercise of power depends on the consent of the ruled who, by withdrawing that consent, can control and even destroy the power of their opponent" (4).* By Sharp's analysis, individuals can transform power dynamics through refusal of cooperation and persistence in disobedience and defiance (64), a concept reflected in the approach of the prisoners movement.

As noted in the preface, this book emerged in part from earlier research I conducted on "nonviolent," or unarmed resistance in Palestine during the second intifada (Norman 2010; Hallward and Norman 2011). In interviews conducted with activists engaged in unarmed tactics, either through demonstrations, protests, boycotts, and/or noncooperation, nearly all cited previous time spent in prison as being instrumental for gaining experience with civil disobedience. Not all of those interviewed saw unarmed resistance as a substitute for other forms of resistance (though some did), but rather as yet another viable strategy for challenging the occupation. Likewise, while few reported choosing unarmed tactics for moral or ethical reasons, many commented on seeing the utility of unarmed tactics for strategic and tactical purposes.

To be sure, many prisoners had been involved in armed resistance in the past, and even prison-based resistance was not wholly "nonviolent." In most cases though, because of the prisoners' situation and lack of access to "weapons," most resistance was by definition unarmed. Prisoners exercised civil disobedience in acts of refusal, ranging from refusing to stand to be counted to full-blown hunger strikes, while others "fought back" against guards with whatever means they had available. Furthermore, as I have written elsewhere, even

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movements that involve “large-scale protests and civil obedience rely largely on more subtle forms of resistance, including developing parallel institutions [and] engaging in small acts of defiance” (Norman and Hallward 2015, 206), which were also reflected in the prisoners movement. The prisoners demonstrated these less overt elements through establishing alternative institutions in the form of a “counterorder” in the prisons, and engaging in political conscientization (Freire 1970) by reading about and discussing other popular struggles and revolutions through a regimented education curriculum. In these ways, while the prisoners movement did not explicitly define itself as “unarmed” or “nonviolent,” its tactics, strategies, and organization reflect many elements of civil disobedience and popular struggles.

For example, hunger strikes and other tactics that attempt to make the prison system unworkable are examples of dilemma actions (Sorensen and Martin 2014), which force opponents to either make allowances or use force, with the assumption that the use of force will ultimately backfire. As Duhamel (2004) describes, “a dilemma demonstration is a tactical framework that puts power holders in a dilemma: if the action is allowed to go forward, it accomplishes something worthwhile related to the issue or position being asserted. If the power holders repress the action, they put themselves in a bad light, and the public is educated about the issue or position” (6).

Hunger strikes and other prison actions clearly differ from demonstrations, and repression may not immediately be evident to the public to create the backfire effect. However, once publicized through solidarity networks, hunger strikes in particular can galvanize public opinion when prisoners are at risk of dying in the custody of the state, creating a dilemma in which the state must either consider prison demands, force-feed prisoners to break the strike, or let prisoners die, a decision that will most likely backfire by creating more support or attention to the prisoners’ cause (Martin 2007). This concept is

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similar to Sharp's theory of "political jiu-jitsu," adapted from Gregg's (1966) idea that "violence by the authorities rebounds against them like the force of an opponent in the sport of jiu-jitsu" (Sorensen and Martin 2014, 75). While Sharp applied the concept the dynamics resulting from authorities' use of force against protesters, it also applies to the prison setting.

Indeed, even when prison resistance lacks publicity and public reaction, prisoners can create dilemmas for prison authorities by using tactics that simply make the administration of the system unworkable, sometimes to the point of forcing negotiations between prison administrators and prisoners. Thomas Schelling's (1968) description of civil resistance applies to the prison context as well: "The tyrant and his subjects are in somewhat symmetrical positions. They can deny him most of what he wants—they can, that is, *if they have the disciplined organization* to refuse collaboration. And he can deny them just about everything they want—he can deny it by using the force at his command.... It is a bargaining situation in which either side, if adequately disciplined and organized, can deny most of what the other wants, and it remains to see who wins" (304 (emphasis added)).

As Schelling emphasizes, resistance in repressive situations depends largely on discipline and organization. In the case of Palestine, discipline in the prisons was more prevalent in the pre-Oslo period of the 1970s and 1980s, when most prisoners came from political factions that provided trusted affinity groups as well as experience in political resistance. According to Maher (2010), group identity and experience in tactical strategizing can be vital for collective action in repressive environments (252). Finkel (2015) also emphasizes the importance of prior experiences in organizing under repressive conditions, noting that "one legacy of repression is the acquisition of the resister toolkit by segments of repressed populations, who then capitalize on these skills during subsequent repression episodes" (340). According to Finkel, this toolkit includes "the skills to create and maintain clandestine networks, manage secret communications, forge documents, smuggle money,

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gather munitions, and outfox security services” (339). Although writing on clandestine resistance movements more broadly, the toolkit described by Finkel includes skills utilized regularly by Palestinian prisoners in the pre-Oslo period, many of whom had gained those skills through their political activity with armed resistance groups and carried them into the prisons. Others acquired those skills while in one prison and transferred them to other prisons, or channeled them back into popular resistance upon their release.

### *Diffusion of Prison-based Activism and Political Impact*

The “bargaining” position of prisoners is of course improved if combined with public pressure. While it might be assumed that prison-based resistance is quite literally confined to a particular time and place, in the cases of political prisoners in protracted conflicts, this is usually not the case. Prison-based resistance, including hunger strikes, have had a reverberating effect, diffusing beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of the physical prison institutions to inspire local, national, and international activism. This was especially true in the 1970s and 1980s when the Palestinian political factions outside would coordinate activism with their members inside the prisons.

This solidarity between prisoners and external groups is common in low-intensity conflicts with political prisoners. As von Tangen Page (1998) writes: “A key problem to the authorities which marks out the Politically Motivated Violent Offender (PMVO) from the average prisoner is organization and outside support. The vast majority of organizations will have support groups outwith the prisons where sympathizers will agitate and organize on behalf of the prisoners... Further, there is a level of collective action among PMVOs which rarely exists among criminal prisoners. This can create great disruption within an entire prison system, where an event in one prison can cause reverberations among other prisons as well as a far wider cross-section of society” (30). In other words, political prisoners tend to

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organize in such a way that activism actually diffuses across prisons, and from the prison sector to outside supporters and organizations, as was the case in Palestine.

External support is also common in civil resistance and unarmed movements, often functioning as a crucial form of leverage. As Johansen (2010) notes, external actors can offer various kinds of support, including moral, strategic, technical, and diplomatic support, offering assistance to movements through participation, training, media coverage, education, and finances. Depending on the form, timing, and intensity of the external support, Johansen argues that it can range from being counter-productive or irrelevant to being important or even necessary for movement success. In Palestine, international solidarity has increasingly played a significant role in the broader national movement, with solidarity networks raising awareness about the Palestinian issue and encouraging states and international organizations to employ diplomatic pressure on Israel. In the case of the prisoners movement specifically, the diffusion of activism tends to be much more at the local and national level, with solidarity demonstrations and protests in cities across the West Bank and Gaza, especially during collective hunger strikes (Norman 2014). External pressure is strongest when the pressure comes from multiple levels, national and international, and in different forms, such as diplomatic and strategic. This synergy has occurred at times during high profile hunger strikes, creating additional dilemma situations for authorities, but external pressure is not always consistent at the local or global levels. Still, the prisoners movement has been intentional in leveraging external networks whenever possible.

In summary, from a collective action perspective, the prisoners movement was responsible for developing alternative institutions that not only proved resilient over the years within the prisons, but actually inspired some of the organizational models, political strategies, and philosophical foundations for activism outside of prison as well, especially during the first intifada. In addition, prisoners' resistance has managed to preserve some

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sense of internal political unity over the past decades, despite external political fracturing, and has also maintained the support of the general population when support for political parties was lacking. In this way, the prisoners movement has been able to maintain a spirit of resistance that challenges the perceived complacency of political leaders following the second intifada. Finally, the prisoners movement has managed to leverage international advocacy around the prisoners issue in both formal organizations and through solidarity networks.

### **Aims and Contributions**

This book aims to illustrate how the Palestinian prisoners movement mirrored the Palestinian national movement, being strongest when prisoners had strong political affiliations that contributed to discipline, organizing skills, and a sense of communal identity in the prisons, and which facilitated support and parallel activism through solidarity networks outside the prisons. The movement was most effective when prisoners used civil resistance tactics; these included developing parallel institutions in the form of a “counterorder,” and creating dilemma actions for authorities that, by threatening to make the prison system unworkable, pushed them to negotiate or grant rights to prisoners. Prisons have thus functioned as epicenters of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and as in other protracted conflicts, have reflected broader dynamics of resistance, control, and sometimes compromise.

The book makes contributions to several bodies of literature. First, it contributes to the growing field of Palestine studies by providing an in-depth analysis of the Palestinian prisoners movement in the context of the national struggle, highlighting the centrality of imprisonment in the conflict, in resistance, and in potential peace negotiations. Second, it contributes to the literature on civil resistance by illustrating how prisons function almost as a laboratory for unarmed tactics, many of which inform ex-prisoners’ activism after their



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release. The study of prison-based resistance as unarmed struggle has been largely overlooked by scholars of both social movements and nonviolence to date (though see Scanlan et al 2008). Third, it contributes to the literature on protracted conflicts more broadly by positioning the prison space as an epicenter of conflict where both the state and activists vie for power and control through tactics ranging from force to negotiation (Norman 2020b). In addition to theoretical contributions, the book seeks to better inform activist networks, civil society actors, and policymakers concerned with imprisonment and detention policies about the prison experience and the dynamics of prison-based resistance.

### **Narrative Approach**

This book is based on narrative oral history style interviews with former prisoners, making their voices a central part of the research. I conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with former prisoners in the West Bank, as well as interviews with lawyers and staff members at prisoners support NGOs. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with former members of Israel's service sector, including the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet), the Israel Prison Service (IPS), and the intelligence branch of the Israeli Police. Names of interviewees have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants.

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note, narrative research is uniquely capable of capturing individuals' stories and investigating how they perceive their experiences in the temporal, spatial, and personal-social dimensions (see also Norman 2009, 86). Indeed, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for participants to extend beyond the mere reporting of events, and even beyond the individual's role in or opinion of such events, to include a reflective, story-telling quality. I sought to preserve this through the text through an oral history approach that includes extended segments of interviews, drawing from individuals' stories to develop a collective narrative on the history of the prisoners movement. As Paul

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Thompson (2000) writes, “Oral history is a history built around people,” and so too is this book.

While interviews formed the core of the research, I also reviewed prisoners’ letters and diaries at archives at the Nablus Public Library and Al-Quds University in Jerusalem.<sup>iv</sup> In addition, I conducted 22 questionnaires with Israelis and 150 surveys with Palestinians to gauge public perceptions, opinions, and responses to hunger strikes and prison-based resistance.<sup>v</sup>

## **Clarifications**

This book does not probe issues of innocence or guilt, and does not seek to celebrate or condemn any particular individual or party, but rather aims to bring attention to an untold story of political resistance in the perhaps unlikely space of prisons. This book is also not intended to provide an introduction or background to the Israel-Palestinian conflict more broadly, but instead to focus on a specific space and community within the conflict that is often overlooked.

It should also be noted that, for most of the book, I use the term “political prisoner” since that was the terminology used by most of the interview participants. In contrast, I preserve the use of the word “terrorist” or “criminal” to describe prisoners only when used in quoted statements from Israeli officials. A more detailed discussion on the legal basis for the “political prisoner” terminology (and alternative terms such as Politically Motivated Offender (PMO)) can be found in Chapter 2.

## **Chapter Outline**

The remainder of the book is organized as follows. Chapter 2, “Imprisonment, Detention, and the Legal System” provides background on the military law system in the

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occupied territories, including the use of military courts, administrative detention, and enhanced interrogation, to clarify the legal framework and provide a context for understanding the prison system. Chapter 2 also includes a brief discussion of imprisonment within the Palestinian Authority; while the book focuses primarily on Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, Palestinians in Palestinian jails have faced similar grievances and, at times, have employed similar acts of resistance.

Modes of resistance are explored in depth in Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3, “Resistance through Organizing: The Counterorder,” traces the early history of prisoners’ resistance by explaining the committee system that prisoners developed to facilitate self-government, education, communication, and finances. Chapter 4, “Resistance through Actions: Hunger Strikes and Civil Disobedience,” discusses the use of direct actions and specific tactics such as hunger strikes that were employed to challenge the prison administration.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore how the prisoners movement both influenced and was influenced by external elements and processes. Chapter 5, “Palestinian Politics and Shifts after Oslo,” focuses on the decline of prison-based resistance and its parallel weakening with the Palestinian national movement in the years following the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. Despite the relative weakening however, Chapter 6, “Diffusion of Activism,” examines how and why the prisoners issue still has salience in local and international solidarity works.

Chapter 7, “Security and the State,” examines the prisoners issue through the lens of the Israeli security sector, discussing how the prison administration attempts to manage the prisoners movement, and how authorities determine when to negotiate or compromise with prisoners. This chapter indicates how prisoners and authorities constantly try to stay one step ahead of the other, reflecting the struggle between rights and security in the broader conflict.

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Finally, in Chapter 8, the book concludes by illustrating the centrality of the prisoners movement in the broader Palestinian national struggle, and the relevance of the prison space as an epicenter of protracted conflict.

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Notes

### Chapter 1

<sup>i</sup> My use of the term “Palestinian communities” in this context, and my references to “Palestine” throughout the book, refer to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.

<sup>ii</sup> The territories occupied during the war also included the Sinai Peninsula, which was returned to Egypt in 1979 via the Camp David I Accords, and the Golan Heights, which were unilaterally annexed by Israel in 1981.

<sup>iii</sup> Prison-based resistance outside of political conflicts often reflects similar tactics. For example, in 2013, approximately 30,000 inmates in California state prisons went on hunger strike to protest the use of solitary confinement, with several dozen staying on hunger strike for 50 days (Caldwell and Harkinson 2013). In 2016, approximately 20,000 prisoners in at least a dozen US states went on a labor strike to improve wages and conditions for prison work (Vonkiatkajorn 2016). However, this book is primarily concerned with prison-based resistance in political conflicts.

<sup>iv</sup> The Abu Jihad Museum for Prisoner Movement Affairs at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem is the primary research center for the history of Palestinian prisoners, maintaining a collection of books, journals, and diaries. The Prisoners’ Section of the Nablus Public Library is also an invaluable public archive, with thousands of books and notebooks used by prisoners through 1995.

<sup>v</sup> See Appendix 1 for a sample copy of the survey.

Sample draft chapter from *The Palestinian Prisoners Movement: Resistance and Disobedience* (Routledge 2021).

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